

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.¹ 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, fulfillments 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,”² with the thought of gender,³ 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 in two 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 sub-cultures. These tracings and movements echo a thought, a life, a relation to heterogeneities and multiplicities realizing an ethic of inclusion, plenishment 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

“us” and “we.” Yet whenever I speak of “we” (or “wle”), I mean to speak hesitantly of us, of you and me, reader and writer, together in this textual place, and some others, uncertain of different collective possibilities of place, remembering that collectives have traditionally formed themselves by acts of domination and subordination. My undertaking here is to sound the resonances and reverberations of an ethic of inclusion, to sing the song of the earth. I include in this task the endless heterogeneities opened up in the spaces of the “I” and “we.” Every “I” that writes or speaks seeks a “we,” yearns for others. Every “we” represents a kind that cannot be every kind and cannot cut itself off from other kinds. Such an understanding, with its endless responsibilities, gives us our ethic of inclusion, marked by the slits and gashes in “uls” and “wle.” The voice in which I speak is mine. I hope it may be yours. I am confident it is not everyone’s. To write, to speak, to read, to listen, is to participate in an ethical, inclusive relation struggling to know itself as “we,” always hesitantly to know itself as “wle,” as you and I, and more. The difficult thought of this book, echoing in the repeated voices of a “we,” is what kinds compose our collective relations as readers and writers, compose any human work. Such a question evokes the thought of ethical inclusion as unending proximity to heterogeneity.

I find an ethic of inclusion dispersed throughout the history of Western philosophy, surrounded by exclusions. The ethic of inclusion presented here emerges from readings of Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, and Leibniz; others might find that ethic in Kant and Hegel. An ethic of inclusion also emerges in more recent Western writers: Whitehead, Dewey, and Heidegger as well as contemporary ethical and political writers such as Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and Levinas. But the inspiration behind the thought of ethical inclusion emanates from feminist interpretations of ethics and culture, represented here by an extended reading of Irigaray’s *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, and from interpretations of culture in other contemporary writers, Western and non-Western.

My reading of Irigaray is divided in two parts, the one a traversal of the history of Western philosophy from the standpoint of sexual difference, inspired by her reading of Plato’s *Hystera* (Irigaray, SOW), otherwise known as the Cave, where she finds the good haunted by gender, the other following developments in contemporary continental, feminist, and multicultural thought from

sexual difference to heterogeneity, leading to an ethic of inclusion, including every thing and kind in nature, excluding none from the good. Two avenues open here into ethical difference: one from the question of sexual difference back to “first philosophy,” in chapters 3 through 6; the second from animals and other natural things to ecological feminism, in chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 9 enters heterogeneity through intimacy, face to face, and through sexual violence and gender inequality. Chapters 11 and 12 join sexual difference with other heterogeneities of sexuality, race, and culture, passing to the natural world. Different readers may desire different entry points: some into an engendered Western philosophy, in chapter 3; others into environmental feminism, in chapter 7. My goal is to show that these undertakings are linked. I hope that whatever entry point you may choose, you will be led to others.

If the question of sexual difference is the question of our age, it cannot be divorced from other questions of the age. To undertake that question is to read the works taken to define our age historically in gendered terms, to reconstruct our histories as sexed and gendered narratives. It is to understand the impossibility of carrying out an engaged philosophical thought, including traditional texts and authors, that does not concern itself from within with feminist, ecological, and multicultural issues. It is to take feminist and multicultural writings as seriously as possible, inseparable from other writings.

