

THE NOMINALISM IN MONTAIGNE'S ESSAYS

O NOMINALISMO NOS ENSAIOS DE MONTAIGNE

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ABSTRACT

This paper faces the hard and almost unexplored issue on Montaigne's nominalism. It also contains interesting clues about the skepticism in the Middle Ages. It shows the most important extracts of the *Essays* that would be written under the nominalism's influence. Most of the scholars even ruminate on that Montaigne translated a Middle Ages' work. This road certainly leads us to the very few explored issue about the relationships between the *Essays* and the later Scholastic. Working with an edition of Montaigne's translation (1581) of Sebond's *Theologia*, this paper presents extracts from Sebond's nominalism that were on the root of some extracts of the *Essays*.

KEY-WORDS: Montaigne. Nominalism. Universals. Sebonde. Fideism.

RESUMO

Este artigo mapeia a quase inexplorada via do nominalismo nos *Ensaaios*. A questão correlata do ceticismo na Idade Média é também contemplada, de modo indireto. Salvo o trabalho de Compagnon (1980), poucos são os estudos que interpretam os *Ensaaios* a partir da tradição Nominalista (William de Ockham, 1285?-1349). A maior parte dos pesquisadores não considera o fato de que Montaigne fora tradutor de uma obra da escolástica tardia. Este artigo apresenta trecho de uma edição da tradução (1581) da obra do catalão Raymond Sebond que mostra claramente a influência nominalista. Assim, esta influência, nos *Ensaaios*, ocorrera por meio de Sebond. Portanto, não parece ser o caso de um contato direto de Montaigne com as obras de Ockham. Se o problema dos Universais aparece sob roupagem retórica nos *Ensaaios*, seu contato com o Nominalismo ocorreu sobretudo mediante fontes indiretas (Sanchez é outra fonte muito provável).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Montaigne. Nominalismo. Universais. Sebond. Fideísmo.

The issue of nominalism² in Montaigne's *Essays* is not a subject that has attracted a great deal of attention from scholars³. Whatever the reasons to overlook this question, this research

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² This tradition, founded by W. Ockham (c. 1285?-1349), was qualified by a variety of arrangements. It was K. Michalski's who identified nominalism as a sort of criticism and skepticism (DE LIBERA, 1998, p. 428). Anyway, this scholar's very few studied in Brazil and I would like to point out here the gap in the Middle Age studies about some bonds between old skepticism and Ockham. The very point that increases the probability that Ockham had been in touch with Sextus' works is about Sextus' fourteenth-century manuscripts and translations. For more details, see: Floridi (2002, p. 63-89). Besides that, the Ockham's logical machinery seems structurally pretty close to Sextus' arguments against all branches of philosophy. Finally, one should also pay attention to the great influence of Cicero's rhetoric during the Middle Ages.

presents some historical and thematic difficulties particularly if one wants to affirm that Montaigne was a nominalist *avant la lettre*⁴. It could be a mistake to assert Montaigne as a 'nominalist' if we define this term as a philosophical movement⁵. Montaigne could be named a nominalist only as an outsider of the Universities' environment. How paradoxical this could be if

3 Agreeing with Compagnon (1980, p. 22): "[...] *Sont ainsi méconnus les éventuels liens des Essais à la doctrine nominaliste, logique et épistémologique, métaphysique et théologique, voire éthique et politique, qui conserva pourtant une influence au cours du XVIe siècle, notamment sur la Réforme.* [...]". Compagnon thesis relates moral to logic in the *Essays*. He doubt, henceforth, about the priority between logic and ontology: "[...] *De nouveau, la morale des Essais dépend d'une logique et d'une ontologie.*" (p. 122. See also. p. 134). There is an underlying thesis on Compagnon, namely, that the *Essays'* moral had, in a certain way, a relationship with ontology and logic. Montaigne's on the very root of modern epistemology, as Popkin (2003) have been argued. If the major issues of the *Essays* were the man (anthropology) and the moral (virtue, pleasure, action etc), inasmuch we can find in the *Apology* epistemological (knowledge and truth) and even metaphysical (God) questions. Another point of dispute is about Montaigne's theological commitments. For some scholars, the *Apology* also had established the thesis for rational theology and for the seventeenth-century french theological debate between Jansenism and Jesuits. About this theme, the bibliography is large and very massed. The thesis seems, mostly, mixed and there is no final answer or a high road that could, historically, defines these sources. We should start to define the relationships between Agustin and Ockham in the *Apology* (or, how the doctrine of Grace and the struggle against universals could enable the beginning of a modern catholic Theology).

