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LAURSEN (John Christian), « Montaigne and Burton in dialogue with the Cynics. Illness of the body, illness of the mind, and illness of the state »

RÉSUMÉ – Cet essai a pour but de restituer certains aspects du dialogue mené avec la tradition cynique par Michel de Montaigne et Robert Burton. Ni l'un ni l'autre n'ont suivi cette tradition jusqu'au bout, mais ils se sont engagés dans des emprunts et des débats productifs, en accord et en désaccord avec les différents cyniques antiques, selon ce qui leur convenait dans leurs analyses des maladies du corps, de l'esprit et de l'État.

MOTS-CLÉS – Burton, Cyniques, Diogène le cynique, parrhesia, liberté sexuelle, askesis, ponos, mélancolie

LAURSEN (John Christian), « Montaigne et Burton en dialogue avec les cyniques. Maladie du corps, maladie de l'esprit, maladie de l'État »

ABSTRACT – This essay is intended to recover parts of the dialogues with the Cynical tradition carried out by Michel de Montaigne and Robert Burton. Neither of the two followed this tradition all of the way, but they did engage in productive borrowing and debate, agreeing and disagreeing with the different ancient Cynics as it suited their purposes in their analyses of the illnesses of the body, illnesses of the mind, and illnesses of the state.

KEYWORDS – Burton, Cynics, Diogenes the Cynic, parrhesia, sexual freedom, askesis, ponos, melancholy

MONTAIGNE AND BURTON IN DIALOGUE WITH THE CYNICS

Illness of the body, illness of the mind,
and illness of the state

This essay is intended to recover parts of the dialogues with the Cynical tradition carried out by Michel de Montaigne and Robert Burton. The two are connected because they both wrote large, all-purpose how-to-live books, and both were widely read for centuries after, right down to today. They were both concerned about the interrelations between the body, the mind, and political life.

An influential interpretation of Montaigne's work found it to be an eclectic mix of Hellenistic Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Skepticism¹. The remarkable thing, from the point of view of this essay, is that this interpretation does not give any weight to an additional Hellenistic philosophy, Cynicism. Similarly, Burton scholars sometimes refer to his Stoic and Epicurean borrowings without mentioning his borrowings from the Cynics². Perhaps this is because Cynicism was not always considered a philosophy, but rather something like an act or a lifestyle. But Diogenes referred to himself as a philosopher, and many authors have pointed out that to the ancient Greeks philosophy was a way of life. Montaigne called Diogenes a philosopher (I, 28, 190)³. Burton

1 P. Villey, *Les Sources et l'évolution des Essais de Montaigne*, Paris, Hachette, 1933.

2 M.A. Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 10; 30. Lund mentions the Cynical tradition only once, when she observes that among many other "unexpected shifts in tone and mood" he swings from "homiletic seriousness to Cynic laughter" (p. 166). In *Robert Burton and the Transformative Powers of Melancholy* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2015) Stephanie Shirilan compares Stoic and Epicurean elements in Burton at several points (p. 32, 37, 138, 145-148, 169) but seems to understand the word "cynic" only in the modern meaning of amoral and manipulative (p. 31, 116, 169).

3 M. de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, eds. P. Villey and V.-L. Saulnier – online edition by P. Desan, University of Chicago. Hereafter cited in the text by volume, chapter, and page number.

compared his own life to Diogenes's: he is "confined to my college as Diogenes to his tubbe"⁴.

There are parallels between Montaigne's view of his own philosophy and Diogenes's practices. Montaigne wrote that "Ma philosophie est en action, en usage naturel et present: peu en fantasie"(III, 5, 842). This much could have been said by Diogenes. Diogenes expressed most of his philosophy in the actions of *ponos* or exercises intended to discipline himself and to teach by example rather than in theory⁵.

And there has not been much attention to Montaigne's use of Cynical tropes. Michèle Clément performed the service of listing 20 mentions of Diogenes and 31 mentions of other Cynics in the *Essays* and provided an analysis⁶. She also argued that Montaigne's frequent references to paradoxes probably drew on Cynical paradoxes (C185). Similarly, Suzel Mayer provided an excellent account of how Montaigne often presented Socrates as a Cynic; what I am adding is emphasis on the point she makes that Montaigne himself can be understood as, at times, a Cynic himself, or at least in dialogue with the Cynics⁷.

This should always be understood as part of a larger dialogue. In writing about Socratism in Montaigne, Thomas Berns asserts that "il convendrait des lors d'ajouter à la seule figure de Socrate, celles des sages sceptiques, stoïciens, et surtout cyniques, en considérant ces différentes forms de sagesse socratique comme poreuses et comme dialoguant les unes avec les autres" and observes that "la frontière est souvent mince entre cyniques et stoïciens"⁸. I am going to try to widen the analysis by

4 R. Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 6 vols. eds. T. Faulkner, N. Kiessling, and R. Blair, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989-2000, I.422. Hereafter cited in the text with the letters "CE" and volume and page number. This passage from the 1621 edition was deleted from later editions.

5 S. Husson, *La République de Diogène. Une cité en quête de la nature*, Paris, Vrin, 2015, 72ff. Hereafter cited in the text with the letter "H" and page number.

6 M. Clément, *Le cynisme à la Renaissance d'Érasme à Montaigne*, Paris, Droz, 2005. Hereafter cited in the text with the letter "C" and page number. She missed the reference at III, 1, 796. There are sixteen references to Antisthenes, ten to Crates, two to Metrocles, and one to each of Hipparchia, Demetrius, and an anonymous "philosophe cynique" (C166). Clément does not mention four references to Bion, nor any of the Roman-era Cynics such as Lucian (one reference).

