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autobiographical project. Rather than presenting the truth of the self—for example, a self named “Louis Althusser”—the work offers us a conflicted dynamic with no clear uniting principle. Presciently anticipating the misreading of someone like Christopher Hitchens, who takes the self-denunciation in Althusser’s book as evidence that the entire oeuvre is rotten, Montag stresses that the naïve critical project committed to the defense of the bourgeois subject is fated to judge an autobiography rather than to read it, hence, to mistake this book’s critique of subjectivism for the breakdown of a particular individual’s authority.

Althusser described the beginning of the 1990s as “a time when Marxism is declared dead and buried” (125). Since this time is still very much our time, it is crucial to remember that the effort to map the logics of contemporary culture is only one dimension of the progressive project. In a brief conclusion, Montag argues that while the object of critical labor is to “produce knowledge,” such an endeavor is always in part an acquisition of knowledge about the limits of knowledge, hence, it is equally a challenge to the explanatory authority of any given epistemological or historical paradigm (134). In working on Althusser, then, “it is possible . . . that we will contribute not only to a knowledge of the social world, but to its transformation, which is, after all, that to which Althusser devoted his life” (135). We can only hope that contemporary literary and cultural theory will continue forward in the same spirit.

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Ann Hartle, *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), viii+303 pages.

Rarely did Montaigne’s restless attention pause long enough for reflection to wrest itself free from the immediacy of lived experience. Where modern philosophy, with Descartes, is born out of an almost ascetic refusal of our worldly being, the *Essays* can trace their origins back to the contingent and concrete givens of personal existence. Montaigne is interested only in his manners, his *moeurs*, his ways of

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being and having a self. If we recognize a part of ourselves in the portrait he has etched in words, this is because he writes against the background of that mysterious yet familiar sense of our shared humanity—*l'humaine condition*. Without this background philosophy, and all inquiry for that matter, would cease to be intelligible. But does introducing the ambiguity and opacity of the private impression into the very heart of thought not liquefy the very attempt to formalize the essay through the labor of conceptual understanding? Can the essay withstand philosophical appropriation and still remain an open-ended and partial knowledge of individual phenomena? If so, what remains of philosophy?

This formidable nexus of questions is the focus of a new book by Ann Hartle. Her *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher* is noteworthy in that it does not tread the well-worn path of the literary or topical piece. Montaigne's singularly expressive genius has ensured that he will never want for these sorts of creative foragings. Instead, Hartle has taken up the invitation extended by that masterful reader of the *Essays*, Hugo Friedrich, namely, to "provide a philosophical interpretation of Montaigne's thought" (2). The dearth of similar attempts testifies to the intrinsic difficulty of the project: as Adorno, Lukacs, and many others have recognized, the essay rebukes the totalizing impulse that in modern philosophy has given the *pensée de survol* or the "system" an absolute and determining value. The skepticism that crystallizes in the "Apology for Raymond Sébond," for many the only philosophically relevant issue in the *Essays*, is less an intellectual stance than the logical outcome of an unyielding fidelity to the experienced moment. To be mindful of the itinerant character of Montaigne's consciousness and yet to seek therein for an order of unity and principle that extends beyond the personal scope of the observations—these are the twin scales whose balance is vital if the *Essays* and philosophy are to be brought into any sort of productive *rapprochement*.

How, then, does Hartle fare in this most difficult of syntheses? To her credit, the decision to take Montaigne at his word and follow him as he plumbs his natural faculties as an "unpremeditated and accidental philosopher" (11) is a sound one. What is an "accidental" philosopher? To begin with, "accidental" has nothing in common with its usually passive connotation. Montaigne did not by chance discover that he possessed an intuitive facility for philosophical reflection. He was hardly a latecomer to the writings of the ancients.

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“Accidental” does not qualify a specific historical event in Montaigne’s life, as if one could even be so foolish as to determine the moment when the right to participate in the “conversation of mankind” was granted. To practice philosophy in an “accidental” manner is to follow the Socratic counsel to “Know thyself,” and in this sense the *Essays* are attentive to the same inspiration that brought Descartes to explore the depths of the *cogito*. However—and here Hartle is entirely correct in her emphasis—what accounts for the affinity between the essay and Montaigne’s “accidental” philosophy is the latter’s grounding in human custom, habit, and opinion—all pretheoretical modes of understanding and response. As she writes, “accidental philosophy is completely and radically human” (37). In direct contrast, “deliberate” philosophy (a term coined by Hartle to refer to the express value given to the discipline of the self in ancient philosophy, e.g., the annihilation of the passions in the ideal figure of the Stoic sage) tends to forget the specific being of the human subject (29). Where it places the philosopher under the “rule of reason” (27), enforcing a conformity of thought and behavior according to “precepts of philosophy” far removed from the everyday world (27), “accidental” thinking places an irreducible ontological value on contingency and possibility (160). In one of the late essays Montaigne writes of his distaste for the “transcendental humors” that goad men into believing that the divine essence of humanity should have nothing commonplace about it (32). “Accidental” philosophy begins in the historical time and place of the individual, coordinates of facticity that situate reflection in the already meaningful but not thetic or thematized world. If this is the path that speculative inquiry must take to meet the essay on its own terms, what, then, of rationality and truth? Does “accidental” philosophy necessarily invoke a radical skepticism? Is there room for a metaphysics in the crowded and noisy life that is the setting and substance for Montaigne’s venture into himself?

