

Introduction

It is common to identify aesthetics with the philosophy of art, but this notion of aesthetics is ripe for revision. In *Poetic Inclinations*, I introduce a metaphysics of experience developed with a foothold in philosophical aesthetics and hermeneutic phenomenology. This philosophy is about sensitively expanded aesthetic thinking, as well as the mind-opening and world-transformative experiences related to such thinking and traditionally called ‘aesthetic’ or ‘religious’ experiences. In *Poetic Inclinations*, I present my metaphysics of experience with a specific emphasis on the practical implications of this philosophy. I disclose the constructive critical nature of aesthetic thinking, a quality of crucial relevance to any theory or analysis of contemporary culture and institutions. Pitching the formative consequences of sensitively expanded thinking, I reveal its importance for not only academic research but also contemporary culture. In addition to explaining what it means to think in an aesthetic way, *Poetic Inclinations* attests the relevance of such thinking by showing its implications for human action and the choices we make in life. The book demonstrates, for instance, how sensitively expanded thinking can foster human well-being and improve our understanding of human history and the lives we lead.

Presenting the ethical significance of sensitivity, transgressive experience, and expanded thinking, the texts included in *Poetic Inclinations* explain the benefits of applying an experience-metaphysical approach to many practical issues. For example, they show the consequences of aesthetic thinking for the understanding of what it means to be a critical intellectual, including what philos-

ophy and universities essentially are or should be. In its choice of texts, the book also makes evident that aesthetic thinking and the notion of the artwork can contribute to the philosophy of history by developing our ability to encompass both the historical and the ahistorical, rather than feeling forced to choose between them. Similarly, the book demonstrates how aesthetic thinking, due to its sensitively expanded nature, can contribute innovatively to current disciplines such as border studies, the study of human well-being, and social studies.

In *Poetic Inclinations*, I introduce and apply new interpretations of prevailing concepts of, for example, poetry, philosophy, experience, truth, thinking, beauty, aesthetics, history, borders, hospitality, and transcendence. The first chapter deals with the wonder in which philosophy originates, including the significance of wonder, experience, and memory for both literary and biographical storytelling. The second chapter addresses the intellectual crisis caused by the fact that few people today dare to prioritize *philosophia*, the search for wisdom that philosophy originally was. However, in this chapter, I suggest that a metaphysics of experience nourished by philosophical aesthetics and hermeneutic phenomenology can revitalize philosophy and enhance the humanities. The third chapter explains the contemporary relevance of philosophical aesthetics not only for the study of art but also for the humanities and society in general. This chapter rejects the usual identification of philosophical aesthetics with the philosophy of art, as well as the current focus on physical corporeality and sensuousness to the neglect of sensitivity and sensitively promoted insight. The fourth chapter consists of ten theses on the essence of aesthetic thinking and its importance for academic research, culture in general, and society as a whole. In discussing what it means to be a philosopher, the fifth chapter further pursues the question concerning the nature and meaning of philosophical thinking, and the connection between such thinking and the good life. Being a philosopher means being an intellectual, that is, someone who thinks critically owing to a sensitive awareness of the ambiguity of the immanent and a desire and ability not to contrast the particular and the universal.

The sixth chapter follows up on the question of literary and biographical storytelling by discussing how philosophical aesthetics, including the concept of the artwork, can contribute innovatively to historiography and the philosophical notion of history, which demands aesthetic thinking. The seventh chapter, devoted to *felix aestheticus*, interprets the good life aesthetically as the life of free philosophical thought and proposes a broad outlook, which is currently much needed in both the academic world and society in general. The eighth chapter develops the content of the short fourth chapter. In particular, it explains the significance of aesthetic thinking for human well-being and challenges current interpretations of the notion of the 'beautiful soul' by interpreting it as the capacity to perceive something as intrinsically valuable and surpass dichotomies in thought. The content of the short fourth chapter is also developed in chapter nine, which, by distinguishing between transcendence and the transcendent and between divinity and the divine, contemplates the transcending quality of aesthetic thinking interpreted as sensitively expanded thinking. The tenth chapter translates the mindset presented in the previous chapters into reflections on the notions of the limit and the threshold, thus contributing innovatively to current border studies and more specifically to contemporary border aesthetics. Finally, the eleventh chapter contributes innovatively to current social studies by interpreting hospitality as an expression of aesthetic sensitivity and world poetry as the multidimensionality of immanence perceived in transgressive experiences.

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Poetic Inclinations is part of a duology that also includes the book *Imaginative Moods: Aesthetics, Religion, Philosophy*.¹ Together these books represent the first comprehensive presentation in English of what I term the metaphysics of experience, and which,

1 Dorthe Jørgensen, *Imaginative Moods: Aesthetics, Religion, Philosophy* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2021).

owing to my monographs in Danish, is well known and widely used in the Nordic countries. Aesthetics plays an important role in both books, but each book has its own scope and can therefore be read as an individual work. As is evident from the description of *Poetic Inclinations* presented in the previous paragraphs, this book includes a focus on ethics, history, and philosophy (for example, the ethical significance of aesthetic thinking, in the sense of its formative consequences). *Imaginative Moods*, on the other hand, includes a focus on aesthetics, religion, and philosophy (for example, the potential contribution of aesthetics to the understanding of prayer). Nevertheless, the two books are interrelated due to their shared task as introductions to the metaphysics of experience and their mutual cross references. They genuinely supplement and complement each other.