7 S. Mayer, "Un Socrate cynique" in Thierry Gontier and Suzel Mayer, eds., *Le Socratisme de Montaigne*, Paris, Garnier, 2010, p. 219-236. Hereafter cited in the text with the letter "M" and page number.

8 T. Berns, "Cynisme et cosmopolitisme: Socrate et son fou" in Thierry Gontier and Suzel Mayer, eds., *Le Socratisme de Montaigne*, Paris, Garnier, 2010, p. 237; 245.

bringing out the larger arguments that include the explicit references to Cynics, implicit references to Cynics, and discussion of cynic themes even without reference to them, all of which can be understood as dialogues with the Cynics.

Montaigne is well known for griping about his personal illnesses, from kidney stones to those that come with old age. He knew that the best response is from the mind, diminishing the importance of illnesses of the body. But the mind has its illnesses also, and some of them are as well known as ambition, selfishness, and cruelty. And over and over he tells us that he lives in sick times, such that both the nation and the state are ill. Some of his dialogue with the Cynics concerns the best way of adapting to the illnesses of the body, mind, and state.

Robert Burton's book is, on the surface, not as personal as Montaigne's. On its face it is a compendium of knowledge about melancholy and how to cure it. It is not centered around personal experiences described as personal. But it is hard to imagine writing a book like this without the personal experience of melancholy that he mentions occasionally, and he made it clear that he got out of melancholy by reading and writing about melancholy. No one has studied his use of the Cynics like Clément did for Montaigne, but he cites Bion twice, Crates seven times, Demonax once, Demetrius the Cynic once, Diogenes nine times, Menippus four times, and Lucian dozens of times (CE Indexes). He followed Montaigne in ransacking all of the available history of human culture in order to develop a perspective on its causes and possible cures. Ransacking means that he read so widely that he discovered that melancholy can be caused by almost anything, and it can be cured by almost anything, including opposite means⁹. This is surely a paradox worthy of the Cynical tradition. Early on the stage is set for the importance of the topic: "Kingdoms, Provinces, Families, were melancholy as well as private men" (CEI.60), and indeed, "all the World is melancholy" (CEI.109). The whole book is about an illness of the mind that can cause and be caused by illnesses of the body and cause and be caused by illnesses of the state.

Montaigne wrote that his book was about himself (I.Pref.3), but it was also obviously about everyone else including his readers. Burton turned

9 See J.C. Laursen, "Robert Burton on Curiosity, the Passion for Knowledge, and Melancholy" in *Curiosity and the Passions of Knowledge from Montaigne to Hobbes*, Rome, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei / Bardi edizioni, 2018, p. 167-179.

Montaigne's claim around and wrote of the reader that "Thou thy selfe art the subject of my Discourse" (CEI.1), but it was also obviously about himself. Burton's relationship with Montaigne has been well-described as "a fundamentally emulative relationship" in which Burton found in Montaigne "an example of how to preserve the particular from abridgment while nonetheless articulating something common"¹⁰.

Burton was not mainly and only a Cynic any more than Montaigne was. He is perhaps best understood as a practitioner of what Erasmus encouraged as "copious discourse" in *De Copia* (1512)¹¹. Copious discourse meant writing at length about anything and everything related to a topic, garnering a certain feeling of authority without actually establishing truths and certainties, which certainly is plausible as a reading of Burton. Diogenes the Cynic was much more terse and pointed and was sure about his moral truths. But although his goals and style were different, Burton could still engage in a number of dialogues with the Cynics.

Burton's book is widely accepted as a *cento*, defined in his times by Justus Lipsius as a collection and ordering of quotes from other writers such that the collection and ordering changes the meaning of some of the quotes and of the whole in a direction determined by the author of the *cento*¹². Montaigne clearly fits this description, too. The burden is on the reader to recognize the directions in which the author is massaging the materials, and thus it is incumbent on the reader to recognize the different sources of materials such as our authors' dialogues with the Cynics. The most recent analysis of Burton's rhetoric does not even mention Diogenes or the Cynic tradition¹³. I am not claiming that they constituted one of the most important aspects of his rhetoric, but that they were indeed one of its building blocks.

10 K. Murphy, "A Disagreeing Likeness: Michel de Montaigne, Robert Burton, and the Problem of Idiosyncrasy" in N. Kenny, R. Scholar, and W. Williams, eds., *Montaigne in Transit: Essays in Honour of Ian Maclean*, Cambridge, Legenda, 2016, p. 224; 235.

11 See the book by M. M. Schmelzer, *'Tis All One: "The Anatomy of Melancholy" as Belated Copious Discourse*, New York, Lang, 1999, which also has a substantial discussion of Montaigne (p. 46-50).

12 See, e.g., A. Gowland, "'As Hunters find their Game by the Trace': Reading to Discover in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*", *The Review of English Studies* 70, 2019, p. 437-466, at 440.

13 S. Wells, *Robert Burton's Rhetoric. An Anatomy of Early Modern Knowledge*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019.

ASKESIS AND PONOS

Diogenes is famous for living in a barrel, eating lentils, drinking only water, and other elements of *askesis*, or asceticism. He also engaged in *ponos*, or practical exercises designed to cultivate and prove Cynic discipline. Montaigne was not personally a Cynic, as far as asceticism is concerned. In the *Travel Journal* he repeatedly stresses that he likes warm and soft beds, and wants curtains at the windows to keep out the light¹⁴. As he puts it, “La philosophie n’estrive point contre les voluptez naturelles, pourveu que la mesure y soit jointte, et en presche la moderation, non la fuite” (III, 5, 892). He certainly did not embrace a snowman in the winter in order to measure his patience and fortitude, as he describes Diogenes doing (III, 10, 1014). Montaigne also did not engage in physical exercises like the Cynics did, but some of his activities can be understood as a sort of *ponos*, or practical exercise. He took the waters at a number of spas as an attempt to self-medicate. His *essais*, in their literal meaning, are exercises, as Suzel Mayer points out (M221). And perhaps his repeated description of his efforts at self-control in social and intellectual matters can count as a sort of *ponos* as well. Both *askesis* and *ponos* are matters of self-control and self-discipline.

