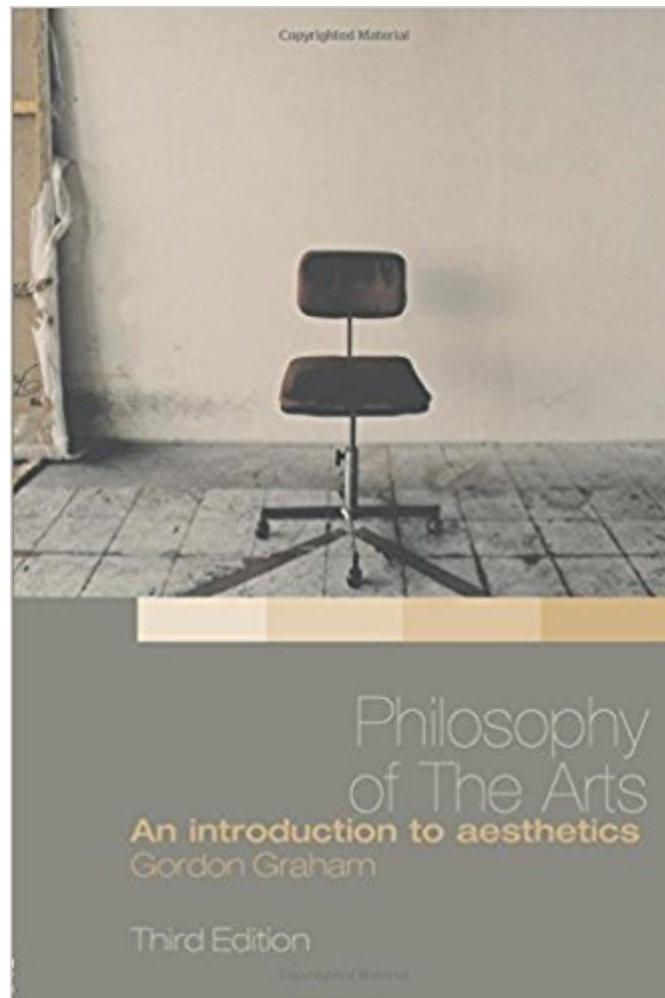




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Philosophy Of The Arts: An Introduction To Aesthetics



Synopsis

Philosophy of the Arts presents a comprehensive and accessible introduction to those coming to aesthetics and the philosophy of art for the first time. The third edition is greatly enhanced by new sections on art and beauty, modern art, Aristotle and katharsis, and Hegel. Each chapter has been thoroughly revised with fresh material and extended discussions. As with previous editions, the book: is jargon-free and will appeal to students of music, art history and literature as well as philosophy looks at a wide range of the arts from film, painting and architecture to fiction, music and poetry discusses a range of philosophical theories of thinkers such as Hume, Kant, Gaender, Collingwood, Derrida, Hegel and Croce contains regular summaries and suggestions for further reading.

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Customer Reviews

'The new edition of Philosophy of the Arts provides one of the most comprehensive and pellucid introductions to aesthetics on the market.' - Andy Hamilton, Durham University
Reviews of the second edition: '...clear, comprehensive yet philosophically complex.' - Matthew Kieran, University of Leeds
'...accessible, wide-ranging and above all engaged.' - Jerrold Levinson, University of Maryland
'Gordon Graham's book is a delight ... urbane and authoritative, accessible to all.' - Peter Lamarque, University of Hull
'An excellent introduction to philosophical aesthetics, which also makes its own distinctive and original contribution to the subject.' - Alex Neill, University of Southampton

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Yasss

There are two excellent reviews of this text already posted here. I will only add my personal experience using it in the classroom. For the last decade this book has been my primary text teaching undergraduate general education courses in aesthetics. I like it for two reasons: 1) Graham takes a stand on normative standards of art and defends that stand. This is very useful in an aesthetics course. Some students accept Grahams position, some reject it, but all benefit from trying their own ideas against Graham's. 2) Graham sets his position in the context of the discussion of actual works of art. This may seem to some an odd bit of praise--that an aesthetics text actually discusses art--but the sad fact is that many textbooks in aesthetics treat the subject so abstractly that actual art objects are rarely mentioned and never given systematic treatment. Graham is not afraid to test his theories against the entire range of art from music to painting to cinema to architecture. This opens the way for class discussion of actual works of art in an aesthetically informed way. I recommend this text.

