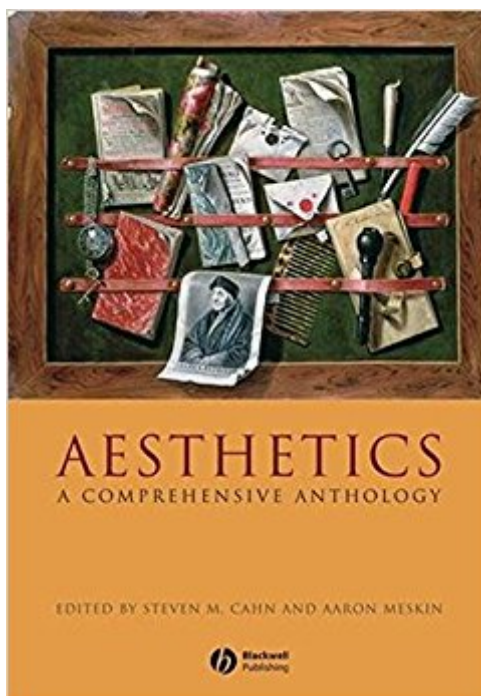


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# Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology



## Synopsis

From Plato's *Ion* to works by contemporary philosophers, this anthology showcases classic texts to illuminate the development of philosophical thought about art and the aesthetic. This volume is the most comprehensive collection of readings on aesthetics and the philosophy of art currently available. Brings together the most significant writings in aesthetics and philosophy of art from the past 2500 years. Each section includes a useful introductory essay which provides an overview of developments in the field. Broken down into three sections: Historical Sources, Modern Theories, and Contemporary Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art. Thorough, systematic, and flexible, including two alternative tables of contents (historical and topical); an ideal textbook and guide to the field.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Steven Cahn and Aaron Meskin have put together an unrivalled collection of great work in philosophical aesthetics, encompassing historical sources ranging from Plato to Shaftesbury, modern theories from Schiller to Gadamer, and more recent work covering all the central areas in contemporary aesthetics and philosophy of art. I thoroughly recommend it.”

• Peter Goldie, University of Manchester  
“The go-to book for classics in aesthetics from Plato and Aristotle to Adorno and Walton. Balanced and comprehensive, each chapter selected with a keen eye for bringing out enduring themes, this volume is a landmark achievement.”  
• Dominic McIver Lopes, University of British Columbia

The appreciation of art and the pursuit of beauty are fundamental elements of human life, and for

almost as long as we have engaged in philosophical inquiry we have been theorizing about aesthetic matters. Covering nearly 2,500 years of theory and analysis, this anthology offers the most comprehensive collection of readings on aesthetics and philosophy of art currently available. From Plato's *Ion* to work by contemporary philosophers of art, *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology* showcases classic texts that speak for themselves in showing the development of philosophical thought about art and the aesthetic. Thorough, systematic, and flexible, this volume is an ideal guide to the field and makes an excellent textbook for a variety of courses in philosophical aesthetics.

Overall, this anthology leaves very little to be desired by way of an introduction to Aesthetics. I will give a brief review as another reviewer has already provided the majority of what I would like to say:

**Pros:**

- + The anthology covers many of the historical works (including some that were heavily influential but left out of other anthologies). I include works by philosophers such as Schopenhauer, whose work primarily served to influence Nietzsche, but also contributes far more than Nietzsche cares to use.
- + The length of the works in this anthology is an important detail. This anthology tries to provide a sample of each of the historical works so as to translate their main ideas. Yet, works such as *Art as Experience* and *The Critique of Judgment* have slightly longer lengths -- both because their authors were more prolific and because their ideas were not proposed concisely. Anyone with experience reading Kant understands that 10 pages of his critiques may as well be 40 pages of another book. The anthology does well to ensure that the reader has enough of each author to understand the primary (and numerous secondary) points of his or her work.
- + Medieval aesthetics are included among the historical section. I have enjoyed previous aesthetics anthologies (here, I am thinking of *Art and Its Significance*), but they have not included medieval works nor as many contemporary commentaries. The anthology presents both very well.