Diogenes was an ascetic because he was a moralist, or someone who gave the highest priority to morality, over and above other values. Montaigne reports about the Cynics that “Ces philosophes icy donnoient extreme prix à la vertu et refusoient toutes autres disciplines que la morale; si est ce qu’en toutes actions ils attribuoient la souveraine autorité à l’élection de leur sage et au dessus des loix” (II, 12, 585). Montaigne quotes Diogenes for mocking “musiciens qui accordant leurs fleutes et n’accordent pas leurs meurs. Des Orateurs qui estudient à dire justice, non à la faire” (I, 25, 138). That meant that in principle Diogenes was not especially interested in reading or writing, or exploration of the natural world, but mostly in calling his contemporaries

14 Montaigne, *Journal de voyage en Italie par la Suisse et l’Allemagne* in Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat, eds., *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1962, p. 1130; 1137-1138; 1145, etc.

to live up to high standards of moral behavior¹⁵. Montaigne was not a moralist in this sense, as demonstrated by his wide reading and extensive writing, and calling into question of many accepted moral truths, but he did write a nuanced critique of intemperance in learning, especially when it becomes an end in itself (III, 12, 1038ff.). He was also an anti-moralist in other ways, including pulling back from endorsing strict morality or justice where it causes other harms. He never accepted the authority of a sage, although he had a great deal of respect for Socrates. Montaigne's anti-moralism sometimes involved him in dialogues with Cynics.

The last chapter (number 37) of Book Two of the *Essays* is titled "Of the resemblance of children to fathers", but is mostly about kidney stones, his own health, and his distrust of doctors¹⁶. We know that he had Cynics in mind as he wrote because very early on he quotes an exchange between Antisthenes and Diogenes in which Antisthenes asks how he can be delivered from the evils of disease and Diogenes suggests suicide. Antisthenes answers that he did not seek delivery from life, but from some of its evils (II, 37, 759). Rather than endorsing Diogenes's point that we are always free to commit suicide, Montaigne finds in another Cynic the point that even old and sick people usually want to keep on living. Later, he opposes Antisthenes's claim in another place that life is about learning to die: it should be about learning to live (III, 2, 816). One scholar interprets this as a rejection of the Stoic doctrine that life is about learning to die, which it surely was¹⁷. But it was also a rejection of Diogenes's too-frequent recourse to suicide and Antisthenes's perspective on life. This is part of what I call a dialogue with Cynics. In this case he quotes one Cynic against another, and then refutes the first one.

The example of suicide carries over into illnesses of the state. Later Montaigne writes of those who seek to change the foundations of states

15 Nevertheless, several books are attributed to him. Husson explains that they were probably not investigations of the truth but polemics against others designed to guide people toward the practices of the Cynics (H54, p. 62; 64; 91, etc.).

16 D. Brancher issues a valuable reminder that Montaigne's attitude toward physicians is not at all simple or one-sided in "Montaigne face à la médecine: Écriture sceptique et modèle médical à la Renaissance", *Nouveau Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, 46, 2007, p. 41-65. It is, in keeping with the spirit of this article, a dialogue.

17 E. Ferrari, *Montaigne. Une anthropologie des passions*, Paris, Garnier, 2014, p. 219ff.

that they want to “guarir les maladies par la mort”, in implicit reference to Diogenes even if he was not thinking of him when he wrote this (III, 9, 958). “Mais est-il quelque mal en une police qui vaille estre combatu par une drogue si mortelle [as civil war]? Non pas, disoit Faonius, l’usurpation de la possession tyrannique d’un estat”, Montaigne writes (III, 12, 1043).

Montaigne’s discussion turns up, over and over, doctors who have not helped their patients, and in fact have killed them. At one point it blends over into politics: telling a story about the introduction of a lawyer into a happy community, he points out that the lawyers have a way of stirring up trouble which ends in illness of the body politic (II, 37, 778-779). Diogenes did not make the danger of lawyers a major theme (probably because there were no lawyers as we know them in his society), but he did make the ironical point that an athlete turned doctor would be able to get his revenge on his competition (DL VI.63).

As I understand it, we do not have much information about why Montaigne ordered the chapters in his book in exactly the way that he did. But if the last chapter of Book II could be retitled “Doctors kill us”, the first chapter of Book III could be retitled “Great men make us lie, and then kill us” or something like that. He starts out with a compliment to Emperor Tiberius’s high sense of honor that in a particular case he preferred the honorable to the useful, but then immediately undercuts that praise with the remark that “C’estoit, me direz vous, un affronteur. Je le croy: ce n’est pas grand miracle à gens de sa profession” (III, 1, 790). The rest of the chapter, like his chapter against doctors, is strongly critical of political leaders. One should get involved in helping to solve one’s country’s troubles, he says, but controlling one’s anger and hatred (III, 1, 793). Self-interested malice is one of the causes of illnesses of the state (*ibid.*).

