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Michel de Montaigne
Accidental Philosopher

Michel de Montaigne, the inventor of the essay, has always been acknowledged as a great literary figure but has never been thought of as a philosophical original. This book is the first to treat Montaigne as a serious thinker in his own right, taking as its point of departure Montaigne's description of himself as "an unpremeditated and accidental philosopher."

Whereas previous commentators have treated Montaigne's *Essays* as embodying a skepticism harking back to classical sources, Ann Hartle offers a fresh account that reveals Montaigne's thought to be dialectical, transforming skeptical doubt into wonder at the most familiar aspects of life. The essay is the new philosophical form of this dialectical thought, in which the world is presented as radically contingent but where the divine is present in an incarnational and sacramental way.

This major reassessment of a much admired but also much underestimated thinker will interest a wide range of historians of philosophy as well as scholars in comparative literature, French studies, and the history of ideas.

Ann Hartle is Professor of Philosophy at Emory University.

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To my son, Robert Wyman Hartle, Jr.

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Note on the Texts

References to the French text of the *Essais* are to the edition by Pierre Villey and V.-L. Saulnier, 3 vols., 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, “Quadrige,” 1992). The English translation is that of Donald Frame, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1943). The citation (VS16; F9), for example, refers to p. 16 of the Villey-Saulnier edition and to p. 9 of the Frame translation. In some instances, I have emended Frame’s translation. I have consulted the translation by M. A. Screech, *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne* (London: Penguin Press, 1991). References to the Screech translations are cited by the letter S and the page number – (S614), for example.