



The Philosopher At The End Of The Universe: Philosophy Explained Through Science Fiction Films

By Mark Rowlands

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'It's Schopenhauer and the will. It's Plato, it's Hume, Baudrillard and the concept of the Nietzschean superman!' Keanu Reeves on *The Matrix*

The Philosopher at the End of the Universe allows anyone to understand basic philosophical concepts from the comfort of their armchair, through the plots and characters of spectacular blockbusting science-fiction movies. Learn about: The Nature of Reality from *The Matrix*; Good and Evil from *Star Wars*; Morality from *Aliens*; Personal Identity from *Total Recall*; The Mind-Body Dilemma from *Terminator*; Free Will from *Minority Report*; Death and the Meaning of Life from *Blade Runner*; and much more. As someone once said, things must be said and knowledge known, and the cast list assembled to tell us does not disappoint: Tom Cruise, Plato, Harrison Ford, Immanuel Kant, Sigourney Weaver, Friedrich Nietzsche, Keanu Reeves and Rene Descartes. From characters in the biggest films (with lots of explosions and bad language) to Ludwig Wittgenstein (no explosions and too much language in general), hear all the arguments. I think, therefore... I'll be back!

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

All the revelations of a college survey course on philosophy can be easily gleaned from a few science fiction films. At least that's the premise of this thoroughly entertaining conversation starter by philosophy professor Rowlands, who explicates the musings of some of philosophy's biggest stars within the context of cinema's most enduring sci-fi hits. Under Rowlands's guidance, these films shed light on such abstruse philosophical ideas as the "the problem of free will" and "death and the meaning of life." For example, the great lesson of *Frankenstein* is not that life can originate only from a divine creator, Rowlands says. Rather, the monster, a creature unable to choose his physical nature, his parents or his future, actually embodies the existential dilemmas explored by Heidegger, Sartre and Camus. In a particularly winning chapter on *Star Wars*, Rowlands compares the musings of Plato and Nietzsche, conjecturing that evil is not the absence of good but, rather, a contrast necessary in order for good to exist. (That is, Darth Vader is nothing without Obi-Wan and vice versa.) Rowlands recommends that readers watch each film before plunging into the corresponding chapter. And he makes no apologies for his "lowbrow" intellectual diversions into such crowd pleasers as *Total Recall* (a celluloid essay on memory theory and identity), *Hollow Man* (a meditation on moral vs. "prudent" choices) and *The Matrix* (a Cartesian daydream). Rowlands frequently injects his own thoughts with self-deprecating charm. His combination of humor and erudition produces an engaging read, delightful in its tone and accessible in its prose, that affirms the wisdom of numerous armchair philosophers who have declared that everything you need to know about life can be learned from the movies.

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From [Booklist](#)

Irish philosopher Rowlands adopts a mildly smart-alecky persona for this Philosophy 101-type foray that uses "sci-fi" flickers to illustrate questions of meaning, knowledge, identity, free will, morality, and death. *Frankenstein*--actually, Kenneth Brannagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*-- serves to tease out the meaning of life as absurdity, a result of the discrepancy between interior and exterior perspectives on the self. Because of the same inside-outside clash--the rock, Rowlands says, on which all philosophical positions founder--certain knowledge proves elusive: see *The Matrix*. The mind-body problem (see *The Terminator*) and the concept of personal identity (*Total Recall*) come to ends similar, respectively, to those of the issues of meaning and knowledge. Only when the issue is "Why be moral?" are the bonds of rationality slipped; act according to your conscience, Rowlands, along with Nietzsche, counsels. While arguing by inference (they star in so many philosophically intriguing films) that Arnold Schwarzenegger and Keanu Reeves be hailed as actor-philosophers, Rowlands effectively covers an astonishing number of essential thinkers and positions, meanwhile betraying only individualist and antireligious biases. *Ray Olson*

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Review

"Excellent - not only is each chapter a model of philosophical exposition, conveying philosophical ideas with exemplary verve and clarity, the book also manages to connect the philosophy to the movies in a natural and convincing way- serves to inject a degree of passion into the bloodless halls of philosophy" TLS "Hugely entertaining ... Rowlands knows his stuff and marries some of the tougher philosophical arguments to the more accessible conduit of popular entertainment- enjoyable and illuminating" Waterstone's Books Quarterly

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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