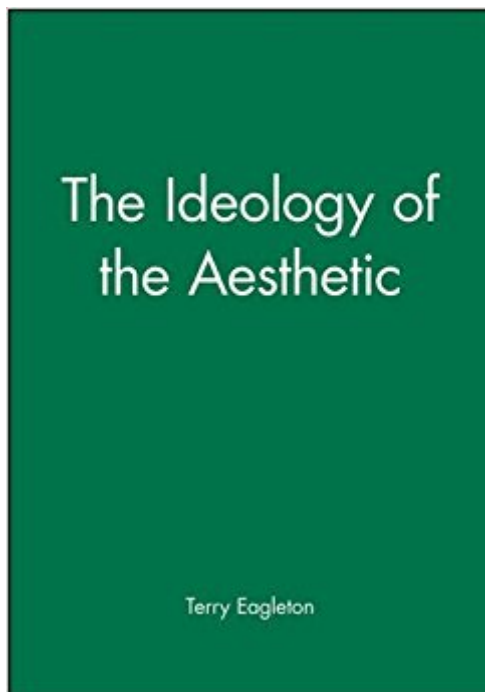


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The Ideology Of The Aesthetic



Synopsis

The Ideology of the Aesthetic presents a history and critique of the concept of the aesthetic throughout modern Western thought. As such, this is a critical survey of modern Western philosophy, focusing in particular on the complex relations between aesthetics, ethics and politics. Eagleton provides a brilliant and challenging introduction to these concerns, as characterized in the work of Kant, Schiller, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Lukacs, Adorno, Habermas, and others. Wide in span, as well as morally and politically committed, this is Terry Eagleton's major work to date. It forms both an original enquiry and an exemplary introduction.

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Customer Reviews

Although not a history of aesthetics, Eagleton's new book traces the relationship between aesthetics and political interests from the Enlightenment through post-modernism, aiming at a Marxist philosophy of the body. While starting with Shaftesbury, Hume, and Burke, he is primarily concerned with the contribution of the German philosophical tradition. He is especially interested in the Hegelians from Hegel and Marx to Benjamin, Adorno, and Habermas, and the anti-Hegelians from Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche to Heidegger and Foucault. As with his many earlier books on literary theory and Marxist aesthetics (e.g., *Literary Theory*, LJ 8/83), Eagleton's new volume is marked both by its clarity and its commitment. -T.L. Cooksey, Armstrong State Coll., Savannah, Ga. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"That contemporary theory would eventually turn back to consider its origins in the contradictions of philosophical aesthetics was predictable; but nothing could have prepared us for Eagleton's extraordinary confrontation with the entire modern history of this discourse, in a book which will be indispensable for years to come." F. R. Jameson, Duke University "Eagleton succeeds brilliantly in situating aesthetic theory as an irreducibly heterogeneous series of discourses whose ideological and political effect on North Atlantic civilization since the Enlightenment has been more diverse and consequential than traditional philosophical, literary, and cultural theory has previously suspected or acknowledged." Choice

I must confess that having seen Eagleton speak not too long ago, I was a bit rattled by the disjunct between this text (which I think is quite good) and the platitudes/tired jokes that he offered. In any case, Eagleton's writing here, particularly the section on Kant, is clear and cogent--I was also amused by his attempt to start some sort of quarrel with the ghost of Paul de Man, although given their radically different conceptions of aesthetics, this is perhaps understandable.

A good book on this subject needs to be written but I am not sure I will finish this one. I second the opinion of another reviewer in that one must have a command of (not just familiarity with) the philosophers mentioned in the book prior to reading this, as this is a book of interesting but, I fear, untrustworthy commentary. You need to have the background to sort it out on your own. There are moments of insight and originality here, some flashes of great writing, long stretches of shockingly bad writing, much confusion. Without opinions of your own with which to compare, the novice reader could get lost. (editor should be fired for timidity) Only a small fraction of the book is about aesthetics, the rest concerns the political ideology under which aesthetic systems might have been formed. I think it is fair to say that Eagleton is at all times suspicious that the aesthetic concerns exist in order to flatter and justify the historical rise of a bourgeois power structure. Some commentary on 19th century German history is shocking...if true. For rank beginners read Roger Scruton's Chapter 29 essay on the subjective in his *Modern Philosophy*. And, as always, go back to W.T. Jones for real clarity on any subject.

Book arrived timely, in condition as promised. Thanks. As to content, I bought this book for my PhD daughter. I don't understand a thing that Eagleton writes.

This is an excellent book that has helped me to answer questions about representation, ideology,

and hegemony embedded in classically "non-representational" art forms such as music. Eagleton's writing style, as with other of his books that I have read, makes it easy to comprehend and internalize some of the thicker ideas of modern critical theory. As an academigeek I found that I couldn't put it down. I have given this book only four stars, though, because of its conscious lack of attention to any category of oppression other than class. While I acknowledge that Eagleton states in the introduction that his focus on class is a means of re-introducing class to the area of critical theory that has more recently been dominated (and dismissed) by an emphasis on race and gender studies, this conscious omission is characteristic of some of the main concerns of contemporary studies in race and gender. Eagleton would not lose the edge of his finely tuned Marxist critical approach by acknowledging the intersections of class, race, and gender in his analysis; and he would find, in my opinion, that it enhances his argument regarding the prevalence and dissemination of ideology through aesthetic practice. But despite my fundamental criticism of Eagleton's unidimensional approach, I consider this book to be one of the more important works I have found in helping to develop my approach to aesthetic criticism.

As an undergraduate, I found this book to be absolutely superb. First, it is a difficult read and it requires a close reading in order to fully understand the scope of Eagleton's theories on the aesthetic and its political foundations. Also, I recommend that one be familiar with the texts that Eagleton refers to in this historical analysis. In other words, I would first recommend a knowledge or basic understanding of Burke, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Walter Benjamin. The Ideology of the Aesthetic does not concern itself purely with the relationship between art and life, but begins with the nature of particulars and universals in knowledge. Next, using a historical analysis of the texts, Eagleton is able to flush out why the aesthetic became necessary within liberal societies during the 19th century. It asks why the aesthetic became so necessary as a tool for power and resistance. While there are Critical School/Marxist leanings, the book is, nonetheless, a fantastic read. In general, Eagleton is a particularly insightful scholar and I highly recommend his other works. Particularly, this work was a fantastic guide for me in my research on the rise of the idea of the "aesthetic" state in the early 20th century.

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