4 Accordingly to Normore (2017, p. 121), the term 'nominalis' appears firstly in the second quarter of the twelfth century, related to Peter Abelard. It is only in the fifteenth century that 'nominales' would be related to a philosophical school. On its very beginning, the two main metaphysical claims of these were that no universal beings (everything is particular) and no abstract beings (all being is a concrete one) exists. This author gives us a dozen names of sixteenth century nominalists.

5 Despite not been at odds with the main theological discussions of his time, Montaigne was aware of the *zeitgeist* of his century. This signifies that he has been in touch with nominalism also as a student of law in Bordeaux. But the thesis here is that his theological and nominalism knowledge came, mostly, through Sebond. The nominalist's thesis achieved an important role on his theological position at the *Apology*, together with skepticism and augustinism. Concerning this, one issue is if skepticism was on the very roots of nominalism during the later Middle Age. The gap between reason and faith is both attributed to nominalist's theology and to the rise of skepticism in the Renaissance: "[...] *Most of theology depends upon revelation, and natural reason can prove less about God than one might think—perhaps not even that God exists.* [...]" (NORMORE, 2017, p. 136). Another issue, then, is how nominalism and skepticism meet in the Renaissance to form fideism and how these reach modernity. One example of how Universities' issues were present in the *Essays* concerns the utility of logic. The following issue was a touchstone in the distinction between nominalists and realists in the first quarter of the sixteenth century in the University of Paris: "[...] *That the sharpest division in the teaching of logic while Mair was an Arts Master was still that between Nominalists and Realists is suggested in his Summulae Logicales, where one objection to the claim that logic is a useful science is that there is nothing certain in it, because there is nothing on which the Nominales and Reales agree.*" (NORMORE, 2017, p. 127). We can see this problem advanced by Montaigne's own words at the eighth chapter of the third Book: "*Or qui n'entre en deffiance des sciences, et n'est en doute s'il s'en peut tirer quelque solide fruite au besoin de la vie, à considerer l'usage que nous en avons? [...] [B] Qui a pris de l'entendement en la logique? Où sont ses belles promesses? [...]*", (MONTAIGNE, 2004, p. 926). Cicero's *De finibus* is the following quotation of this same extract from the *Essays*, which shows Pyrrhonism about the sciences (saying, *trivium* and *quadrivium*) in defense of life. All the following quotations from the *Essays* are identified by the Book number (in roman numerals) followed by the chapter number and the page number.

we take for granted that some of the nominalist's thesis in the *Essays* would deeply reach the following century⁶, including, in a certain way, academic debates.

Moreover, this thesis conflicts *prima facie* with the position occupied by Montaigne in the history of ideas nowadays, namely, as a skeptic and moralist. However, some sources suggest that Montaigne had been in touch with the Aristotelian logic⁷ inasmuch as an explicit critical refusal of dialectic and his dissatisfaction with logic. One should keep this in view when considering a more theoretical side in the *Essays*.

We do not want to argue here the thesis that Montaigne 'applied' any nominalist logical techniques⁸. We don't even claim that any of the semantic operations and analyses developed by this tradition are already present in the *Essays*. It's not the case to claim by any direct contact between Montaigne and Ockham's metaphysical and logical works⁹.

The issue here, however, is to explore an indirect influence for which we certainly have material sources and that is indeed supported by some extracts from the *Essays*. But the difficulty increases, as there are no explicit quotations or mentions about nominalist philosophers. Anyhow, our deal here will be to reconstruct some statements of the *Essays* to clarify its very sources. Paradoxically, as every Montaigne's scholar knows, in spite of the high number of quotations, the *Essays* still requires a very deep interpretation's work.

The thesis concerning Montaigne's nominalism commitment could be explored through the issue of the singulars *versus* universals¹⁰. This question functions as a gateway combining linguistic and metaphysical commitments. Once more, this issue is historically hard to define¹¹.

6 Nominalism was important to philosophy in the sixteenth century as Voltaire was important to the liberty of press nowadays. Certainly, the reader should comprehend that comparison as limited.

7 In the *Dictionnaire* (2004, p. 599-601), the entry 'logic' gives us a historical overview of Montaigne's possible contacts with Aristotelian logic during his youth.