Chapter 4 of Book III is on diversion as a remedy for grief, and for other things. Princes, and the rest of us, can divert our passions to other things. Montaigne gives an example where he diverted a prince from vengeance to clemency by appealing to his ambition for a good reputation (III, 4, 835). When his kidney stones cause him a great deal of pain he observes that it is the little things, a dog, a horse, a touch, which divert him from his pain and make him want to hold on to life (III, 4, 837). The rule, in personal life and in politics, is that we can

deal with illness by distraction. *Askesis* or *ponos* which keep us busy help us deal with illnesses of the body and of the state.

Montaigne makes a theme of the priority of acting and doing over reading and abstract thinking, like the Cynics (III, 5, 842). He quotes Diogenes's answer to Hegesias, who asked him to read him a book:

Vous estes plaisant, luy respondit-il, vous choisissez les figes vrayes et naturelles, non peintes: que ne choisissez vous aussi les exercitations naturelles, vrayes et non escrites? Il ne dira pas tant sa leçon, comme il la fera. Il la repetera en ses actions. (I, 26, 168)

When he says that “Ma philosophie est en action, en usage naturel et present: peu en fantaisie”, he could have been quoting Diogenes, but was not (III, 5, 842). Montaigne also makes a theme of his self-control and autonomy. He neglects some advice from doctors, “ayant accoustumé de luicter les deffauts qui sont en moy et les dompter par moy-mesme” (III.6. 901), which also could have been, but was not, a quote from Diogenes.

Another sort of *askesis* for the ancient Cynics was the rejection of wealth and possessions above the absolute minimum. Self-control and autarchy meant that a wise person did not need them. The Cynic Crates was alleged to have placed his wealth in the hands of a banker with instructions that if his children were fools he should give it to them because they would need it, but if they were wise he should distribute it to the most simple-minded of the people because wise children would not need it. Montaigne answers that “Nullement serois-je d'advis du faict de Crates”, he writes, because he assumes wrongly that “les sots, pour estre moins capables de s'en passer, estoient plus capables d'user des richesses” (III, 9, 949-950). But Montaigne accepts the more general rule that wealth can be corrupting as well as merely disquieting. “Si je cherchois à m'enrichir [...] j'eusse servy les Roys, trafique plus fertile que toute autre”, he writes (III, 9, 949). But “je ne cherche qu'à passer [...] sans grande attention” for similar reasons as the Cynics: it avoids all sorts of trouble that amassing riches brings with it (III, 9, 949). Again indicating that Cynics are in the back of his mind, he cites Diogenes, who, when asked what sort of wine he liked best, answered, “l'estranger” (III, 9, 951). Such wine has not cost Diogenes any effort or

cares. But Montaigne rejects Crates's solution to the problem of wealth: that Cynic cast himself into "la pauvreté pour se deffaire des indignitez et cures de la maison. Cela ne fairois-je pas (je hay la pauvreté à pair de la douleur), mais ouy bien changer cette sorte de vie à une autre moins brave et moins affaireuse" (III, 9, 954). In the last part of this remark Montaigne may have been expanding on thoughts that did not reflect his actual practice: he spent considerable time on managing his estate and participating in civil life.

When Montaigne writes that "[c]omposer nos meurs est nostre office, non pas composer des livres, et gaigner, non pas des batailles et provinces, mais l'ordre et tranquillité à nostre conduite. Nostre grand et glorieux chef-d'œuvre cest vivre à propos" (III, 13, 1108), he could have been quoting the Cynics, but he had made this message his own. When he describes the mental games he uses to downplay the importance of the pain from his kidney stones (in III, 13, at length), and concludes that the best advice is "[s]ouffrez seulement, vous n'avez que faire d'autre regime" (III, 13, 1094), he also could be describing Cynic *ponos*.

Montaigne also does not hesitate to make fun of Cynics when it suits his purpose. Diogenes was famous for testing his endurance of cold by embracing a snow figure in the winter. Montaigne quotes a man who asked him if he was very cold, and when Diogenes answered that he was not, the man asked what was so difficult about what he was doing if he was not cold (III, 10, 1014). At another point he quotes the answer of a king to a Cynic who begs for a silver drachma: "Ce n'est pas present de Roy, respondit-il. – Donne moy donc un talent. – Ce n'est pas present pour Cynique" (III, 11, 1034). Cynic paradoxes used against other people can be used against them, as Montaigne shows in a sort of dialogue with them.

Robert Burton was a scholar at Oxford who wrote and wrote and wrote on the subject of melancholy. Perhaps one could say that his version of *askesis* and *ponos* was to write. He brought out the first version of his *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621 and then spent the last seventeen years of his life revising and adding to it for a total of five further editions, including a posthumous one. He had the self-discipline to never use one noun or adjective when he could use five, never explain something once when he could explain it several times, and never use one example

when he could use many. His work has been described as “the greatest Menippean satire in English before Swift”, bringing it close to the Cynical tradition¹⁸. His book has been situated in the context of the popularity of paradoxes in the Renaissance, which, as we have already seen, has roots in the Cynical traditions¹⁹. And as one author put it, he saw “bodies, families, and nations operating analogously”, such that melancholy could be found at any of those levels²⁰.

