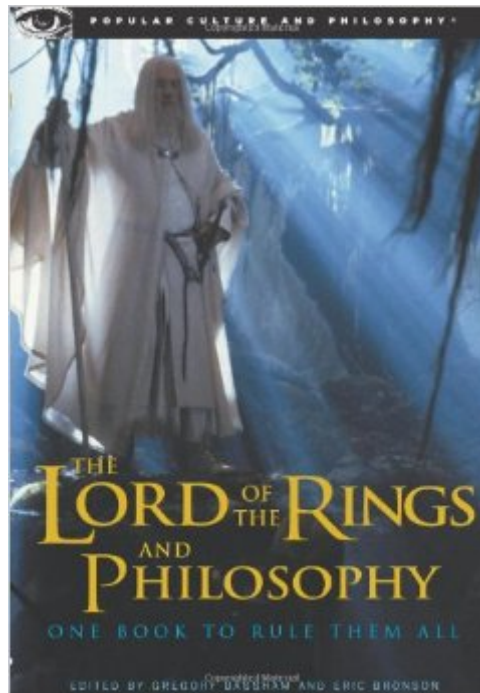


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The Lord Of The Rings And Philosophy: One Book To Rule Them All (Popular Culture And Philosophy)



Synopsis

The Lord of the Rings is intended to be applicable to the real world of relationships, religion, pleasure, pain, and politics. Tolkien himself said that his grand tale of wizards, orcs, hobbits, and elves was aimed at truth and good morals in the actual world. Analysis of the popular appeal of The Lord of the Rings (on websites and elsewhere) shows that Tolkien fans are hungry for discussion of the urgent moral and cosmological issues arising out of this fantastic epic story. Can political power be wielded for good, or must it always corrupt? Does technology destroy the truly human? Is it morally wrong to give up hope? Can we find meaning in chance events? In *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy*, seventeen young philosophy professors, all of them ardent Tolkien fans and most of them contributors to the four earlier volumes in the Popular Culture and Philosophy series, address some of these important issues and show how clues to their solutions may be found in the imaginary world of Middle-earth. The book is divided into five sections, concerned with Power and the Ring, the Quest for Happiness, Good and Evil in Middle-earth, Time and Mortality, and the Relevance

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Customer Reviews

This book, despite the ostentatious title which Tolkien himself might've disavowed (he might humbly have thought that the Bible and other works, not his own books, were the true "books to rule them all"), is well worth reading. It covers many aspects of philosophy and thought, including Plato,

Nietzsche, existentialism, Eastern religion, etc., which do not always receive the discussion vis-a-vis Tolkien that they deserve. One of the best essays is Alison Milbank's "'My Precious': Tolkien's Fetishized Ring", an analysis which resembles Brenda Partridge's (in)famous 1983-or-so essay "No Sex, Please, We're Hobbits: The Construction of Female Sexuality in The Lord of the Rings", in its commentary on Shelob's scary voracity. Milbank also mentions Karl Marx's "commodity fetishism" as a factor in Tolkien's work (and the Ruling Ring is certainly one hot commodity in Middle-earth, even before Frodo "gives Gollum the finger" on Mount Doom and the action heats up a bit)...though Milbank notes that Tolkien probably had no "People's Republic of the Shire" in mind when writing Lord of the Rings!! Another standout essay is "Happy Endings and Religious Hope: The Lord of the Rings as an Epic Fairy Tale" by John J. Davenport. Of all the essays, it perhaps draws most deeply on a variety of Tolkien's works, including the Silmarillion and Tolkien's influential essay "On Fairy-Stories". Davenport, whose essay is the last in the book (and, significantly, at the end of the "Ends and Endings" group of essays), poses the hope that "Day will come again" ("Aure entuluvá" in the Elvish spoken at a desperate battle in the Silmarillion) not only in Middle-earth but also on our own earth, at least from Tolkien's Christian point of view which hopes for eventual reward for those who strive for right throughout their lives. Davenport ably invokes the Beowulf epic, the tales of King Arthur, and the Tolkien-favorite medieval story of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" in showing how Tolkien's goal of finding "joy, poignant as grief" is forwarded through The Lord of the Rings' combination of epic narrative with "eucatastrophe", Tolkien's brilliant term meaning more-or-less "a catastrophe of good" or "a surprise turn for the better, such as found in fairy tales". And indeed, as Davenport notes, the various "eucatastrophes" in Tolkien's trilogy do leave one with a taste of hope for something better in our futures, dark as the interim may be. Back to the book as a whole: although the still photo of the resurrected Gandalf from the Two Towers film gracing the cover looks a little cheesy (though still impressive), the light-from-above in the picture does remind us that there is something gleaming or "eternal" caught in the mesh of Tolkien's work, not mere idle fantasy. Though lacking the coherence and focus that a book-length piece would have, as opposed to the various scattered and short essays in "One Book to Rule Them All"--and I was sorely tempted to give only 4 stars for this book, because of this scatteredness--, "One Book" does a fine job of reminding us of the genius of Tolkien not only for entertaining narrative but also for offering serious thought about the meaning of life, and "One Book" does so all the better by its drawing on his fellow geniuses throughout the millenia to illustrate or complement his points. Two thumbs up (and any ring-fingers left on one's hand).