8 Normore (2017) even mentions Sebond as a nominalism's source in the sixteenth century. Our paper disagrees relatively, then, with his partial conclusion that this movement disappears in the half of the sixteenth century onwards: "[...] *At least from the perspective of Walker and Salabert, Nominalism as a movement seems to have died in the first half of the sixteenth century, and there is little reason to doubt their opinion [...]*" (p. 130). His mistake is mostly due to the scope of his research, strictly kept on names that acted only on Universities. However, we can see that, as a philosophical movement, nominalism didn't exercise a major role in sixteenth century academic context. Even though, Normore admits the survival of some of its views throughout the century until the final decade.

9 Despite it, one must consider the fact that Montaigne's library contained Saint Thomas' *Works*. However, we don't know anything about the edition.

10 For an interpretation of Montaigne as a nominalist see. Screech (2000, p. 77-78), who shows the presence of the universal issue in the *Essays*.

11 One of the major sources for Montaigne's nominalism (and also for his skepticism) was the Portuguese Doctor F. Sanchez. Montaigne's library contained a copy of his major work, the *Quod nihil scitur* (M. D. VXXXI), as

It can be said that nominalism is present in the *Essays* through two major theses, namely: 1) that universals are only terms, with a linguistic and grammatical existence (this last element is questioned by Montaigne), and 2) that only individuals exist (the strong claim about the exclusive existence of singulars)¹².

There is no full commitment to the first thesis. This might be because there is another thesis about a kind of existence of universals that would invalidate it. Another reason is that Montaigne did not explicitly formulate the claim, that has not such a historical background as supposed by Compagnon (1980). Anyhow, there is a stronger commitment to the second thesis, as I will argue. About the first one, we can identify some versions of it along the *Essays*, as I'll also clarify. The challenge I undertake here is, convinced by the relevance of both theses, to give a compatible explanation for the two of them.

Furthermore, nominalism can be identified as a background in Montaigne's work, (what might be called, an 'ambiance argument'). In this sense, nominalism was defended without the technical tools developed by Ockham and its formulation is freer for Montaigne. Thus, we argue, the nominalism tradition is present in Montaigne's work side by side with other philosophical traditions. Nevertheless, Montaigne's commitment to nominalism¹³ would only be partial in this

suggested by Villey. See *Les Essais* (2004), p. LXVIII. Here I propose also to display the question of the meeting between nominalism and skepticism in some key Renaissance philosophers.

12 "*Où Michel de Montaigne embrasse résolument la cause nominaliste. Seul les individus existent [...]*" (COMPAGNON, 1980, p. 22). Certainly, there's a difference of field in assert the existence of singulars or the existence of individuals as the only epistemic trait that we can know. However, Montaigne modifies the nominalistic's thesis that only singular exists, applying the linguistic scope to anthropology.

13 The nominalism reception in Montaigne and Gassendi was very similar, as Bloch (1971, p. 112-113) said (an indirect reception of some of the nominalists thesis in Gassendi): "[...] *Sans doute la connaissance qu'il manifeste des thèses du nominalisme médiéval procède-t-elle moins d'une lecture directe des auteurs que des exposés et discussions scolaires, et de la diffusion générale du thème nominaliste depuis le 15^e siècle chez tous les adversaires de la scolastique traditionnelle. [...] Quelle est la teneur de ce nominalisme, quelles en sont les implications? L'exposé de l'Essai 2 du Livre II des 'Exercitationes' commence par l'affirmation des thèses générales du nominalisme: il n'y a d'universalité que dans nos concepts, ou dans les noms servant à les désigner; il n'y a d'existence que singulière. Ainsi l'idée de <nature>, celle de la <nature humaine>, par exemple, est-elle une idée creuse: il n'y a que des individus, que les natures humaines singulières de ces individus; tout au plus pourra-t-on dire qu'il existe une nature humaine multiple, aussi divisée et diverse que le sont les individus; et sans doute faudrait-t-il ici, derrière l'exemple traditionnel, apercevoir les perspectives nouvelles sur l'humanité qu'ont tracées les grandes découvertes du 15^e et du 16^e siècles, et dont un Montaigne avait pris si fortement conscience.*". If the background of the nominalism reception seems similar in Montaigne and Gassendi, certainly the remake of the thesis is pretty different. For example, Gassendi holds the possibility of the sciences, whereas Montaigne puts all sciences (in a modern sense) in doubt. However, there are thematic similarities, as the ontological thesis that affirms the singular beings as the only existence. This thesis keeps ontological diversity related to sensible and singular beings.

sense, as Montaigne was not a scholastic disciple of Ockham and so offers no dogmatic defense of Ockham's theory.