There is, but first the classical categories of metaphysics must be made to reflect the radical emphasis that Montaigne places on the utterly human (“human, all too human,” as Nietzsche will later say in a similar vein of observation) birthplace of all ideas. For Hartle there is in the *Essays* a metaphysics, as Montaigne is throughout engaged in a critical dialogue with the canonical arguments, in the writings of Aristotle, Plato, and Aquinas, that have formed and informed the philosophical mind. When he writes in the last and penultimate essay “Of Experience” that he is his own “metaphysics and physics,” one

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ought to read this declaration with all the gravity of insight warranted by Montaigne's familiarity with and sophisticated negotiation (through the practice of quotation, the dialectical movement of perspective) of the wisdom of the ancients. The horizons of significance are not merely rhetorical but are in their deepest reaches, for Hartle, eminently philosophical. Consonant with the central function and narrow scope of his self-observation, however, such traditional metaphysical categories as "being and becoming, nature, causality, and the universal and the particular" (40) must have their meaning reflected through the form of the individual's life. In effect, Montaigne "lowers" or "weakens" (61) the terms of metaphysics so as to bring them in line with his localized self-understanding. Whatever knowledge can be captured through these notions, it is clear that it must be grounded in that openness to the possible and faithfulness to common opinion that distinguish the essay as a style of saturated thinking. "Thought," writes Hartle in a pithy summary of Montaigne's philosophical position, "is not a mode of being that escapes the human condition: thought *is* the human condition" (152). The essay has metaphysical significance in that it seeks to discover how it is that thought can emerge from experience and bind itself together into enduring forms of understanding capable of expressing truth. Far from a wholesale denial of metaphysics, there is in the *Essays* a very contemporary recognition, for Hartle almost Heideggerian, of the need to question Being from the world as it is already lived (153). If the reflection on Being is grounded in our modes of worldly comportment, our *manèrs*, then there is no point in refusing Montaigne a philosophical credit simply because he never refused to avail himself of the thorny ambiguity of existence. "Accidental" philosophy in this sense joins with the general trend (in phenomenology, existentialism, critical theory, deconstruction, etc.) away from the certain and absolute—i.e., non-differentiated—possession of Being in or by consciousness. Sufficiently humbled, consciousness becomes again the place for registering that shock of experience which, in the guise of wonder (7), is the very genesis of philosophical activity.

In the course of this review I have made little mention of the enormous significance of the lived body for Montaigne. This is not by accident. The emphasis on contingency and the consequent need to rethink the grounds and scope of philosophical reflection along the lines of the essay form, as Hartle has done in this book, is deserving of praise. Yet, noticeably missing from her argument is an awareness of (or at the very least a significant emphasis on) the body as the very

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fulcrum and anvil for all of Montaigne's reflections on the human condition. The return to the senses as primary modes of our "lowly" being is one of the pivotal and overriding themes of the *Essays*. When Montaigne writes in "On some verses of Virgil" that he has furnished the reader with "essays in flesh and bone," the boundaries between the metaphorical and the literal content of the observation are profoundly and purposefully blurred. He means to restore to thought its sensitive origins, as it is the wayward body and its movements of affect and desire that gives contingency its basal value. To locate the beginnings of reflection in opinion and custom is an important step toward bringing the *Essays* into the field of post-Cartesian inquiry. However—and I suspect that the influence of Heidegger is responsible for this oversight—our worldly forms of comportment have an undeniably embodied aspect. If there is a criticism of Heidegger's hermeneutics of *Dasein* (at the time of *Being and Time*), it is that there is almost no role played by the body. This is the objection levied by the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for example; but the point applies equally to the effort at making experience strictly a matter of custom and habit (153) and not one also of our sensory involvement with the world. (For further detailed discussions of this point, one can turn to the phenomenological studies of Erwin Straus, or the works on Montaigne by Jean Starobinski and Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani.) Hartle recognizes that there is a strong fidelity to sensory perception on Montaigne's part: "In terms of the Aristotelian ladder from sense perception up to the "first philosophy," Montaigne remains close to the bottom: "experience is low and common" (153). But the "sense data of the empiricist" (153), which Hartle bluntly rejects as having any bearing on "accidental" philosophy, is not the only understanding of the senses available; nor need one entirely dispose of the empiricist's salutary awareness of the need to zero in on external impressions as evidence to be used against the "clear and distinct" standard for philosophical reflection. In the writings of Merleau-Ponty, again, Hartle would have found a considerably more nuanced rejection of the claims of the empiricist position—one, however, that would have saved sensory perception as an original way of disclosing the worldly, contingent, ambiguous—"accidental"—aspects of thought.

