

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910781162003321
Autore	Fontana Biancamaria
Titolo	Montaigne's politics [[electronic resource] ] : authority and governance in the Essais // Biancamaria Fontana
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Princeton, : Princeton University Press, c2008
ISBN	1-282-56925-2 9786612569258 1-4008-2451-6
Edizione	[Core Textbook]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (216 p.)
Disciplina	844/.3
Soggetti	PHILOSOPHY / History & Surveys / Modern
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references (p. [183]-201) and index.
Nota di contenuto	Frontmatter -- Contents -- Acknowledgments -- Introduction -- Chapter 1. The Spirit of the Laws -- Chapter 2. In a Leaden Century: The Decline of Virtue -- Chapter 3. Freedom of Conscience: The Politics of Toleration -- Chapter 4. Freedom of Conscience: Governing Opinion -- Chapter 5. Turning the Tide: Trust and Legitimacy -- Chapter 6. Learning from Experience: Politics as Practice -- Conclusion: Montaigne's Legacy -- Notes -- Bibliography -- Index
Sommario/riassunto	Michel de Montaigne (1533-92) is principally known today as a literary figure--the inventor of the modern essay and the pioneer of autobiographical self-exploration who retired from politics in midlife to write his private, philosophical, and apolitical Essais. But, as Biancamaria Fontana argues in Montaigne's Politics, a novel, vivid account of the political meaning of the Essais in the context of Montaigne's life and times, his retirement from the Bordeaux parliament in 1570 "could be said to have marked the beginning, rather than the end, of his public career." He later served as mayor of Bordeaux and advisor to King Henry of Navarre, and, as Fontana argues, Montaigne's Essais very much reflect his ongoing involvement and preoccupation with contemporary politics--particularly the politics of France's civil wars between Catholics and Protestants. Fontana shows that the Essais, although written as a record of Montaigne's personal experiences, do nothing less than set forth the first major critique of

France's ancien régime, anticipating the main themes of Enlightenment writers such as Voltaire and Diderot. Challenging the views that Montaigne was politically aloof or evasive, or that he was a conservative skeptic and supporter of absolute monarchy, Fontana explores many of the central political issues in Montaigne's work--the reform of legal institutions, the prospects of religious toleration, the role of public opinion, and the legitimacy of political regimes.

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