Hence, my fundamental task in this paper would be to gather together the disparate evidence for nominalism in the *Essays*, underlining the differences and compatibilities with other works directly or indirectly related to this tradition. This would embark on a truly historical journey, which should must be consisted, first of all, in a study of some of Ockham's *Works*¹⁴. Secondly, it would need to map out how Ockham's theses were received by some of his declared followers (leading to a diversity of nominalism theories). This second part would lead to a third one, where the reception of nominalism in the sixteenth century will be mapped out. Finally, I would put the argument together in favor of the hypothesis that Montaigne was in contact with this tradition¹⁵. In what follows, I will present only the last part of this plan, in which some of the important extracts from the *Essays* will be briefly commented upon.

In his First Book, Montaigne devotes one of his fifty-seven essays to the names, and specifically to proper names. Villey, however, did not pay attention to the philosophical relevance of this chapter¹⁶.

We read on the first page: "[A] *quelque diversité d'herbes qu'il y ait, tout s'enveloppe sous le nom de salade.*" (MONTAIGNE, 2004, p. 276). From an empirical ascertainment that could be simplified in the proposition "there is a diversity of greens", another finding can be inferred on a

14 The selection of these works will be made looking for their relevance to the following centuries, I mean, after the thirteenth.

15 This historical issue is presented by Compagnon (1980). Despite Montaigne's translation of the Sebond's *Theologie Naturelle* that enable us to research some theological thesis in his writings, it must be understood that he had not interested in scholastic debates: "*Il ne s'agit pas de prétendre que Montaigne a lu Ockham ou quelque épigone, ni qu'au Collège de Guyenne, ou à Toulouse, il fut mis au fait de l'ockhamisme. Le nominalisme est du reste fort présent dans la Theologia naturalis de Sebond, et Montaigne paraît l'ignorer, il l'atténue constamment dans sa traduction de l'ouvrage. En revanche, il l'accentuera dans l'<Apologie>, par le biais des références, explicites et implicites, aux stoïciens et aux sceptiques. C'est comme si ces derniers avaient permis à Montaigne d'apprécier après coup le nominalisme de Sebond, et de la radicaliser. [...] Nonobstant, les maîtres de Montaigne au Collège de Guyenne, Nicolas de Grouchy et Guillaume de Guérente, <qui a commenté Aristote>, note Montaigne (I.26, 173a), retraduisirent et éditèrent l'Organon, toujours précédé de l'Isagoge de Porphyre, au lieu de seulement reproduire la vieille traduction de Boèce comme le faisait encore Toledo. Guillaume de Guérente, Logica, Paris, 1559. Nicolas de Grouchy, Aristotelis logica, Paris, 1567; Lyon, 1576; Paris, 1578, 1586, 1590. [...]" (p. 24). The reason why Montaigne did mitigated the nominalism of the Sebond's *Theologia* is related to the religious strikes between catholics and huguenots. Nominalism was more reading by the protestant side, but this didn't meant that there wasn't a catholic nominalism. Anyway, another point is why Montaigne had mitigated nominalism in his translation of Sebond and increase it in his *Essays*, mostly in his *Apology*.*

16 Villey (1976), in paying attention to historical varieties, reads this essay on names as a reflection on language made by a libertine author.

linguistic level, which corresponds to saying that '*salade*' is the universal name which designates a diversity of greens (*herbes*). If, on one hand, this extract means an indirect claim about natural language, suggesting that it works using universal terms (*salade*) and that universals exist in language; on the other hand, this same passage criticizes the operation of abstraction inherent to language. This criticism alludes to the issue of universal and singular. Its irony is not opposed to its philosophical compromise. Experience delivers us a diversity of perceptions that are also transmitted, in their diversity, by the senses. Language is a part of the reasoning, related to the process of knowledge.

It seems that a semantic position could be derived from the extract above, namely, that no matter how many words a definition might contain, definitions never represent the multiplicity of empirical distinctions. For example, in a dictionary entry, the diversity of synonyms and antonyms could be understood as a sign of the principle of difference (*distingo*, a conception that corresponds methodologically to Montaigne's). Certainly, this multiplicity is a simplified mirror of the world accessed by subjective experience. There are so many more qualities and quantities of greens than the simplification transmitted by the term 'greens'. It is in this way that Montaigne seems to operate a skepticism of abstraction, as instantiated by universal terms.

Thus, the quote above is a *sui generis* manner of skepticism about the thesis of the existence of universals *in re* and their existence in language. However, the point here is related to natural language, and so does not imply a commitment to any technical definition when referring to 'universals'.

