

**RELG 5375: Aesthetics, Theology, and Ethics**  
University of Virginia, Fall 2021

**Professor:** Dr. Nichole M. Flores  
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**Office Phone:** (434)243-3937  
**Office Location:** Gibson S433

**Seminar Meeting:** Tuesdays 2-4:30pm  
**Classroom:** Gibson S241  
**Office Hours Sign-Up:** [calendly.com/nmf5q](https://calendly.com/nmf5q)



Image: "The Storm" by John August Swanson<sup>1</sup>

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

How do, might, or ought the aesthetic dimensions of experience inform engagement with religion in a pluralistic and democratic society? Our study begins with an investigation of philosophical approaches to the relationship between aesthetics, ethics, and religion. We will then read several influential studies in theological aesthetics, attending to how ethical conceptions such as justice, solidarity, and the common good operate both implicitly and explicitly in these works. Finally, we read works of religious ethics and constructive religious thought that interlace aesthetics, theology, religion, and ethics in response to urgent political and cultural issues facing contemporary democratic societies.

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<sup>1</sup> Completed in July 2020, Swanson says this painting was inspired by Pope Francis's commentary on the Covid-19 pandemic: "We were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat...are all of us. Just like those disciplines, who spoke anxiously with one voice saying, 'We are perishing' (Mark 4:38), so we too have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this."

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

- Seminar participation (contributing to discussions) – 10%
- Weekly reading responses (submit via Collab Discussions) – 10%
- Occasional presentation of text accompanied with one-sheet summary of book's central theses/discussion questions – 10%
- Final Research Essay – 70%

**ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION POLICIES:**

- Weekly response posts should be uploaded to Collab Discussions by **Tuesday at 11am**. Responses must be received by this time so that Prof. Flores has a chance to read them and prepare for that day's seminar discussion.
- One-sheet summaries should be submitted to Prof. Flores via email by **Tuesdays at 11am** so that she has a chance to read it and use it to prepare for the day's seminar discussion. The student(s) presenting on the week's text are excused from submitting a reading response post via Collab Discussions for the week they are presenting.
- Final research essays should be **submitted via "Collab Assignments" and NOT via email**. The official submission deadline for final research essays is **Tuesday, December 7** but Prof. Flores will begin accepting final essays and reading them as early as the **last week of November**. If necessary, please inquire about possible extensions for the final research essay. A new deadline will be negotiated if an extension is granted.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT ASSIGNMENT DETAILS OR OTHER COURSE-SPECIFIC MATTERS? SUBMIT VIA COLLAB DISCUSSION FORUM, "COURSE QUESTIONS."****AUDITOR EXPECTATIONS:**

- Graduate Students and Doctoral Candidates are invited to audit the seminar
- Auditors are expected to register as auditors through UVa SIS
- Auditors are expected to attend seminar and submit weekly reading responses to Collab Discussions. Weekly submissions are crucial to the success of the seminar, especially in light of its communal and participatory aims.
- Auditors are not required to submit a final research essay.

**REQUIRED BOOKS:**

1. Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (University of Chicago Press)
2. Natalie Carnes, *Image and Presence: A Christological Reflection on Iconoclasm* (Stanford University Press)
3. Nichole M. Flores, *The Aesthetics of Solidarity: Our Lady of Guadalupe and American Democracy* (Georgetown University Press)
4. Eddie Glaude, *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (University of Chicago Press)
5. Roberto S. Goizueta, *Christ Our Companion: Toward a Theological Aesthetics of Liberation* (Orbis Books)
6. Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder: Art as a Gospel of Beauty* (Baylor University Press)

7. Alejandro Nava, *In Search of Soul: Hip Hop, Literature, and Religion* (University of California Press)
8. David Nirenberg, *Aesthetic Theology and Its Enemies: Judaism in Christian Painting, Poetry, and Politics* (University of Chicago Press)
9. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Bleknep Press of Harvard University Press)
10. Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton University Press)
11. Josef Sorett, *Spirit in the Dark: A Religious History of Racial Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press)
12. Christopher D. Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith* (Oxford University Press)
13. Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (Palgrave Macmillan)
14. Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (Oxford University Press)

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **PART I: PHILOSOPHY IN THE FOREGROUND**

#### **Week 1 - August 24**

Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* - **Be prepared to discuss Scarry's book during first seminar meeting!**

#### **Week 2 - August 31**

Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*

#### **Week 3 - September 7**

Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism*

#### **Week 4 - September 14**

Glaude, *In a Shade of Blue*

### **PART II: THEOLOGY IN THE FOREGROUND**

#### **Week 5 - September 21**

Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*

#### **Week 6 - September 28**

Carnes, *Image and Presence*

#### **Week 7 - October 5**

Goizueta, *Christ Our Companion*

#### **Week 8**

October 12 - READING DAY, NO CLASS

October 13 - Flores, *The Aesthetics of Solidarity* Book Panel (via Zoom, details forthcoming)

#### **Week 9 - October 19**

Gonzalez-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder*

#### **Week 10 - October 26**

Nirenberg, *Aesthetic Theology and Its Enemies*

**Week 11 - November 2**

Sorett, *Spirit in the Dark*

**PART III: INTERLACING AESTHETICS, THEOLOGY AND ETHICS**

**Week 12 - November 9**

Nava, *In Search of Soul*

**Week 13 - November 16**

Read Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*

**Week 14 - November 23**

**THANKSGIVING WEEK, NO CLASS MEETING**

**Week 15 - November 30**

Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith*

**Week 16 - December 7**

***Research Paper Due - Tuesday, December 7***