

Dorthe Jørgensen

Poetic Inclinations

Ethics,
History,
Philosophy

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To my beloved Willy with eternal gratitude

Willy Aastrup (1948–2019)

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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.

* * *

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).