I would like to present another extract, from the sixteenth chapter of the Second Book, where we could argue for the influence of nominalism. Prepared on the same model as the others, this chapter is on the subject of the passion of glory. Notwithstanding, it opens with some remarkable comments on the difference between language (name) and the world (thing): "[A] *Il y a le nom et la chose: le nom, c'est une voix qui remarque et signifie la chose; le nom, ce n'est pas une partie de la chose ny de la substance, c'est une piece estrangere joincte à la chose, et hors d'elle.*"¹⁷. (MONTAIGNE, 2004, p. 618). Here, Montaigne makes a distinction between the name and the thing (language and the world) claiming that names are accidents. There is a brief

¹⁷ The reader must keep attention to the use of the word '*voix*', which was one of the language' signification mode, namely, his 'material' mode, as was understood by the Terminism.

discussion of substance and he adopts an explicit terminism's position. Notwithstanding, only by an *ad hoc* appeal could we interpret this extract by a designation and signification theory that would be compatible with the artificial and arbitrary properties of language.

Moreover and most important, it is notable how close this passage is to Sebonde (1581, p. 212): "[...] *Le nom est hors de la chose, il n'est pas la chose, mais il la marque et signifie.*"¹⁸

We would like to state that the influence of this background leads to a philosophy of language. But, as always with Montaigne's exegeses, it is difficult to establish the limits of our thesis. We can say that language is not the world, which could imply a thesis of language's conventional nature¹⁹. The scope of universal' terms does not include all the singular differences. It can be concluded, therefore, that in his way Montaigne faced the question of the existence of universals.²⁰ My point is that the refusal of universals will be alternately postulated and refused over the *Essays*.

In the eighth chapter of the Third Book, we can read: "[...] *Tous jugemens en gros sont lâches et imparfaits.*" (MONTAIGNE, 2004, p. 943). The topic of this chapter concerns the art of conversation mixed with reflections upon the art of thinking. Some justifications for refusing universal' judgments are postulated: they are imperfect and vague (in a Cartesian sense, they bear unclarity and indistinctness). While this quotation affirms the existence of universals in language, it suggests that their epistemic status is weak. The reason for this weakness is the strict affirmation of the existence of singular terms (individuals).

In the same chapter, we can read: "[...] *Ces jugemens universels que je vois si ordinaires ne disent rien. Ce sont gens qui saluent tout un peuple en foule et en troupe. Ceux qui ont vraye cognoissance le saluent et remarquent nommément et particulièrement.*" (MONTAIGNE, 2004, p. 936). This quotation conveys an implicit restriction of existence to individuals related to the *vraye cognoissance*. There is also an implicit assertion that universals have a linguistic existence.

18 The proximity between the two passages is out of doubt as we can read through Montaigne's own translation. The first publication of this translation was in 1569 and the extract from the *Essays* is on the [A] blanket, which doesn't disturb the probability that this extract means an indirect reference to nominalism.

19 Even been passages where Montaigne seems to claim to a correspondence between word and thing.

20 Compagnon (1980, p. 12) reading is based on a paradox resulted from the existence and inexistence of universal: "*D'une part le nom est vide, impropre, arbitraire et accidentel; de l'autre, il est plein, propre, nécessaire et essentiel. Tel est le paradoxe apparent que j'entends déployer sinon dénouer: il porte sur le nom dit propre, sur l'individu, l'universel, et enfin sur le nom d'auteur; il résume la dialectique du <je> et de <mon estre universel>, la logique de l'appropriation du nom dans l'écriture, non seulement celle des Essais. [...]*". It must be understood that there is a constitutive paradox in the *Essays* originated from the identification between the proper names and the universal.

Therefore, we can ask: which thesis is stronger or has more weight? Is there a correspondence between the name and the individual here?

Montaigne's rhetoric combines a political image (a sovereign who salutes a people) with a philosophical reflection on judgment and knowledge. We have a metaphor where a political image is used to represent how language works. The image of the salutation implies skepticism of universal knowledge and also reinforces the claim for the existence of singular as individuals²¹. Judgments about Universals are semantically vague. But even that thesis does not block the existence of universal judgments in language. Is it possible to explain why, according to the quotation above, universal judgments incur vagueness? Thinking in terms of an epistemic theory of correspondence, sooner or later we must demand an ontological complement. This is the reason for the vagueness of universal judgments that do not correspond to the subject of their claims, or, if they do, this is not precise but rather a general correspondence.

But do we need to include in the scope of these language criticisms standard abstraction? Is Montaigne, like a kind of french Cratylus, completely rejecting natural language in its trivial use? In a certain way, the skeptical refusal of universals generalizations represents a semantic and ontological skepticism. There is no universal *in re* and even in our minds there are no universals at all.