Poetic Inclinations makes the metaphysics of experience available to beginners and introduces practitioners in various professions, fields, or occupations to the implications of this philosophy. It proves the relevance of the metaphysics of experience by emphasizing the significance of aesthetic thinking in fields such as education, politics, and social work. Besides appealing to scholars and students, this book may also appeal to practitioners such as teachers, pedagogues, and social workers. *Imaginative Moods*, on the other hand, provides further knowledge about and insight into the metaphysics of experience. This book is slightly more demanding, since it focuses on the aforementioned metaphysics as such and its theoretical implications in aesthetics and theology. *Imaginative Moods* may appeal to scholars, students, pastors, psychologists, and artists, as well as those who have read *Poetic Inclinations* and who are thus already familiar with the relevance of the metaphysics of experience.

Poetic Inclinations and *Imaginative Moods* give an international readership access to innovative work that includes the re-interpretation of established concepts, the introduction of new notions, and the presentation of the practical and theoretical implications of both. They also offer new ways to conceive of and apply aesthetics, hermeneutics, and phenomenology, which includes

groundbreaking theoretical work in the form of a unique integration of these disciplines, as well as a unique integration of aesthetics and theology. Phenomenologists and hermeneutic philosophers generally reject or diminish aesthetics in favor of the philosophy of art. Traditionally, Protestant theologians also rejected aesthetics, and contemporary theological attempts to include aesthetics mostly confuse it with the study of art. Finally, *Poetic Inclinations* and *Imaginative Moods* present numerous practical (critical, ethical, pedagogical) as well as philosophical and theological implications of contemplating contemporary phenomena within the framework of the metaphysics of experience. They expose the importance of sensitive contemplation that has an eye for transgressive experience and acknowledges both the existential relevance of such experience and its significance for the production of knowledge, for contemporary culture, and for society in general.

Both books consist of collections of texts written in various contexts but revolving around the aforementioned topics. The texts I have selected for publication together constitute two monographs thanks to their thematic kinship, common terminology, and common introduction and application of the metaphysics of experience; I edited and organized them for their present release, in English and in book form. I was motivated to produce these monographs by my international colleagues, who have often lamented that the majority of my research, including my major presentation of the metaphysics of experience—that is, the 965-page monograph *Den skønne tænkning* (Beautiful Thinking)—is only available in Danish.² Many scholars and artists from various backgrounds have requested a comprehensive English introduction to the metaphysics of experience, including the research in which this philosophy originates, the way of thinking of which it is a product, and its practical and theoretical implications. It is my great hope that *Poetic Inclinations* and *Imaginative Moods* will fulfill this request, at least

2 Dorthe Jørgensen, *Den skønne tænkning: Veje til erfaringsmetafysik. Religionsfilosofisk udmøntet* (Beautiful Thinking: Pathways to the Metaphysics of Experience. Religio-Philosophically Implemented) (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2014).

partly, and I am deeply grateful for the interest that has motivated their publication.

The editing of the present material was guided by a wish to avoid unnecessary repetition but also to enable the reader to approach and understand each text and each book without prior knowledge of the others. A certain amount of repetition was thus unavoidable, but, as a teacher and knowledge disseminator, I have learned that repetition is far from harmful for educational purposes, especially when the content being mediated is philosophical and thus potentially difficult to access. Some of the texts presented in *Poetic Inclinations* and *Imaginative Moods* have been published previously, in various books or journals and in Danish or English, while others represent hitherto unpublished material produced with a foothold in my Danish monographs. Precise details can be found in the acknowledgements, where I also express my deep gratitude to the journal editors and publishers who have authorized me to reproduce previously published work. The editorial organization of the texts makes it possible, as mentioned, to favor an anarchistic way of reading in which one jumps between the texts and books, or perhaps only reads a single text or book. However, it also entails that one benefits from reading the books from beginning to end, starting with *Poetic Inclinations* and finishing with *Imaginative Moods*. At the end of the day, reading with an open mind is the most important premise of the outcome, and such a mindset aligns perfectly with the moral implication of the metaphysics of experience and thus with the ethos of the books.

The texts included in the present publication were translated into American English by me, in close cooperation with various copyeditors and proofreaders, and edited following the Chicago Manual of Style. Each text constitutes a chapter. To make it easier to use the chapters on an individual basis, I provide full bibliographic information in a footnote about texts I refer to the first time they appear in a chapter. All quotations follow current translations into En-

glish; in cases where there is no available translation, I have made one myself. Numbers and letters in references to Plato's texts refer to the Stephanus pagination, and in references to Aristotle's texts to the Bekker numbering. Citations and quotations from Kant's texts refer to page numbers in the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Kant, followed by volume and page numbers in the Academy Edition.