If you buy this book looking for what philosophical ideals Tolkien imbued his literature with, you may be disappointed with this book. While there are some essays I think Tolkien would certainly agree with, there are also many he wouldn't. This book is first and foremost about philosophy. What this book does is illustrate different philosophical ideas by using characters and situations from the Lord of the Rings as examples to help you understand. With this in mind, I think a lot of people can certainly enjoy this book.

the most disappointing so far in the 'popular culture and philosophy' series, these essays have little to do with either LotR or Philosophy in the traditional sense, instead attempting to cover everything from environmentalism to narrative structure. As a general format, the authors state their intentions to mold Tolkien's world to their own pet ideas and quote profusely while saying little that convinces. One of the essays even admits that the Buddhist parallels it's spent the last few pages proposing are clearly "superficial" - why waste the print, then? Another oddity here is a collection of quotes by various noted philosophers that have nothing to do with either the themes in LotR, or, in many cases, the topics the essays address. Extremely discouraging.

In this Popular Culture series, this is one of the better editions. The mix of approaches to Tolkien gives a broad range of ideas, and most of them are well thought out and presented. The intent here is not scholarly exegesis, which you can get in many other books. This is Tolkien looked at from a more general viewpoint, which is still a valid way to approach the books of Middle-earth. I don't have any problem recommending this collection of essays.

Fans of Tolkien and Middle Earth who have more than a passing interest in the topic will relish Lord Of The Rings And Philosophy, a collaboratively compiled compendium by Gregory Bassham and Eric Bronson of seventeen young philosophers who examine the myth, symbolism and philosophical foundations of Middle Earth. Applications to everyday living provide a seasoned assessment of insights on good, evil, freedom and basic issues raised in the course of the Lord of the Rings. The lively tone makes Lord Of The Rings And Philosophy completely accessible to academic scholars and non-specialist general readers alike.

The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy is a interesting book which seems to come at the problem from two directions. One direction is to examine the books, trying to understand the ideas and reasoning of the different characters by taking examples from the history of philosophy and the

great thinkers of philosophy. The other way seems to be to take philosophy and explain certain ideas, for example from early Greek thinkers, by using characters and events from the books as examples. In other words half the book is trying to explore the world of Middle-earth using philosophy as a road map while the other half the book explores our world of thought and ideas using understandable examples both adults, and some children, will know from Middle-earth. That IS the point of the series - using popular culture to help examine, explain and explore thought. Questions about ethics, what does it mean to be good, why BE good, would you WISH to live forever, and is technology evil are all examined. Some of the answers ARE interesting and also add, I think, to Tolkien's works. The thing is I think if you are into the Lord of the Rings, either the books or the movies, you may have already gone over many of these questions in your mind. So you may find the book boring or, at least, somewhat limited in scope. There are no real surprises. A good book to read during a snow storm in front of the fireplace IF you have no other new books around. Of course, I would suggest getting *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* if you don't already have it.

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