Furthermore, we can't know the five universals that were in debate (genus, species, sameness, difference, and accident) by reason or by the senses. There is an epistemic skepticism here that limits human cognitive capacities, including imagination that is not apt even to imagine

21 The issue in Aristotle (1952, p. 518) runs as following: "(8) [...] [25] [...] *If, on the one hand, there is nothing apart from individual things, and the individuals are infinite in number, how then is it possible to get knowledge of the infinite individuals? [...] 999b [...] (A) If there is nothing apart from individuals, there will be no object of thought, but all things will be objects of sense, and there will not be knowledge of anything, unless we say that sensation is knowledge. [...] (B) [...] For evidently it is not possible to suppose it in all cases; we could not suppose that there is a house besides the [20] particular houses. – Besides this, will the substance of all the individuals, e.g. of all men, be one? This is paradoxical, for all the things whose substance is one are one.*" In the fourth part of the *Metaphysics'* Gama is presented a knowledge issue, namely, how can we know the singular existence. In this scope, the change between contraries must be explained. This implies to explain the knowledge beyond sensations. There is asserted, them, the necessity of one or more principles. In that way, the being and the substance appear as that which assures epistemic unity and identity. Anyhow, Montaigne seems to faces this problem in your way, especially in the last chapter of his work. What must be underlined from this chapter of the *Metaphysics* is the research for something that underlies things. To establish the existence of one substance from the infinity individuals' existence is a paradox that Aristotle himself recognized. The passage quoted above directly relates ontology (the existence of singular beings) and epistemology (the possibility of the knowledge of these beings). Anyway, this quotation of Aristotle shows how Scholastic was deeply influenced by his works, even such an intellectual school as Nominalism.

the nature of universals. We can only retain their existence concerning God. This skepticism means fallibility and can be found on the very roots of Descartes' epistemology.

It seems that there is an understanding of how things are in Montaigne's refusal of universals. However, there is also a tension between the full negation of universals and a mitigation claim about them, if they are understood as 'form': "[...] *chaque homme porte la forme entiere de l'humaine condition.*"²² (MONTAIGNE, 2004, p. 805). The question here is what weight we should give to this much-debated passage. In its original context, its sense is moral, suggesting that practical needs informs men during all stages of their lives, no matter their lifestyle (ordinary or great lives). But there is also a natural property common to all men that assures the universal scope of this originally moral passage.

There is a paradoxical tension, therefore, between this passage and the other ones quoted above. This paradox makes sense only when related to the philosophical tradition that opposes the particular and the universal. The last quotation allows us to think that Montaigne's thought has some relation to the universal. Thus, the thesis identifies the universal with the form on the epistemic claim that an universal can only be known through the particular²³. This is a paradox within Montaigne's thought that is not outgrowing.

Desan (2004, p. 999-1000) does not call it a paradox, but our position is close to him. We can read in the entry 'universel-universalisme' from the *Dictionnaire*:

[...] *Si M. ne nie pas l'existence d'universaux, il les subordonne néanmoins à des pratiques particulières. [...] Ainsi, selon M., l'universel réside dans le particulier, seule entité dont on peut faire l'expérience. [...] L'universel doit toujours être conçu au niveau de l'ensemble des expériences particulières qui constituent et forment l'être singulier. [...] M. résolut en fait, à sa façon, une de ces grandes questions philosophiques de la Renaissance: le passage problématique du particulier à l'universel. M. évacue la dichotomie particulier/universel qui empêche ses contemporains de penser la différence. Il réconcilie les extrêmes: l'universel n'existe que dans le particulier et le particulier témoigne de l'universel. [...] Bref, on trouvera toujours l'universel dans le particulier [...]*²⁴.

22 For an Aristotelian interpretation of 'form' at the *Essays*, see [Screech \(2000\)](#).

23 If Montaigne refuses deductions, we could find, however, a commitment with induction since we were convinced about the existence of universal on particulars.

24 The universal dispute (about its existence as its knowledge) lasted until Locke (See. *Essay concerning the human understanding*, Book I, chaps.1 and 2). For an overview of this issue in Locke, See Armstrong (1970, caps. 3 e 4). Also, in his paper, Carraud (1995) maps Arnauld's commitment to Cartesianism. In doing that, he goes to some lessons Arnauld gave between the years 1639-41, courses that were decisive to Arnauld's position faced scholastic theses. In spite of it, the most important for us is the comment on Arnauld's work, *Philosophical Conclusions*. Carraud found an Ockhamist formulation not only at Arnauld's conception of liberty, in which is related to

If, on one hand, we can recognize the coherence of this reading, on the other it is difficult to take it as a definitive end-point, a kind of synthesis of Montaigne's thought²⁵.