In his introduction, titled “Democritus to the Reader”, Burton opens the topic of the “cares, miseries, suspicions, Jealousies, discontents, folly and madness” of kings (CEI.99). “Next in miseries and discontents [...] are great men” (CEI.100). Burton could have drawn on the Cynics here, but did not. Instead, he added some of them as targets of his critique of philosophers and scholars. “These acute and subtle Sophisters, so much honored, have as much need of Hellebor as others” (CEI.100). He draws on Lucian in critique of philosophers (CEI.100), but then asserts that “*Democritus* that common flouter of folly, was ridiculous himselfe, barking *Menippus*, scoffing *Lucian*, satyricall *Lucilius* [...] may be censured with the rest” (CEI.101). He could have been drawing on Diogenes when he wrote that “our Artists and Philosophers [...] are a kind of mad men” who “mend old Authors, but will not mend their own lives” (CEI.103). It is difficult to tell whether he is being ironic when he lists so many philosophers and others who claim wisdom but turn out to be fools and then says “I should here except some Cynicks, *Menippus*, *Diogenes*, that *Theban Crates*” (CEI.107-108). Since he goes right on to say in the same sentence that the only wise people in his day are the Rosicrucians, it certainly seems like he is writing in an ironic mode.

One of Burton’s main themes was the critique of useless curiosity. Just as Diogenes had lambasted the search for knowledge while neglecting one’s morality (DL VI.27-28), in the First Partition of his book Burton lambasted “fruitles questions about the Trinity, Resurrection, Election, Predestination, Reprobation, hell fire, etc.” in theology (CEI.364) and

18 N. Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 311. On the other hand, in *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion*, Mary Ann Lund denies that it should be considered a Menippean satire as a whole, even though it uses Menippean satire from time to time (p. 122; 126; 158).

19 R. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of the Paradox*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966.

20 Wells, *Robert Burton’s Rhetoric*, p. 168.

useless questions of natural science such as “how high the *Pleiades* are, how farre distant *Perseus* & *Cassiopea* from us, how deepe the sea etc.” (CEI.364). “What is most of our Philosophy, but a Labyrinth of opinions, idle questions, propositions, Metaphysicall terms?”, he asked (CEI.364). Natural science, alchemy, antiquarianism, and politics are equal wastes of energy: why must we “have all the present newes at first, though never so remote, before all others, what projects, counsellis, consultations, etc. whats now decreed in *France*, what in *Italy* [...]”, he asked (CEI.365). If Diogenes had known of these early modern quests for knowledge, he surely would have said the same as what he said about the unnecessary quests for knowledge of his own time.

In the Second Partition, Burton returned to the theme over and over: Tiresias in one of Menippus’s plays is quoted for counsel to “be not curious, or over solicitous in any thing” (CEII.122). But even before this point, something interesting has happened: Burton has also made the opposite case, that curiosity can be a cure for melancholy. It provides distraction, which is one of the best cures: nothing “is so fit & proper to expel Idleness and Melancholy, as [...] *Study*” (CEII.84). Now, “[translated from Latin] to discover the mysteries of the heavens, the secrets of nature, and the order of the universe, would confer greater happiness and pleasure than can be imagined [end of Latin]. What more pleasing studies can there be then the Mathematicks [...]” (CEII.87). A new kind of *askesis* and *ponos* is suggested. One may gain from the study of what had been previously described as useless: from alchemy and squaring the circle and the search for the philosopher’s stone (CEII.94). The work of curiosity, the exploration of the “world of books” (CEII.85), became Burton’s *askesis* and *ponos* and cured his melancholy.

Where Montaigne had rejected Crates’s throwing of his money into the sea (III, 9, 949), Burton lists it several times as one of the reactions people have had to the sufferings and uncertainty of life (CGI.279, II.145). He makes the point that Crates might have been thinking that if he did not drown his money, it might drown him (II.269), but he is not recommending that anyone follow Crates’s path. Burton’s reference to the Cynics’ view of suicide was not, like Montaigne, to quote one against another, but to report that “*Ëpicurus* and his followers, The Cynickes and Stoicks in generall affirme it” and that Diogenes had no sympathy for Speussipus’s suffering since the latter could end it by suicide whenever

he wanted to (CEI.434-435). Burton does not mention the opposite take by Antisthenes that Montaigne had quoted. Does this carry over to the state? Can a state end its own sufferings by suicide? Burton does not say.

Among the remedies that *askesis* and *ponos* might provide to someone who is suffering from scoffing, slander, libel, and obloquies, is to learn to ignore them. Burton cites the report that “Diogenes in a crowd, when one called him back and told him how the boys laughed him to scorn, Ego, inquit, non rideor [I, he said, am not being laughed at], took no notice of it” (CEII.199). This was Socrates’s method as well (CEII.199). This is both a solution to personal slander and to political slander: ignore it.

PARRHESIA, OR FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Diogenes was famous for saying what he thought, or exercising freedom of speech. When Alexander asked him if he could do him any favors, he asked Alexander to not block his sunlight. One theme of the chapter on the useful and the honorable is Montaigne’s freedom of speech when negotiating with the powerful. The great men who are served by liars and betrayers distrust these servants and later have them killed (III, 1, 798f.). By contrast, Montaigne claims that he always spoke his mind when with the great, and the respect the great had for that may have protected him from their suspicions (III, 1, 792ff.). Diogenes had said that the most beautiful thing in the world is *parrhesia*, or freedom of speech (DL VI.69), and Montaigne spells out its importance for himself (*ibid.*). He remembered that Diogenes had said that it is better to wash lettuce than to spend time in the courts of the powerful but that Aristippus had answered him that if he knew how to live among men he would not have to wash lettuce (II, 12, 544). Montaigne explicitly takes this as an example of the equal plausibility of opposite arguments, but he also provides what might be understood as advice for those who want the benefits of living in courts without the restraints: get a reputation for outspokenness and honesty, and that may protect you. If this chapter can be interpreted as Montaigne showing Diogenes how to survive court life while keeping his *parrhesia* intact, we may see this again as a dialogue with the Cynics.

