Plenishment in the Earth
An Ethic of Inclusion

Stephen David Ross

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Chapter 1
Prelude

This book undertakes an ethics of inclusion, a responsibility toward the good everywhere, a love, a *cherishment*, of heterogeneous creatures and things throughout human life and nature. It pursues an ethical rethinking of natural kinds in memory of the repeated movements in Western thought that sort and order nature's and humanity's kinds into superiors and inferiors, dominants and subordinates, pure and impure, setting some to rule over others, excluding some from the good: men over women, humans over animals, Europeans over non-Europeans, pureblood over mixed. The difficult thought at the heart of this endeavor, giving voice to the music in which this work resounds, is the possibility that Western reason has been from the beginning a participant in this struggle of superiority and inferiority, demanding from us other notes to echo the good. A related and demanding thought is that every ethical and political task bears a debt in memory of past injustices, struggling against their endless repetition. The moving thought at the core of this venture is that writings on gender, race, and culture mark our time with the possibility of a profound ethical response to this archaic debt.

This book undertakes a thought in memory of the impossibility of caring for all things together in a harmony in which none are hurt. Heterogeneous things come together by selection and exclusion; in human life by judgment, in representation. To live in memory of the good is to experience endless joys and sorrows, fulfillsments and injustices, carried out in the name of the good. To undertake the good is to face unceasing *sacrifice* and loss: the deaths of some that others may live, the suffering of some that others may know joy. Sacrifice knows the holiness of cherishment, works within the good, but never becomes sacred, never brings us to safety. Sacrifice never escapes from the contaminations of injustice. Responsibility for sacrifice refuses every comfort in the name of the good.
Plenishment is the crossing of cherishment and sacrifice, inhabiting their borders: an inexhaustible concern for heterogeneous things and kinds together with endless impossibilities of fulfillment, producing boundless possibilities of love and joy, still haunted by memories of disaster. An ethic of plenishment includes the different things of the earth in their heterogeneous plenitude, none excluded from the good, but knows sorrow at the inevitability of loss, mourns the suffering and passing away of creatures and kinds, and knows joy at the goods that emerge from this painful place, a joy bearing unlimited responsibility for the good.

Cherishment, sacrifice, and plenishment speak together in an archaic voice of an inescapable call to the good that ethics can neither resist nor fulfill, expressing something immemorial. This immemoriality is older than any law, the call of things and kinds to us from where we find ourselves together, in kin and kind. From its immemoriality, it repeatedly asks us to wonder who we are. From its memories of injustices, it repeatedly calls upon us to exceed ourselves in the earth, to reach out beyond ourselves to others.

Cherishment is inclusion, includes the heterogeneous things and kinds of the earth, expresses the call of the good. Sacrifice is exclusion, the work of the good in time, dividing the world into good and bad, right and wrong, excluding some that others may thrive, expressing the impossibility of accomplishing the good without qualification. Plenishment is a life, a practice of cherishment joined with this impossibility. Plenishment is judgment guided by the call that every work remain haunted by memories of contamination. This book undertakes the difficult thought of cherishment and sacrifice together, of ethics as inclusion joined with the inescapability of injustice.

All this is said within a certain hesitation. Not a procrastination, not a delay before we work to save ourselves and the earth from injustices, but hesitation in the face of others, called to us in the name of the good. It is a hesitation we bear in being responsible for knowing and pursuing ethical tasks haunted by past and future injustices, including our own.

This book undertakes the task of resisting the division of kinds of things into good and bad, superior and inferior, and asks us to think of heterogeneous ways to relate to heterogeneous kinds. It undertakes the task of thinking of heterogeneous kinds of creatures, human and otherwise, against histories of domination and
subordination, of injustice and harm. This task begins here with what Irigaray calls "the question of sexual difference," with the thought of gender, of men and women composing two kinds of creatures in difficult relations, constituting the human world, instituting a social contract, a social world composed by regulations and laws, domination and subordination; a collective world that includes some and excludes others. This book returns repeatedly to the question of sexual difference to ask whether we can know the limits of sexual difference, or whether something enigmatic, before which we pause, echoes within the ideas of men and women, gender and desire, that compose the thought of sexual difference. This hesitant movement around the question of sexual difference opens onto thoughts of heterogeneity, leading from gender through the social world of race and culture, to the natural world, and on to multiple and heterogeneous natural kinds. This book proceeds from such thoughts of gender and world to consider: first, what such a thought might entail; and second, what kind of measure we can bring to the difficult thought of gender, divided into men and women, suffused by a profusion of creatures and kinds and by endless desires. This thought of two genders joined with the immeasurable heterogeneity of the natural and social world leads to animals and other natural creatures and things, to ecological feminism and other ecologies and feminisms, and thereupon to thoughts of multiple kinds emerging from other cultures and subcultures. These tracings and movements echo a thought, a life, a relation to heterogeneities and multiplicities realizing an ethic of inclusion, replenishment in the earth.

I must begin right away—I hope it is not too late, I suspect it is always too late—to say who and what I am, to name my kind. I am a heterosexual man. How important is that fact for undertaking the question of sexual difference? If I am a man, can I take up the question of sexual difference, or am I prohibited, silenced? Can I? May I? May what I have to say about sexual difference be included in an ethics of sexual difference, or do only women know that ethics? How can we ethically say "only"? How can we inclusively avoid "we"? I am a Western, heterosexual man of Jewish genealogy living and writing in the United States at the close of the twentieth century. Are these kinds relevant to my project here, to you, to me? Are other kinds to which I belong, or do not belong, also relevant?

I cannot undertake an ethic of inclusion without speaking of