To continue with the last quotation, we could say that it instantiates universality in a certain way since we have a moral and anthropological type of generality. Nevertheless, Montaigne is not claiming any substantive universality encompassed by different individuals, like a mountain, a shark or a scottish woman.

It is also hard to be certain that *forme* is close to what Neo-Platonists understood as soul, since we find no evidence of liking for any transcendental position in the chapters of the *Essays*. We could hope that psycho-physic monism, combined with an explicit claim for reason's fallibility and other epistemic commitments (like the hyperbolic imagination and the spirit's plasticity) might help us to define this *forme*, as well as the reiterated contradictions that define men²⁶.

This anthropological form would also be defined by mobility by an induction that begins from the self, 'always tottering and reeling'. It sounds strange that a work historically characterized by its commitment to subjectivity contains such a universal and formal claim, but this is typical of Montaigne.

The singular-universal paradox is clearly identified in the following passage: "[C] *Les auteurs se communiquent au peuple par quelque marque particuliere et estrangere; moy le premier par mon estre universel, comme Michel de Montaigne [...]*" (MONTAIGNE, 2004, p. 805). The 'universal being' was identified with a proper name, and so by a nominalist sign used

indifference (see. p. 121), but also to his conclusions on logic, on physics, and on metaphysics. This links, anyhow, Cartesianism to Ockhamism: "[...] *In fact, a certain number of Ockhamist formulations are susceptible of receiving a Cartesian sense. Everything happens as if the Ockhamist pronouncements of Arnauld were in some way themselves Cartesianizable.*" (p. 124-25).

25 Since Montaigne doubts on knowledge of singulars and recognizes the function of appearances.

26 The *Dictionnaire* (2004, p. 413-414) entry 'forme', assigned by Couturas, says: "*Dans les Essais, les occurrences du mot <forme> ont, pour la plupart, le sens usuel d'<état>, d'<aspect extérieur> [...] de <manière d'être ou de faire>, de <façon de vivre> [...] et se rapportent à une description extérieure de l'individu et à ses habitudes. Plusieurs occurrences se rapportent à un principe intérieur à l'individu [...] A partir de la détermination du substantif, deux directions sont données au terme: il s'agirait, soit d'un principe universel que partagent tous les hommes [...] soit d'un principe individuel, propre à chaque individu [...] M. semble ainsi poser d'une part, l'existence d'un principe, d'une individualité, d'une unicité, d'une singularité à l'intérieur de chacun et d'autre part, une appartenance commune à l'<humaine condition>. [...] C'est donc la pluralité des formes existantes que M. prend pour objet de son expérience, dans leur diversité d'êtres singuliers. [...]*". We have, so, two definitions of form that are derived from the *Essays*: 1) form as a shared universal, 2) form as an individual aspect that pertains exclusively to each individual. In the first sense, the definition has, paradoxically, compatibility with mobilism. In the second, it is compatible with the thesis that affirms the exclusive existence of individuals.

to designate singular beings. But if we can read here a nominalist reduction of the universal to a proper name (and it is debatable how this association can achieve the self), there is also no claim that universals also exist *in re*.

In this last sense, the very fork between the diversity of human beings would instantiate the universal²⁷. The singular is the beginning and the limit of knowledge. In the former sense, through the knowledge of an individual by its proper name, we will also know something of the natural order which participates in the intellectual act. This 'something' does not erase the differences that naturally define human beings.

It is important to include mobilism in this theoretical framework, since it is related to Montaigne's skeptical ontology. Compagnon (1980, p. 70) gives us a clue how to make these theoretical commitments compatible:

[...] Plus exactement, si les noms propres sont des termes concrets, les qualités qu'ils signifient de manière indirecte, qu'ils connotent, peuvent en effet être contraires: le vice et la vertu, la mauvaise part et la bonne part. [...] un nouveau facteur de la variation du nom, le temps [...] les changements dans le temps sont les deux grands arguments nominalistes contre la réalité des abstractions. Le langage, variable dans le temps et dans l'espace, ne saurait enfermer une vérité.

This non-substantive conception of language is related to the contradictory diversity of the qualities of names²⁸. Compagnon restricted these contradictions to language. It seems however that their scope covers men when described under anthropological and moral motivations, what some scholars call as a kind of commitment to human behavior.