**Cons:**

- There is nothing by Derrida. Deconstruction was a very important shift in aesthetic and literary theory. It is a shame that the anthology left his work out. As another reviewer noted, the book leans more toward analytic philosophy than continental, so I am sure that played a role in leaving "Of Grammatology", for instance, out.
- The anthology does not cover a lot about metaphysics of art. What is the difference between two numerically distinct yet qualitatively identical (to the very atom -- except for the fact that one was made by the artist and the other is a reproduction) works of art? This is a fascinating topic in aesthetics, and it is not adequately captured within this book.

Overall, I would rate the work an 8.5 / 10. I would gladly recommend this anthology to anyone who wishes for an introduction to aesthetics, and I may use it in my courses on aesthetics in the future.

It is as it says, a comprehensive anthology on aesthetics. It covers the full gambit on the authorities on Aesthetics from the beginning.

the book looks just like new, but I got it for the used price! delivery was quick and I like that I could track the package!!

Best way to buy college textbooks! This vendors product was right on the money and I can't believe I haven't been buying my books like this all along.

Too many pages and the print is minuscule!

The book was in the stated condition, brand new, but it took over 2 weeks to ship and they do not provide a tracking code. Seeing as I needed it for the start of my semester, it was frustrating to not know when the book would finally get here. If it were faster service/had a tracking code it would be a 5.

Like most of the Blackwell anthologies I have experience with, this is very well put together and is a thorough (if not fully comprehensive) introduction to the most important and influential thinkers in aesthetics. I use it, along with some supplementary readings, in my aesthetics class, and focus there on the classical and modern readings - but I find it helpful that the book includes both a historical and a topical table of contents, so that you can read the selections chronologically or according to topics like "beauty" or "definitions of art" or "expression and emotion in the arts." When it comes to contemporary aesthetics, this book covers a wide range of the most influential thinkers in English-speaking and analytic aesthetics, while almost completely ignoring the work of Continental thinkers (apart from a few selections from critical theory and hermeneutics, which is treated here as "historical" and not contemporary). The most glaring omission is that there is nothing here from Derrida, who did, after all, write a number of important and highly influential pieces on aesthetics (not to mention Deleuze, or Lyotard, or Baudrillard, or Ranciere...). Still, this is the most thorough text of its kind that I've seen and I wouldn't necessarily argue for omitting anything that is here in order to include those other things (since to do them justice would probably require another kind of book - best to consider this an "Anglo-American and Analytic Approaches to Aesthetics and their Historical Predecessors" anthology). Another thing that would make it more helpful as a textbook would be to have a very brief introduction to each selection, outlining the issues and the

central contributions made within the selection to the field of aesthetics. In my class I tend to assign readings first and then have lectures and discussions, and brief introductions would help to orient my students better before we meet to discuss. In lieu of that, I try to say something briefly before the reading, but it would be helpful for them to be able to turn back to the summaries during and after each reading, and it would be helpful for them to get a different take on the overall importance of the reading than I have to offer. There are broad essays introducing each period (e.g. a brief essay on "the classical period" - from Plato to Kant, and a brief essay on "modern theories" from Schiller to Gadamer), but that's not quite the same, and not as useful, as quick intros to each reading selection.

If you've ever wondered what makes art art, and what philosophers have to say about it (throughout history), then this is a book for you! Plato! Aristotle! Some dude from the 1700's you've never heard of but somehow 98% agree with! Aesthetics versus fine art! It's organized, thoughtful, and contains art-related excerpts from philosophical and sometimes borderline sarcastic authors (that Plato is a hoot when he writes as the endlessly sassy "Socrates")! The binding is tough, so even when I bend the pages all the way back to keep it open during class it stays strong and doesn't look bent when closed! And you can use the half-page-ish space at the beginning and end of each excerpt to take notes! There are two columns on each page - double the art fun! If you're getting this for a class, have no fear, you might actually like it, and you're getting it because you want it, then I recommend reading something and instigating an art discussion to show off your mad philosophy skills at your next luncheon! Okay, that's all. Have a lovely day.

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