Praise for
THE CALL OF CHARACTER

"The Call of Character engages questions of perennial interest to philosophers, theorists, and all individuals, and Mari Ruti is perhaps uniquely qualified to write it. She has an uncanny ability to translate complex theoretical issues into clear and readable—yet not the least bit dumbed-down—prose. Her treatment of the timeless question (what makes for a good life?) is both original and insightful. I wholeheartedly recommend this book." —Angi Allen, Dartmouth College

"This book will contribute powerfully to discussions of the self from a position both inside and outside the critical psychoanalytic discourse." —Gail Nemesis, William College

"Ruti’s fabulous new book reveals in the unanswerable mystery of the call of character—that aspect of ourselves that makes each of us unique, passionate, yet also perpetually dissatisfied and longing for more. In Ruti’s hands, dissatisfaction of our incompleteness becomes not a reason for despair but a source of fascination and political possibility: a summons to pursue an erotics of being in the most mundane aspects of our everyday lives." —Agnese Stuffer, Emory University

"The Call of Character is expansively erudite yet plain-spoken, honest with a dazzling self-consciousness that situates itself historically in our present moment. Ruti’s singular voice gives words to those necessary though often disavowed tensions of human life. I have already used insights from this book in my work with patients, to whom Ruti calls us to feel the call of our character stronger and more directly. Should we feel inadequate when we fail to be healthy, balanced, and well-adjusted? Is it realistic or even desirable to strive for such an existential equilibrium? Condemning our current cultural obsession with cheerfulness and “positive thinking,” Mari Ruti calls for a revaluation of character that honors our more eccentric frequencies and argues that sometimes a tormented and anxiety-ridden life can also be rewarding. Ruti critiques the search for personal meaning and pragmatic attempts to normalize human beings’ unruly and idiosyncratic natures. Exposing the tragic banality of a happy life commonly lived, she instead emphasizes the advantages of a lopsided life rich in passion and fortitude. She also shows what matters is not our ability to evade existential uncertainty but our courage to meet adversity in such a way that we do not become irrevocably broken. We are in danger of losing the capacity to cope with complexity, ambiguity, melancholy, disorientation, and disappointment, Ruti warns, feasting us feeling less “real” and less connected and unable to process a full range of emotions. Reeding the call of our character means acknowledging the marginalized, chaotic aspects of our being, and it is precisely these creative qualities that make us immi-
TABLE and irreplaceable."

—Amy Allen

Mari Ruti
was educated at Brown University and Harvard University and is professor of critical theory at the University of Toronto. She is also the author of Reinventing the Soul: Posthumanist Theory and Psychic Life, A World of Fragile Things: Psychoanalysis and the Art of Living, The Summons of Love, and The Singularities of Being: Lacan and the Immortal Within.

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The Call of Character
LIVING A LIFE WORTH LIVING

Mari Ruti

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THE CALL OF CHARACTER
The Call of Character
Living a Life Worth Living

Mari Ruti

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To AZ

I wrote this book for you before I even met you.
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One of the peculiarities of this book is that it presents relatively complex ideas in relatively simple language. I chose this approach because I believe that my topic—the question of what makes each of us a unique and idiosyncratic character—should be accessible to readers beyond the academy. At the same time, I have sought to avoid the overly simplistic tone of much of the popular writing on the theme. When self-help or New Age gurus tackle the question of what it means to lead a fulfilling life, the kind of life that feels worth living, they tend to advocate a streamlined program of (concrete or spiritual) steps that is supposed to lead to a harmonious existence, thereby sidestepping all the ways in which human life is not designed to be harmonious. Likewise, they tend to fall back on an untheorized notion of what it means to be a human being in the first place, talking as if the matter were completely straightforward. It’s not. As a result, if this book has a goal, it is to remain