Montaigne makes a larger point about being open and public in what one says: “je me suis ordonné d’oser dire tout ce que j’ose faire, et me desplais des pensées mesmes impubliables” (III, 5, 845). This is in part for moral purposes: “Il faut voir son vice et l’estudier pour le redire. Ceux qui le celent à autruy, le celent ordinairement à eux mesmes” (*ibid.*). This is Kantian publicity for the sake of the one who is open and honest, not only for the sake of others. And the same goes for the Cynics. Without reasons to hide anything, “quoi que l’on fasse dans une cité cynique, on le fera en public”, as Husson describes it (H109).

Burton can certainly be understood as exercising *parrhesia*. Not only does he criticize just about everything and everyone in authority in his descriptions of what causes melancholy, but he draws on many other critics. Menippus and Lucian are regularly cited, drawing attention to their Cynical laughter at just about everything (CEI.5, 7-8, 17, 29, 32, 38, etc.; CEII.8, 33, 38, 39, 41, 48, 55-56, 98, 115, etc.; CEIII.2, 5, 12, 18, 30, 41, etc.). Burton even makes a reference to Montaigne. “If I make nothing, as Montaigne said in a like case, I will mar nothing, ‘tis not my doctrine but my study, I hope I shall do no wrong to speak what I think, and deserve not blame in imparting my mind” (CEII.126 – Burton’s note refers to II.6 of the *Essais*). Here, he is adopting Montaigne’s *parrhesia*, which drew in part on the Cynics’ *parrhesia*.

When he gets to what he calls love-melancholy, Burton defends himself from aspersions that he should not write about frivolous, unchaste, or obscene topics on the ground that this sort of melancholy is an important species of the illness, and has been the topic of work by many respected authors (CEIII.1-2). Such melancholy in a king can lead to illnesses of the state as well. To forbid *parrhesia* on this matter would require forbidding the reading of Genesis (CEIII.3). So Burton says that “I will treat of this with like liberty as of the rest” (CEIII.7).

DEFACING THE COINAGE

Diogenes’s father was accused of adulterating the coinage in his native city and both father and son were exiled. Diogenes made a virtue of

this vice by claiming adulteration of the coinage as his duty. It was a metaphor for undermining established authorities. His goal was a society of autarchic individuals, free from concern with or interference from state and religious authorities. Montaigne did not follow Diogenes as far as undermining all laws and states. His general position is to follow the local laws and authorities, not because they are right but because people need some sort of minimal political and religious structure in order to live together without too much violence.

In Book III, chapter 1 on the useful and the honorable Montaigne mentions Diogenes on the law, revealing that he is present in the back of his mind. That point is another jab at Diogenes: Montaigne quotes Dandamis who lumps Diogenes together with Socrates and Pythagoras as people who are “trop asservis à la reverence des loix” (III, 1, 796). This is surely intended as a paradox, because each of these figures was celebrated for flouting the laws in one way or another. As Suzel Mayer puts it, “Si Diogène est trop asservi aux lois, qui ne l’est pas?” (M225). But Socrates died out of respect for the laws, and a moralist like Diogenes inevitably respects the moral laws that he upbraids us for not following. Montaigne can reasonably think that both of them exaggerated the importance of the laws. For him, the world and the laws are always in motion, and subject to revision. As he put it in chapter 2 of Book III, “Of repentance”, they are always subject to change. A distinction he made in chapter 1 of Book III was between real and national justice; in so many words, he is not sure what real justice is, and that means that interpretations of the laws are always up for revision.

Diogenes was a moralist with no respect for the laws of the city which he thought were usually corrupt. In contrast, Montaigne argued that on the whole the best government is the government one has inherited (III, 9). He certainly does not share the Cynic view that we can do without government. But there is some Cynic moralism in Montaigne concerning politics. In “The useful and the honorable” he observes that it is better to be a victim of injustice than a perpetrator of it (III, 1, 799). There are some things a man will not do, even against the enemy in war: “il y a quelque chose illicite contre les ennemis mesmes” (III, 1, 802). “Toutes choses ne sont pas loïsibles à un homme de bien pour le service de son Roy ny de la cause generale et des loix” (*ibid.*). The moral law has priority, just as Diogenes would have it. If the political

“coinage” is bad enough, we should deface it. Montaigne is outlining a middle way between rejection of the city and a full embrace of it, partly in dialogue with Cynics. Morality is a standard for judging politics, and later he writes of “la disconvenance aux meurs presentes de nostre estat” (III, 9, 956). It is just that revolution and civil war are not likely to improve that moral state.

Another of Montaigne’s underminings of the laws can be found in his discussions of kingship. It may seem strange to talk of kingship in reference to the Cynics, since Diogenes’s basic principle was the avoidance of political power. But Diogenes did express the paradox that the only thing he wanted from Alexander was for him to not block the sunlight, and chide Plato for giving up too much of his independence in order to advise the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse (DL VI. 41, 25). Later thinkers expanded on Cynic kingship, especially Dio Chrysostom²¹. Montaigne’s discussion in chapter 7 of Book III, “Of the disadvantages of greatness”, starts with an expression of his own avoidance of the highest power (III, 7, 916). He writes that “j’ay plustost fuy qu’autrement d’enjamber par dessus le degré de fortune auquel Dieu logea ma naissance” (III, 7, 917), although Philippe Desan has documented his life-long effort to confirm his noble status (Desan, esp. chs. 1 and 5). And he starts with some flattery about the difficulty of being a good king because of the self-control that it requires (III, 7, 917). But just a short while later he writes that “la paillardise s’en est veue en credit, et toute dissolution; comme aussi la desloyauté, les blasphemes, la cruauté; comme l’heresie; comme la superstition, l’irreligion, la mollesse; et pis, si pis il y a” concluding that those who surround them “souffrent cautheriser leur ame” (III, 7, 919-920). This is a terrible characterization of kings and courts, undermining respect for them, worthy indeed of Diogenes except that he would not have wasted as many words on them. Montaigne goes on to say that he does not subject his mind to kings: “Ma raison n’est pas duite à se courber et flechir, ce sont mes genoux” (III, 8, 935). He quotes the Cynic Antisthenes to the effect that kings cannot order soldiers to be good soldiers any more than donkeys can be made to plow (*ibid.*). Here he is following a Cynic, and goes on to criticize others who

