



Functional Beauty

Glenn Parsons, Allen Carlson

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Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson offer an in-depth philosophical study of the relationship between function and aesthetic value, breaking with the philosophical tradition of seeing the two as separate. They begin by developing and defending, in a general way, the concept of Functional Beauty, exploring how the role of function in aesthetic appreciation has been treated by some notable thinkers in the history of aesthetics. They then consider the relationship to Functional Beauty of certain views in current aesthetic thought, especially what we call "cognitively rich" approaches to the aesthetic appreciation of both art and nature. Turning to work on the nature of function in the philosophy of science, they argue that this line of enquiry can help solve certain philosophical problems that have been raised for the idea that knowledge of function plays an important role in aesthetic appreciation.

Although philosophical discussions of aesthetic appreciation tend to focus largely and sometimes almost exclusively on artworks, the range of aesthetic appreciation is, of course, much larger. Not simply art, but also nature, architecture, and even more mundane, everyday things--cars, tools, clothing, furniture, and sports--are objects of frequent and enthusiastic aesthetic appreciation. Accordingly, in the second half of the book, Glen Parsons and Allen Carlson consider the place and importance of Functional Beauty in the aesthetic appreciation of a broad range of different kinds of things. The final chapters explore Functional Beauty in nature and the natural environment, in architecture and the built environment, in everyday artifacts, events, and activities, and finally in art and the artworld. In each case, Parsons and Carlson argue that Functional Beauty illuminates our aesthetic experiences and helps to address various theoretical issues raised by these different objects of appreciation.

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