I invite you to join me on an ethical and political journey from the question of sexual difference through profusions of sexual and other identities to nature’s plenitude, responding to the call of the good. Our journey will proceed through six musical movements, each separated from the others by a hesitation, an interlude or rest. In this “Prelude” and “Rest,” I hope to anticipate the themes of this work, foreshadowing their development. I will begin to work (“Lullaby” and “Rest”) with the question of sexual difference, perhaps of gender, which Irigaray suggests may be the question of our age. What can it mean for this or any question to be the question of our age, and who are “we” who may compose an age? I will closely follow Irigaray’s train of thought from this question in relation, first, to Heidegger, who asks a similar question of *technē* and technology, then to other works of the Western tradition that bear upon our understanding of ourselves and our age, Plato and Aristotle, for example, and Spinoza, who according to

Kristeva excludes women from his ethics.⁴ Such works echo different voices reverberating within questions of gender, sexuality, and culture, all questions of heterogeneity. These reverberations destabilize any thought of tradition and culture. We will move from thoughts of men and women, masters and slaves, the different places and kinds of nature and humanity, to listen to the *Stabat Mater*. The mother, the woman, stands sadly in her place. We will return thereafter (“Canon” and “Rest”) to the thought of gender, to the dyad, the pair, man and woman, counting the pair as two, struggling with the scale, the canonicity, of measure. I will hesitantly regard⁵ gender, first as two and, then, as a profusion of identities and kinds. Plato suggests in *Philebus* that we are to take up the intermediate numbers and then let them pass away into unlimit. I will retrace a thought of the indefinite dyad back to Plato in the thought of gender. Such a thought will lead to thoughts of economy and measure. I hope to resist the idea that gender belongs to a single restricted economy containing a single measure. Instead, it belongs to general economy, exceeding any measure, any mastery.⁶ I hope to resist the idea of mastery. We will find that our discussion of the economy of gender returns us repeatedly to animals and other creatures, to nature’s heterogeneity.

Our journey will lead from gender to nature, from the subordination of women to the domination of animals and other creatures and natural kinds, tracing a movement from an ungendered ethics toward animals and their “liberation” to ecological feminism (“Carnaval” and “Rest”). The movement from sexual difference to kindred difference expresses the heart of the movement in this book from ethical exclusion to inclusion, a movement toward heterogeneity.

The movement to natural kinds will take us away from intimacy, face-to-face proximity, and we will return to think of gender erotically, sexually, sensually, struggling with the idea of other genders and other embodiments with their *jouissances* (“Tango” and “Rest”). Throughout this itinerary, from “Canon” to “Tango,” I will seek to understand ethical responsibility as a face-to-face relation with alterity. Each chapter in this path, with its rest, opens another movement in heterogeneity, beginning with the question of sexual difference, in chapter 3, leading through the history of Western philosophy viewed as a situating and re-situating of heterogeneity, concluding with the *Stabat Mater*, the mother in relation

to the son. Each of the following chapters, together with its respective rest, opens a different perspective on heterogeneity, repeatedly beginning with Irigaray's critique of Levinas, that in the face to face he does not know something of radical alterity, marked by sexual difference.⁷ Chapter 5 pursues the binariness of gender into the possibility of a measure, scale, or economy of heterogeneity, read throughout the history of Western philosophy. Chapter 7 moves from the heterogeneity of gender to nature's heterogeneity, to animals and other kinds, no longer reflecting Western philosophy's history. Chapter 9 returns to sexual difference erotically, understanding heterogeneity to bear a face-to-face relation to intimacy. In this chapter, I will follow Irigaray's suggestion that heterogeneity is sexual, erotic. I will move from the erotic dyad of men and women to other erotic proximities, heterogeneously. I will wonder with MacKinnon if relations between men and women can be intimate under conditions of gender inequality and sexual violence. I will pursue the thought that *erōs* destabilizes gender in face-to-face relations, find that ethical responsibility proliferates heterogeneities face to face.

With this thought of sexual and gender displacement, we will turn back to nature's heterogeneity with figures of disturbance and impurity, witches, lesbians, and others who disturb the regulations of the social contract and language ("Walpurgisnacht" and "Rest"). Our journey's displacements will bring us to colored figures on a rainbow sky, members of different human kinds and cultures, Western and non-Western, figures of fascination. With this arrival, we will find ourselves (in the concluding "Rhapsody") on the threshold of an ethic responsive to the heterogeneities of natural and human kinds, of cultural differences and identities. We end our journey with an ethic of inclusion, plenishment in the earth, an inexhaustible responsibility for and toward the heterogeneous things and kinds of the earth.