21 See J. C. Laursen, “Cynic Kingship in the German Enlightenment” in Cesare Cuttica and G. Burgess, eds., *Monarchism and Absolutism in Early Modern Europe*, London, Pickering and Chatto, 2012, p. 61-74; 228-232.

think that their kings, by virtue of being kings, must be canonized or deified (III, 8, 935). The implicit point is that being a king does not mean that someone is a good king.

Crates similarly undermined respect for political leaders. Montaigne quotes him: “celuy qui demanda à Crates jusques à quand il faudroit philosopher, en receut cette responce: Jusques à tant que ce ne soient plus des asniers qui conduisent noz armées” (I, 25, 99). Montaigne observes that

Antisthenes permet au sage d’aimer et faire à sa mode ce qu’il trouve estre opportun, sans s’attendre aux loix; d’autant qu’il a meilleur advis qu’elles, et plus de cognoissance de la vertu. Son disciple Diogenes disoit opposer aux perturbations la raison, à fortune la confidence, aux loix nature. (III, 9, 990)

Not much respect for the law is left after these pieces of advice. So if on the one hand Montaigne frequently endorses living by the laws that exist where one lives, on the other hand he does not give them any more legitimacy than that they exist. At the beginning of “Of Experience” he does a riff on the obscurities and difficulties of interpretation of the laws that certainly undermines any claim to sure interpretations and any reason for self-confidence in one’s interpretations (III, 13, 1065ff.). So “les loix se maintiennent en credit, non par ce qu’elles sont justes, mais par ce qu’elles sont loix” (III, 13, 1072). If we were to apply this reasoning back to Diogenes, we might conclude that the coins defaced by his father might have been declared valid currency anyway. Any currency is better than none at all.

We might add that Montaigne also often undermines the authority of the religious, or what we may call religious coinage. In the time of the religious wars in France, religious partisanship led people to assume there was nothing good about people of the opposing party, and nothing bad about their own (III, 10). That led to major abuses: “ce sont choses que j’ay tousjours veues de singulier accord: les opinions supercelestes et les meurs sousterraines” (III, 13, 1115).

Burton’s way of defacing the coinage was not unlike Montaigne’s in undermining the prestige of kings by bringing out their suffering, their foolishness, their human weaknesses, as we have already seen above²².

22 In *The Politics of Melancholy from Spencer to Milton* (New York, Routledge, 2006) Adam Kitzes discusses Burton’s 12 paragraphs on England’s troubles (134) and asserts that

There is more. His discussion of beauty brings our attention to the ways in which powerful people are manipulated. Beauty “made *Diogenes* call proper women *Queenes*, *quod facerunt homines quae praeciparent*, because men were so obedient to their commands. They will adore, cringe, compliment and bow to a common wench (if she be faire) as if she were a noble woman, a countesse, a Queene, or a goddesse”, he quotes (CEIII.69). When kings give all their power to women, it is an illness of the state (CEIII.69ff.)

Burton undermines a great deal of politics and religion in the last section of the Third partition, on “Religious melancholy”. He accepts the claim that the devil uses politicians who use religions to gain control over the people (CEIII.343ff). “Polititians, Statesmen, Priests, Heretics, blind guides, Impostors, Pseudoprophets [. . .] propagate his superstition” (CEIII.346). Burton gives himself some cover by attributing the misuse of religion to Machiavelli’s advice (CEIII.347), to “polititians in *China* especially” (CEIII.349), and to “the See of *Rome*” (CEIII.351), but it is hard to imagine that readers would not begin to suspect the political uses of religion in every quarter after so many examples are brought out. Of the superstitious, he says, “there is nothing so mad and absurd, so ridiculous, impossible, incredible, which they will not believe observe and diligently perform” (CEIII.369). “Scoffing *Lucian*”, he notes, wrote “in Commical fashion to glaunce at the monstrous fictions, and gross absurdities of writers and nations” (CEIII.370-71) and calls him “that adamantine persequutor of superstition” (CEIII.374). We may assume that Burton approves of this Cynic behavior since he quotes so much of it with apparent approval. Superstition produces “warres, tumults, uproares, torture of soules, and despaire” (CEIII.389). One of the solutions he canvasses to the maladies of the state such as civil wars and persecutions caused by superstition is toleration, of which he draws many examples (CEIII.392-395).

As one form of defacing of the coinage of Montaigne’s lifelong attention to his own pedigree, Burton cites the Cynic Bion’s claim that his father was a rogue and his mother a whore (CEII.203). But Burton does not mean to countenance atheism and irreligion. He does not follow Sextus Empiricus and other atheists (CEIII.395ff.). He recognizes that the Cynic Demonax and his own much-cited Lucian cannot be vindicated against

his message may be conservative (149). But it also may be subversive and thus not so conservative.

charges of atheism (CEIII.404). But “temporising statesmen, politicke Machiavilians, and Hypocrites” are “cunning dissemblers” and “all their life is Epicurisme and Atheisme” (CEIII.406). If Cynics go down this road, Burton will not follow them. One coin he will not deface is the coin of “true Religion” (CEIII.369): “I am a Christian”, he asserts, although as so often, using another’s words (CEIII.402).

