PART ONE

MONTAIGNE AND HIS SKEPTICAL BACKGROUND
1. Introduction

Modern thought has traditionally been understood as the result of deep transformations that occurred in Europe in consequence of a process beginning with Renaissance Humanism and continuing with the Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution. These historical factors should be understood also against the background of the rediscovery of ancient skepticism in the sixteenth century since they contributed to the conflict of doctrines and the questioning of tradition, leading to the discussion of the validity of philosophical, scientific and theological theories.¹ The arguments of the ancient skeptics were taken up again and reformulated in the light of this new context. I intend to show that the discovery of the New World, starting in 1492, may be considered also one of the constitutive elements of that historical context, since its economic, political and cultural impact lead to a deep transformation of the European world from that moment. It contributed to the loss of credibility of ancient science by revealing a reality until then unknown, leading to the need for new knowledge about geography and the natural world, and particularly about the people found in the Americas.²