

# Images of Excellence



CHRISTOPHER JANAWAY  
**IMAGES OF  
EXCELLENCE**  
PLATO'S CRITIQUE OF THE ARTS

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Plato was the first great figure in Western philosophy to assess the value of the arts; he famously argued in the Republic that traditionally accepted forms of poetry, drama, and music are unsound, claiming they are conducive to warped ethical standards, detrimental to the psyche, and purveyors of illusions about important matters in human life. This view has been widely rejected; but Christopher Janaway here argues that Plato's hostile case is a more coherent and a more profound challenge to the arts than has sometimes been supposed. Denying that Plato advocates 'good art' in any modern sense, Janaway seeks both to understand Plato's critique in the context of his own philosophy and to locate him in today's philosophy of art, showing how issues in aesthetics arise from responses to his charges. Plato's questions about beauty, emotion, representation, ethical knowledge, artistic autonomy, and censorship are of contemporary relevance as formerly secure assumptions about the value of art and the aesthetic come under scrutiny. "Images of Excellence" gives a new and original view of a famous issue in the history of philosophy; it is written not only for readers working in ancient philosophy, but for all who are interested in aesthetics, art theory, and literary theory. From the reviews: 'Christopher Janaway ...strikes a fine balance between lucid exposition of the texts, explanation of standard and alternative views and relevant aesthetic theory, and his own interpretations, which grow out of this carefully cultivated ground. His views are often persuasive, and always interesting, meticulously argued, and worthy of serious consideration...Classicists will learn a great deal from Janaway about what philosophers do and how they do it ...Non-philosophers will also receive a clear and accessible introduction to the theory and history of aesthetics...At the same time Janaway's philosophical analysis is at a highly specialized and sophisticated level...this book makes a powerful statement of Plato's claim to importance in the area of aesthetic theory ...a stimulating, enlightening, highly intelligent, and well written book.' Mary Whitlock Blundell, Bryn Mawr Classical Review 'This is a lucid and thoughtful survey, which is effective both as an introduction to the topic and as a contribution to scholarly debate...I found very little in the main thrust or the detailed argument of Janaway's book which did not strike me as convincing.' Christopher Gill, "British Journal of Aesthetics".

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