

Seinfeld AND Philosophy

[A Book about Everything and Nothing]



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Designed for philosophers as well as readers with no particular philosophical background, the essays in this lively book are grouped into four amusing acts. Act One looks at the four Seinfeld characters through a philosophical lens and includes Jerry and Socrates: The Examined Life? Act Two examines historical philosophers from a Seinfeldian standpoint and offers Plato or Nietzsche? Time, Essence, and Eternal Recurrence in Seinfeld. Act Three, Untimely Meditations by the Water Cooler, explores philosophical issues raised by the show, such as, Is it rational for George to do the opposite? And Act Four, Is There Anything Wrong with That?, discusses ethical problems of everyday life using Seinfeld as a basis. Seinfeld and Philosophy also provides a guide to Seinfeld episodes and a chronological list of the philosophers cited in this book.

Seinfeld and Philosophy Details

Date : Published August 20th 1999 by Open Court (first published August 1st 1999)

ISBN : 9780812694093

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Format : Paperback 224 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Nonfiction, Humor, Culture, Pop Culture, Writing, Essays

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From Reader Review Seinfeld and Philosophy for online ebook

Jeff says

An interesting look at some philosophical approaches to Seinfeld. This is a sometimes dry, sometimes interesting effort to understand the basis of what the seinfeldian comedy is all about. I felt I gained some insight to how the writers here have attempted to garner some deeper meaning from this show about nothing. There is quite a bit of something behind all of the nothing, and the commonality of these events and story threads are what allow us to recognise ourselves in these characters and cause us to laugh. I enjoyed the book, but I can see how some reviewers may have expected much more out of this.

Sarah says

Literally not what I expected. A friend of mine told me about this book with so much enthusiasm, I got excited. Once he lent it to me, that excitement deflated. It's just a bunch of philosophical essays on Socrates and *Seinfeld* that I for the most part skimmed.

Judy says

Philosophy isn't my strong point. Just never could understand it. But, as a big fan of the Seinfeld comedy show, I thought I'd give this a try. I must admit that I did skim parts of the book, but found parts of it very interesting as various writers compare different philosophers with different characters on the show. There isn't any doubt that the Seinfeld show has added many terms to current usage. At this point in my life, it's difficult to remember things, but I found it enjoyable to re-live the episodes of Seinfeld.

Nicole Pramik says

This was the very first volume in Open Court Publishing's *Pop Culture and Philosophy* series, which now has expanded to over 80 titles and counting. I've been a contributor for some of the *Pop Culture and Philosophy* books (not this one though), so I can attest to the hard work, research, and careful thought that goes into the process. The main rule contributors must follow is to present a single philosophical concept and make it relatable and relevant to a general audience who is familiar with the main topic at hand. So I suppose this book was going to have some kinks simply because it was the first. That being said, this volume still presents some intriguing insights into the infamous "show about nothing." Because nothing is still something.

Quite easily the strongest contenders in this collection are the opening essays that analyze the four main characters (i.e. Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer). While I'm not into feminism, so the Elaine piece wasn't of much interest to me, the essays examining Jerry in light of Socratic ideals, George in regard to Aristotle's views on happiness, and Kramer's evolution in relation to Kierkegaard's three stages of life were all well-crafted, insightful, and had a tight focus.

The other essays are more general in scope as they utilize various philosophical modes (such as Taoism and ethics) to examine aspects of "Seinfeld," from its proposition that it was a "show about nothing" to the display of social and moral ethics demonstrated by various characters. Overall, there is a good mix here but it does tend to repeat itself in terms of theme, especially regarding virtue and ethics. (Though I will note that viewers who weren't keen on the final episode will gain new insight as to why that really was the perfect way to wrap up the show in light everything its main characters had done.)

Overall, *Seinfeld and Philosophy* is a fun, insightful read, provided you enjoy "Seinfeld" and like philosophy. Thus, the audience for this book is limited but that is by no means a criticism as it is basically limited by default. So if you love exploring some of the deeper meanings or philosophical nuances to various aspects of popular culture, then check out the *Pop Culture and Philosophy* series in general. And if "Seinfeld" just happens to be on your list of pop culture favs, then don't pass up this particular book. It might not be perfect but it's a nifty volume that will seriously make you think. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Max Kaya says

A number of episodes/scenes in Seinfeld made me curious about a philosophical perspective on the sitcom, the Parking Garage episode and the conversation between Jerry and George about how the show is about "nothing" being the two. Well, clearly the show is not about "nothing" It is mostly about the social faux pas. However, the discussions around social faux pas in this book didn't appeal to me.

Some of the philosophical discussions are too distant from the entertainment value of the show. For example, the article about the Opposite mentions how it is possible only for "unchanging" to have an opposite. This is indeed a powerful idea, but relating this to Socrates' and changing forms did not quite make sense to me.

Sure, there are a few articles that are quite enjoyable. The philosophical / psychological evaluation of characters are notable. For instance, one article has a good perspective on Kramer. How he is on aesthetic stage in life, which is followed by an ethical stage. However, he is an arrested adolescent who just doesn't learn. And him not learning is inline with the show's motto, "no hugging, no learning."

One idea from this book that strongly clicked with my perspective of Seinfeld is "comedy is finding the significance in the insignificant", and this is probably the best overarching view of Seinology.

Matthew says

At first I thought my expectations of this book were too high. I had hoped for either a comically entertaining read or a serious if tongue-in-cheek philosophic examination of Seinfeld; unfortunately, I got neither. What I found was a series of mostly poorly written essays that vacillated between taking a serious stance ("Jerry Seinfeld is a philosophical exemplar that could be used to illustrate such and such example") and a humorous one ("Jerry Seinfeld is only a character on a television show and because the character Jerry cannot exist we cannot possibly examine him"). The problem with this is that you must choose one side and stick with it in order to succeed; either the characters are just characters or they are something more. If they are something more then you can't suddenly in the middle of the essay take issue with how they were written; they must be treated as living people whose actions and thought-processes can be extrapolated on.