Since time is the category par excellence of mobilism, nominalism seems to have used it to discredit realism arguments and support its thesis of the perennial existence of abstract terms.

27 See. *Dictionnaire* (2004, p. 999).

28 That corresponds to what Gontier (1998, p. 37-38) called the modern's philosophers 'committed nominalism', that is, a division between the 'divine *lógos*', the 'natural *lógos*' and the 'human *lógos*'. This issue the question of being and knowledge. If there is a commitment to define how things are, someone is not taking the opposite direction in saying that there is a language's empty? Conche (1996, p. 5), for example, affirm a kind of substantial language in the *Essays*: “[...] *Son discours est toujours substantiel. Il est ce qu'il dit, et, comme il ne prétend pas à autre chose, il est irréfutable.*” Hence, there would be compatibility between the nominalism commitment (even if it must be defined as the kind of language's commitment that comes with it), the mobilism and the phenomenism as theoretical backgrounds. If individuals are what only exists, there would be exclusivity of singular terms on it (that is a mirror of the exclusive singular knowledge). The empty, hence, is related to universals. However, on the other hand, Montaigne understands men and nature as defined by motion. This simple thesis seems to complete the nominalist's and it would be necessary to check, on the historical roots, if that meeting never happens before Montaigne himself.

In the last pages of the *Apology for Raymond Sebond* there is a deep reflection on time. If it could be expanded to other chapters, we might find strong declarations that could support a mobilistic interpretation. There is another tension, however, since the very text of the *Essays* furnishes us with motivations to search for some unity between word and thing²⁹.

Finally, I want briefly to present the way in which Montaigne renders skepticism and nominalism compatible. It is in Compagnon (1980, p. 146-147) where we can read:

[...] *Les universaux n'existent pas en re; la blancheur et la pesanteur sont des qualités de la pensée. [...] Sans doute de telles formules relèvent-elles d'un phénoménisme relativiste venu des pyrrhoniens, et elles s'écartent de la doctrine nominaliste qui tente tout de même de fonder un savoir objectif sans le secours d'entités abstraites. Mais justement, Montaigne ne peut pas les soutenir jusqu'au bout. [...] Ou encore, un phénoménisme chrétien, contradictoire en soi, rejoint nécessairement le nominalisme dans le fideïsme.*³⁰

While Pyrrhonism is epistemically distant from nominalism, since we have subjectivity as opposed to objective effort, Christian phenomenism could lead us to this compatibility. Phenomenism defined by these terms means that all we know are phenomena and not the real being of things that lie beyond it. This distance is well adapted to the Christian religion (and the claim that God is the exclusive and supreme being) since faith, thereby, acquires a true function in our epistemic judgments.

Nominalism is an important part of this theoretical framework, including the rejection of universal existence *in re* and the claim for exclusively individual existence. These two points are compatible with fideism that allows the distinction between reason and faith supported by the gap between men and God. God, then, for fideism is understood as the universal *par excellence* but

29 This paradox is recognized by Compagnon (1980) by the thesis of the name's instability. See. p. 75.

30 Naya (2009, p. 32) ends his article claiming by an approach between Renaissance Pyrrhonism and nominalism: "[...] *Just as Renaissance Pyrrhonism had many different aspects, according to its many variegated interpretations, the question of its connection to religion change, as with so many other phenomena, must be approached, if not skeptically, at least from an almost nominalist point of view.*". And the classical paper from Schmitt (1983, p. 241), where initially it was refused a Middle Age influence of skepticism on nominalism: "[...] *The medieval tradition of criticism and logical analysis (sophismata, insolubilia, etc.), of course, had something in common with ancient skepticism, but was an independent development, not genetically tied to the literary remains of the ancients in any but the most indirect of ways. Rarely, if ever, did ancient skepticism and medieval criticism become fused before the advent of modern scholarship. Consequently, they functioned as two different historical strands.*". However, in skeptical terms, we should not let to accept the question putted by Schmitt as a kind of recognition of its own value. As mentioned above, there were three Latin translations of the *Outlines Of Pyrrhonism*, dated by the beginning of the fourteenth-century: "[...] *The writings of Sextus Empiricus [...] exerted no visible influence during the Middle Ages, although we know of three early-fourteenth-century manuscripts of a complete Latin translation of the Outlines of Pyrrhonism.*" (p. 227).

that men can't naturally know or achieved. Aftermath, it must be examined how close was fideism's mitigated position about universals to nominalism's refuse of universals, since the fork between reason and faith is due to Ockham on its late Middle-Age beginning.

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