SEXUAL FREEDOM

Ch. 5 of Book III of Montaigne’s *Essais*, “On some verses of Virgil”, is on sexuality. This was, of course, a great theme for the Cynics. Diogenes masturbated in public and defended incest, adultery, homosexuality, etc. Along the way, this meant equality of rights to sexual satisfaction between men and women (H110, 128f.). Montaigne does not follow Diogenes all the way, but he does follow him part of the way. As Suzel Mayer puts it, “ce qui distingue Montaigne de Socrate [...] c’est son impudeur”, and his vulgar and graphic images “sont tout à fait d’inspiration cynique” (M232).

Diogenes was in favor of saying anything that could be said about sex, not hiding it (H118, 120): there are no shameful things, just shameful uses of them (H120). Montaigne, too, talked openly about his early initiation into sex, comparing it to “Quartilla, qui n’avoit point memoire de son fillage” (III, 13, 1087), and his later age-related impotence (III.5), and also defended equal rights of men and women in some matters. Again, this is a dialogue with the Cynics in the sense of weighing the various steps they took and agreeing with some and disagreeing with others.

The most famous example among the ancient Cynics of unrepressed sexuality was the couple consisting of Crates and Hipparchia, who engaged in sex in public and uncovered (mentioned by Montaigne at II, 12, 585). Montaigne discusses at some length the effort to make women deny and hide their sexuality and aspire to chastity (III, 5, 860-862). But he does not go all the way with the Cynics. He recognizes that hiding and denying and artifice have their uses in matters of sexuality. It is a paradox that while on the one hand,

Je suis fort serviteur de la nayveté et de la liberté; mais il n'y a remede: si elle n'est du tout niaise ou enfantine, elle est inepte aus dames, et messeante en ce commerce; elle gauchit incontinent sur l'impudence. Leurs desguisements et leurs figures ne trompent que les sots. Le mentir [by pretending reluctance] y est en siege d'honneur: c'est un destour qui nous conduit à la verité par une fauce porte. (III, 5, 867)

Again, we have a dialogue with the Cynics. Montaigne may be on to something: much of the pleasure of human life is not wholly natural, but increased by artificial challenges.

At bottom, Montaigne is no more romantic than Diogenes: “je trouve apres tout que l'amour n'est autre chose que la soif de cette jouissance en un subject désiré”, he writes (III, 5, 877); “Nature nous y pousse” (III, 5, 878). And his sexual naturalism follows the Cynics up to a point. “Sommes nous pas bien bruttes de nommer brutale l'operation qui nous faict?”, he asks (III, 5, 878). He is also occasionally rather misogynist: concerning women, “leur essence est si confite en soubçon, en vanité et en curiosité, que de les guarir [of jealousy] par voye legitime, il ne faut pas l'esperer” (III, 5, 870). But he concludes that “je dis que les masles et femelles sont jettez en mesme moule: sauf l'institution et l'usage, la difference n'y est pas grande” (III, 5, 897). Proving that the dialogue with the Cynics persists, he cites with evident approval the fact that “le philosophe Antisthenes ostoit toute distinction entre leur vertu et la nostre” (III, 5, 897; see H122ff).

Burton writes at length on sexual matters as both causes of melancholy and cures for it: the first 329 pages of the Third Partition are on “Love-melancholy”. There are arguments that time and distance and alternatives can cure a particular melancholic love and jealousy (CEIII.202ff., 207ff., 306ff.). Where Montaigne reported that the Cynic “Crates disoit que l'Amour se guerissoit par la faim, si non par le temps; et, à qui ces deux moïens ne plairroient, par la hart” (II, 12, 497), Burton retells the same story: “If imprisonment and hunger will not take them downe, according to the direction of that Theban Crates, Time must weare it out, if time will not, the last refuge is an halter” (CEIII.204). There is also a specific reference: “saith *Montaigne*, the Frenchman in his *Essayes*, that the skilfullest masters of amorous dalliance appoint for a remedy of venerous passions, a full survey of the body” (CEIII.221). Freedom

from melancholy, in sexual matters, includes freedom to engage in certain behaviors, and freedom to escape from certain sexual passions.

CONCLUSIONS

Suzel Mayer concludes that by adopting a number of the Cynical critiques of Socrates and interpretations of Socrates as a Cynic even as he affirmed his admiration for Socrates, Montaigne was transforming himself into a “Socrate impoli” (M236). Diogenes Laertius had reported that Diogenes the Cynic had been called a “Socrates gone crazy” (DL VI.54). Perhaps we could say that Montaigne created a kind of cross between Socrates and Diogenes as his own model and identity. Burton’s identity was perhaps more diffuse, since he had canvassed much of the available literature for causes and cures of melancholy. But we could still characterize him as ready and willing to draw on the resources of the Cynics if and when they were useful in providing a remedy for melancholy.

More could be gleaned from the texts of Montaigne and Burton to a similar effect. But we are already in a position to conclude that neither of our authors was or thought of himself as a Cynic in the ancient mold, but that both of them drew fairly frequently on the resources of the Cynical tradition to make points, shore up their arguments, and provoke thought. It would be no easy task to assign percentages to the influence of each of the ancient schools of Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism, and Cynicism (and perhaps we should add Platonism and Aristotelianism) on each of our authors. But it is not necessary. It is enough to show that both of them engaged in dialogues with the Cynics in order to think about illnesses of the body, illnesses of the mind, and illnesses of the body politic.

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