BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

AND PHILOSOPHY

KNOWLEDGE HERE BEGINS OUT THERE

EDITED BY JASON T. EBERL

Blackwell Publishing
A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down, and a healthy helping of popular culture clears the cobwebs from Kant. Philosophy has had a public relations problem for a few centuries now. This series aims to change that, showing that philosophy is relevant to your life—and not just for answering the big questions like “To be or not to be?” but for answering the little questions: “To watch or not to watch *South Park*?” Thinking deeply about TV, movies, and music doesn’t make you a “complete idiot.” In fact it might make you a philosopher, someone who believes the unexamined life is not worth living and the unexamined cartoon is not worth watching.
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GALACTICA

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Giving Thanks to the Lords of Kobol

Although the chapters in this book focus exclusively on the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica*, gratitude must be given first and foremost to the original series creator, Glen Larson. It’s well known that Larson didn’t envision *Battlestar* as simply a shoot ’em up western in space—“The Lost Warrior” and “The Magnificent Warriors” aside—but added thoughtful dimension to the story based on his Mormon religious beliefs. Ron Moore and David Eick have continued this trend of philosophically and theologically enriched storytelling, and I’m most grateful to them for having breathed new life into the *Battlestar* saga.

This book owes its existence most of all to my friend Bill Irwin, whose wit and sharp editorial eye gave each chapter a fine polish, and to the support of Jeff Dean, Jamie Harlan, and Lindsay Pullen at Blackwell. I’d also like to thank each contributor for moving at FTL speeds to produce excellent work. In particular, I wish to express my most heartfelt gratitude to my wife, Jennifer Vines, with whom I very much enjoyed writing something together for the first time, and my sister-in-law, Jessica Vines, who provided valuable feedback on many chapters. Their only regret is that we didn’t have a chapter devoted exclusively to the aesthetic value of Samuel T. Anders.

Finally, I’d like to dedicate this book to the youngest members of my immediate and extended families who are indeed “the shape of things to come”: my daughter, August, my nephew, Ethan, and my great-nephew, Radley.
“There Are Those Who Believe . . .”

The year was 1978: still thrilled by *Star Wars* and hungry for more action-packed sci-fi, millions of viewers like me thought *Battlestar Galactica* was IT! Of course, the excitement surrounding the series premiere soon began to wear off as we saw the same Cylon ship blow up over and over . . . and *over* again, and familiar film plots were retread as the writers scrambled to keep up with the network’s demanding airdate schedule. At five years old, how was I supposed to know that “Fire in Space” was basically a retelling of *The Towering Inferno*?

Enough bashing of a classic 1970s TV show (yes, 1970s—*Galactica 1980* doesn’t count). *Battlestar* had a great initial concept and overall dramatic story: Humanity, nearly wiped out by bad ass robots in need of Visine, searching for their long lost brothers and sisters who just happen to be . . . *us*. So it was no surprise that *Battlestar* was eventually resurrected, and it was well worth the twenty-five year wait! While initial fan reaction centered on the sexy new Cylons and Starbuck’s controversial gender change, it was immediately apparent that this wasn’t just a whole new *Battlestar*, but a whole new breed of sci-fi storytelling. While sci-fi often provides an imaginative philosophical laboratory, the reimagined *Battlestar* has done so like no other. What other TV show gives viewers cybernetic life forms who both aspire to be more human (like Data on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) and also despise humanity and seek to eradicate it as a “pestilence”? Or heroic figures who not only acknowledge their own personal failings but condemn their entire species as a “flawed creation”? Or a character whose overpowering ego and
“There Are Those Who Believe . . .”

sometimes split personality may yet lead to the salvation of two warring cultures? The reimagined Battlestar Galactica is IT!

Like the “ragtag fleet” of Colonial survivors on their quest for Earth, philosophy’s quest is often based on “evidence of things not seen.” The questions philosophy poses don’t have answers that’ll pop up on Dradis, nor would they be observable through Dr. Baltar’s microscope. Like Battlestar, philosophy wonders whether what we perceive is just a projection of our own minds, as on a Cylon baseship. Maybe we’re each playing a role in an eternally repeating cosmic drama and there’s a divine entity—or entities—watching, or even determining what events unfold. These aren’t easy issues to confront, but exploring them can be as exciting as being shot out of Galactica in a Viper (almost).

Whether you prefer your Starbuck male with blow-dried hair, or female with a bad attitude, you’re bound to discover a new angle on the rich Battlestar Galactica saga as you peruse the pages that follow. Some chapters illuminate a particular philosopher’s views on the situation in which the Colonials and Cylons find themselves: Would Machiavelli have rigged a democratic election to keep Baltar from winning? Other chapters address the unique questions raised by the Cylons: Would it be cheating for Helo to frak Boomer since she and Athena share physical and psychological attributes? Tackling some of the moral quandaries when Adama, Roslin, or others have to “roll a hard six” and hope for the best, other chapters ask questions such as: How would you have handled living on New Caprica under Cylon occupation? Then there are the ever-present theological issues that ideologically separate humans and Cylons: Is it rational to believe in one or more divine beings when there is no Ship of Lights to prove it to you? We’ll also take a look at other perspectives in the philosophical universe, which is just as vast as the physical universe Galactica must traverse: Does “the story that’s told again and again and again throughout eternity” most closely resemble Greek mythology, Judeo-Christian theology, or Zen Buddhism?

So climb in your rack, close the curtain, put your boots outside the hatch so nobody disturbs you, and get ready to finally figure out if you’re a human or a Cylon, or at least which you’d most like to be.
So say we all.
PART I

OPENING THE ANCIENT SCROLLS:
CLASSIC PHILOSOPHERS AS COLONIAL PROPHETS
Battlestar Galactica depicts the “end of the world,” the destruction of the Twelve Colonies by the Cylons. Not surprisingly, many of the characters have difficulty coping. Lee Adama, for example, struggles with alienation, depression, and despair. During the battle to destroy the “resurrection ship,” Lee collides with another ship while flying the Blackbird stealth fighter. His flight suit rips and he thinks he’s going to die floating in space. After his rescue, Starbuck tells him, “Let’s just be glad that we both came back alive, all right?” But Lee responds, “That’s just it, Kara. I didn’t want to make it back alive” (“Resurrection Ship, Part 2”). Gaius Baltar deals with his pain and guilt by seeking pleasure; he’ll frak just about any willing and attractive female, whether human or Cylon. Starbuck has a host of problems, ranging from insubordination to infidelity, and is, in her own words, a “screw up.” Saul Tigh strives to fulfill his duties as XO in spite of his alcoholism, but his career is marked by significant failures and bad calls. Then there’s Romo Lampkin, who agrees to be Baltar’s attorney for the glory of defending the most hated man in the fleet. His successful defense, though, relies on manipulation, deception, and trickery.

Fans of BSG are sometimes frustrated with the characters’ actions and decisions. But would any of us do better if we were in their places? We’d like to think so, but would we really? The temptation to indulge in sex, drugs, alcohol, or the pursuit of fame and glory to cope with the unimaginable suffering that result from surviving the death of civilization would be strong indeed. The old Earth proverb, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die,” seems to express