Gordon Graham uses the question "what gives art value?" as a way of guiding the reader through a dense and complicated range of issues surrounding art and the distinctive concerns raised by various art forms. This is, I think, a welcome alternative to the more tendentious (and familiar) sets of issues that arise when you ask what counts as art (as opposed, say, to craft or entertainment). Of course the question "what is art?" inevitably comes up here too - and he discusses its centrality to philosophical aesthetics in the final chapter - but it's not Graham's focus. The first few chapters consider and challenge several of the most prominent theses regarding why art is important: because it brings pleasure or entertainment; because it offers the distinctive value of beauty; because it enables the expression and communication of emotion; and because it gives us insight. Graham, ultimately, sides with this last view: that art is valuable because of what it can teach us. He is aware there are other values sustained by art, but argues that the best artworks offer us rich insights into ourselves, in addition to whatever else they have to offer. The remainder of the book considers the distinctive contributions of various traditional art forms, such as music, architecture, painting and performance; along the way it clarifies and qualifies the sense in which art can teach us something. Later chapters give a quick overview of art theory, and consider questions raised by

modern forms of art, and by the beauty of the natural world. The book as a whole is pitched at an introductory level, that should be accessible to college-level readers. (I have assigned it in my undergraduate aesthetics course and found it to be clear and comprehensible for students, especially after some discussion.) There are things to argue with here - and (of course) Graham isn't entirely neutral on the debates he discusses. He also, at the same time, appears on occasion to oversimplify some of the material he discusses, to the point where it could easily be misunderstood. In his discussion of expressionism, for example, he claims that R.G. Collingwood is an expressionist, which means he holds that the aim of "art proper" is the expression of emotion. So far, so good. Then he argues that Collingwood effectively oversteps the boundaries of expressionism by claiming that art helps us to understand ourselves, since, Graham argues, the mere expression of emotion can't do this effectively. What he misses is that, for Collingwood, "emotion" is not reducible to a list of ready-made experiential states (like anger or fear or love). If that were true it would, as Graham points out, be hard to understand how a poem like T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" (discussed in some detail by Collingwood) could be simultaneously an "expression" of something like "dissatisfaction" or "anxiety" and teach us much about ourselves. But for Collingwood emotion is more like an unreflective or immediate, but at the same time highly specific, understanding of a situation, and to "express" it is to give specific voice to that understanding so that it can be reflected upon and considered and left behind. In that sense, poets and artists can be thought to be rendering determinate or specific an inchoate and situated grasp of the world, in such a way that it can be made public -- given a "face" -- that can be considered and responded to. What is clear is that Graham's primary interest is not so much to give adequate accounts of each thinker he introduces, but rather to use them as interlocutors in an ongoing conversation on the value of art, in which he has his own ideas to develop and explore. In many cases his approach is quite useful and provocative. He uses Nietzsche's contrast between the Apollinian and Dionysian tendencies in art, for example, to illuminate a distinction between a notion of art as an object to be contemplated and as an event to participate in. I found that to be quite helpful for clarifying the contrast and generating discussion. There are other aspects of the book to argue with - his discussion of architecture frames the possibilities in ways that are overly narrow and, as a consequence, suggests (I think wrongly) that someone like the innovative Antoni Gaudí should be thought of more as an open-air sculptor than an architect. Still the value of the book is that it opens a space in which such arguments can take place. It does cover the bases and addresses a wide range of issues in ways that are both clear and generally accurate and precise. Recommended for those who want an overview of some major issues in aesthetics.

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