Anyway, only the essay on Kramer and Kierkegaard was worth reading--the others ranged from abhorrently terrible to I wish I hadn't just wasted the time I spent reading this.

Jana says

The only reason why I have this book on my list is because my older sister bought it. And because she occasionally asks me about the books that she buys. We don't share similar tastes. I read them, but I mostly don't enjoy them. She adores Seinfeld, I am not a fan. There are numerous reasons why I don't like Seinfeld. But now the top of the list is: this book has references why Seinfeld is as good as Buddha, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Heidegger... The list is endless. So is my irony.

Tom says

At least 10 of the 14 essays which comprise Seinfeld and Philosophy were both entertaining and thought provoking. To cite one example, Jerry's moral dilemma in Season Six over not wanting to become an "orgy guy," can be seen, it turns out, through an Aristotilean lens as proving Jerry's high moral development. In another similar example, George's striving to become "the opposite" of everything he was also testifies that he embodies the ideal laid out in the Nichomecean Ethics to point actions towards becoming whatever conception of "good" we might hold.

Its an excellent read.

Tom Kammerer says

Knew I liked Seinfeld, thought I liked study of philosophy, the combining of the two in this book comes out as forced and contrived; wonder if there's any truth to rumor that this effort was one of Kramer's harebrained ideas?

Emma says

I thought it would be more Seinfeld and less philosophy, but it turned out to be the opposite. While it was interesting, however, I just felt like I was reading a textbook for class.

Kyler says

Overall, the book was a hit or miss in regards to the various essay. There were a few ones which were really interesting and thought provoking. A few really dry ones which really didn't hold my interest at all. And a few ones which had cool ideas, but they were left under explained and vague. At times a repetitive summary of Seinfeld and a few important philosophers, the book really shines when it successfully explores the

television program's philosophical implications, which it does more often than not.

justin says

i had the privilege of taking a "seinfeld and philosophy" course in college. this was required reading. it was real, and it was spectacular!

Marija S. says

I cannot believe they managed to make something Seinfeld related so boring. Unforgiveable

Joey says

A lot of parts in this book were slightly over my head.

The formatting into Acts I-IV is brilliant.

My favorite section was the comparison of Seinfeld and his friends to Sartre's No Exit.

Brian Wilkerson says

"Seinfeld and Philosophy" is a book I bought some time ago. I read a few of its essays but then it got lost in the shuffle. I finally finished it the other day. The show about nothing has profound things in it. Since this is a philosophy anthology I can't use my normal grading method so I'll just sample three of the essays.

"The Costanza Maneuver: is it rational for George to 'Do the Opposite'?"

This is one of my favorites. Not only is it interesting but it cleaves to Seinfeld as much as to the philosophy. I'd say this is one of the better essays in that regard.

The title of this episode refers to the season five episode "The Opposite" where George realizes that his every instinct has been wrong so Jerry (jokingly) advises him to do the opposite of what his instincts tell him. In pursuit of determining if this is a truly rational thing to do, the author of the essay uses concepts such as the Three Kinds of Rationality (minimum, median and maximum) and employs a test; it is rational if it is both feasible and reliable.

The author of the essay also speaks of the comical mechanics in this central joke of the episode. Neither George nor the audience expects the Costanza Maneuver to work and the contrast with its great success is both startling and baffling. It's also about George's neurosis; that's always funny.

"Seinfeld, Subjectivity and Sartre"

This one is about the constructions of the Self (identity, personality etc.) and how it exists in relation to others. It is not only that the persona of the characters is revealed through their interactions with others but that it is influenced and built by them. Examples include Jerry encouraging some odd plan or another by George and Kramer's eccentrics coming from all the strange people he interacts with.

This particular essay had another point to prove; that Jean-Paul Sartre advocated the relationally constructed Self instead of being an essentialist. The author of this essay goes to great lengths to disprove what I assume is a widespread and long standing interpretation. Of course, Sartre's play, "No Exit" and that famous line "Hell is other people" is brought up. In both the play and the TV show there are three (or four) unpleasant people locked in a room for a prolonged period of time as their punishment. Yet the author of this essay notes that the Seinfeld four don't see it as torture because it is their natural environment.

"Seinfeld and the Moral Life"

The author of this essay attempts to prove that the four main cast members are kind and compassionate people who regularly try to do the morally correct thing; yes all four of them. While I disagree I'm more put off by the faulty logic and reasoning in this essay.

Before starting the argument to prove this, the author of the essay first separates "integrity" from the idea of "being moral" because someone can be a horrible immoral person with great integrity. While this is sound enough it also means there is less land to defend. When the author of the essay begins their defense of their argument they point to the few actions that could be interpreted as good and kind and ignores the context. It's cherry picking.

Then the author of the essay responds to possible counter-arguments by stating that being a "comedy of manners" is more or less the same as being concerned with morality because manners are about avoiding hurting someone's feelings. This ignores the possibility of being petty, superficial or self-interested. There is also the phrase "obviously false on its face". This sounds like the start of the Costanza Maneuvers' first section. It referred to the tendency of some people to believe they've won an argument by saying "you're being irrational". Saying that something is false does not prove it to be so.

There are others in this essay that I greatly enjoyed such as "J. Peterman the Ideological Mind: Paradoxes of Subjectivity" and the "Elaine Benes: Feminist Icon or Just One of The Boys". There are only one or two that I disliked and that's more about disagreement or whatever.

Trickster Eric Novels gives "Seinfeld and Philosophy" an A