The absence of a more thorough account of the role played by the body and Montaigne's great fascination with its natural faculties helps explain why Hartle is able to find in the *Essays* a worldview that is grounded in Christianity and the faith of the believer. Above all else,

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this is perhaps the most ambitious and contentious claim in the book: that Montaigne upholds the doctrine of Christian theology. This move is made easier given the fact that minus the deepened understanding of our embodiment, a radical turn of events that unfolds for Montaigne largely in Book III and which takes place against the background of the recovery of Nature as the *logos* or ground for human existence, there is needed an ontological support for the contingency of the human condition. This support, for Hartle, is expressed in the belief, attributed to Montaigne, that not only is the world the creation of God but the world itself is “incarnational” (164). “Incarnation” is the idea that “God is present in and revealed in the world” (164). Rejecting the readings of Montaigne that position him as either an atheist or a skeptic-fideist, the turn to the “Christian pretheoretical beginnings” (136) of the world, believes Hartle (who imports the interpretation of religious faith from the writings of the philosopher Michael Oakeshott), is a sufficient basis to shore up the “being of contingency” (172) as well as provide a unique insight into the political extensions of Montaigne’s “accidental” philosophy. Montaigne’s standpoint on matters of religion has long been a matter of dispute. Through the move to recover the revealed being of the world within Christianity, Hartle means to secure for religion a foundational place in Montaigne’s self-portrait. As she writes, “the role of religion for Montaigne is not utilitarian but rather ontologically foundational and essential” (234).

By making the overall trajectory of the book into one of a gradual unfolding of the religious thesis, some of the figures Hartle uses to such good effect in the opening stages of her analysis seem, in hindsight, to be pressed into service for an end they would not otherwise support. Adorno, Lukacs, and Merleau-Ponty would hardly subscribe to the kind of religious consciousness that Hartle sees flowering in the *Essays*. All of them were decidedly committed to the historical world and the creation of historical meaning and significance through the actions of individuals. While each would agree with Montaigne that reason is more often than not merely foolishness dressed up in an appealing form, none would subordinate politics to religion as Hartle would have Montaigne do. Montaigne’s was in all events a worldly consciousness—to question himself and the world as he does is a display of a faith, but it is a faith and a humanism anchored in the terrestrial, not the celestial. This remains the opening premise and conclusion of the *Essays*. Hartle has certainly elevated the terms of the discussion surrounding the philosophical merits of the *Essays*, and in parts her work must be

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reckoned with. To expect the last and final word from such an “accidental” thesis, however, would be contrary to the very spirit of the attempt.

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Etienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, translated by James Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), xi+291 pages.

What was important in this choice of terms [‘anti-strategic’] was to make clear how deeply we must locate the inversion of perspectives necessary to *answer the call* that we receive: we must displace the call, we must call in return upon the Americans to think in different terms, we must question the very presuppositions of the demands. We must *start changing the concept of the political*. (233)

Etienne Balibar’s philosophically rigorous and politically topical assemblage of nine translated, revised lectures and two essays delivered or written between 1991 and 2002, will be extremely useful to those in the fields of political philosophy, contemporary history, European history, cultural studies, and sociology, to name only a few, and should indeed top the reading lists of anyone interested in contemporary debates on citizenship, European unification, nationalism, the politics of globalization, and the relationship between national and international law. The collection principally consists of lectures addressed to international audiences in the United States as well as in both central and peripheral “old” Europe. In these pieces, Balibar analyzes a variety of local political struggles and crises in and on the borders of Europe, such as the political struggles of the *sans-papiers* in France, which have significantly contributed to the democratization of national borders and to a reactivation of civil disobedience at the heart of citizenship participation. Such specific issues situate Balibar’s discussion of broader transnational crises (crises of nationalism, as well as transnational forms of mass violence) and his analysis of the dominant conceptual and