YOU MUST UNLEARN WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED
THE ULTIMATE STAR WARS AND PHILOSOPHY
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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YOU MUST UNLEARN WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

Edited by
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WILEY Blackwell
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The Star Wars saga has inspired us to explore questions of metaphysics, morality, politics, and the seven forms of lightsaber combat, from our earliest years as younglings, through our apprenticeship as padawan philosophers, to becoming Socratic Knights and, perhaps one day, Masters of Reason – and hopefully not Dark Lords of any sort! For this tremendous influence on our intellectual formation, we owe an incalculable debt of gratitude to Grand Master George Lucas and all of his creative collaborators, as well as the authors and artists who’ve expanded the saga from the Dawn of the Jedi more than 36,000 years before the Battle of Yavin (BBY) through the continuing Legacy of the Skywalker family over 130 years after the Battle of Yavin (ABY).

They say it takes an Ewok village to destroy a Death Star, but it takes much more to assemble a book like this. First of all, this book wouldn’t exist without the contributions of the authors, and we recommend that their wisdom should be preserved in a Holocron for future generations. Tackling a Death Star also requires leadership of the likes of Admiral Ackbar or General Crix Madine. In our case, we benefited extensively from the experience of editorial Grand Moff Bill Irwin. It’s also essential to have some Bothan spies who can smuggle out the Death Star plans. For this project, we depended on the “insiders” at John Wiley & Sons, Liam Cooper and Allison Kostka, to guide us to our target.

Our widows to Star Wars, Suzanne and Jennifer, have patiently endured years of our debating the taxation of trade routes in the Outer
Rim territories, the romantic wooing skills of future Sith Lords, what sort of crystal powers a purple lightsaber, why AT-ATs don’t explode when they’re standing but do after they’re brought down, and whether the Sarlaac looks better with or without its beak. Finally, passing on the *Star Wars* legacy to our children, Kennedy, Ethan, Jack, and August, has been a source of tremendous joy for us as we engaged in mock lightsaber duels and taught them the crucial importance of remembering that HAN SHOT FIRST!
Introduction
“The Circle Is Now Complete”

*Star Wars* has always inspired probing questions:

**January 31, 1997:** Lucasfilm/20th Century Fox releases the “Special Edition” of *Episode IV: A New Hope*, igniting a firestorm of controversy over the question, “Who shot first – Han or Greedo?”

**May 19, 1999:** Lucasfilm/20th Century Fox releases *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*, creating deep public concern centered on the question, “Why is Jar Jar even in this movie?”

**May 19, 2005:** Lucasfilm/20th Century Fox releases *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* with its implied violent deaths of younglings and Anakin’s gory immolation scene, raising the question in the minds of parents, “Is *Star Wars* still for kids?”

**April 25, 2014:** StarWars.com announces that the “Expanded Universe” of *Star Wars* outside of the films, radio, and television series is noncanonical, inviting dozens of novel and comic writers to ask the question, “What did I ever do to George?”

**November 28, 2014:** Lucasfilm releases the trailer for *Episode VII: The Force Awakens*, prompting aspiring Jedi Knights to question, “Does lightsaber design adhere to any safety standards?”
Beyond fan speculation, and sometimes fan angst, *Star Wars* has also inspired philosophical questions. Here are some examples (in the order Lucas intended):

**Episode I**: Does having a “destiny” foretold by prophecy rob a person of freedom?

**Episode II**: How does fear motivate the transformation of democracy into tyranny?

**Episode III**: Is the difference between good and evil merely a “point of view”?

**Episode IV**: Is wisdom truly a matter of trusting one’s feelings?

**Episode V**: Do we all have a “dark side” that we must confront within ourselves?

**Episode VI**: Is it possible to redeem a life spent causing so much evil and suffering?

**Episode VII**: Is having a beard essential to being a Jedi Master?

Clearly, much of the world has by now got *Star Wars* under its skin. The cultural significance of phrases like “Luke, I am your father,” “I’ve got a bad feeling about this,” and “Do or do not, there is no try” aren’t merely pop culture clichés. They’ve penetrated academia, and there are hundreds of scholarly articles and books examining the deeper meaning of George Lucas’s fantastical creation. One of these, *Star Wars and Philosophy: More Powerful than You Can Possibly Imagine* (Open Court, 2005), was put together by the valiant editors of the volume you’re currently reading and came to Lucas’s attention. This may have inspired him to ask a question of his own: “What other deep cultural connections could be made with *Star Wars*?” In turn, this question led him to commission a series of books relating themes in *Star Wars* with history, political science, and religion. In 2007, The History Channel premiered a documentary, *Star Wars: The Legacy Revealed*, which included interviews with scholars commenting on the saga’s historical and mythological roots and connections. As much as *Star Wars* presents us with thoughtful examples of philosophical Stoicism (with the Jedi’s calm detachment even when being chased by large gooferfish), or raises questions about the mysterious Force (is it an energy field or a bunch of midi-chlorians?) or the power of both hate and forgiveness (as the Emperor and Luke battle for Vader’s soul),
it also urges us to understand our own historical, religious, and political circumstances. *Star Wars* endures because we see ourselves in its myriad facets.

Of course, a lot has happened since the original *Star Wars and Philosophy* was published just before the release of *Episode III*, not the least of which are the excitement and enthusiasm generated by the knowledge that director J.J. Abrams is kicking off a new trilogy of films set some years after *Episode VI*, and that there are likely to be other films (a Boba Fett spinoff?) as well. As philosophers, the contributors of the various essays in the pages that follow can’t speculate on the deeper meaning of what’s yet to come. Indeed, as the German thinker G.W.F. Hegel claimed, philosophy only captures *its own time* in thought – so maybe this won’t be the “ultimate” volume on *Star Wars* and philosophy after the next trilogy is over! Still, the brilliant chapters you’re about to read contribute in novel ways to the critical appreciation of the *Star Wars* saga so far for fans and philosophers alike.

We’ve been able to delve into subjects that the original *Star Wars and Philosophy* missed, subjects prompted by not only the six feature films to date but also the *Clone Wars* television series and stories from the Expanded Universe. This book also includes new takes on familiar topics like the nature of the Force – does it *have* to have a dark side? – and whether the minds of droids are similar to our own. Feminist authors critically look at how women are portrayed (in elaborate headgear or in gold bikinis) and treated (choked by their husband or chained to a giant slug) in the films. There’s even a chapter on Boba Fett, our favorite bounty hunter, and his moral code (or lack thereof). Ties of family and friendship are important in the *Star Wars* galaxy, so several philosophers examine the moral psychology behind the relationships between characters from slaves to princesses. One chapter even answers the age-old question, “Can Chewie speak?”

We also examine the philosophical significance behind the impact of *Star Wars* on the real world as an important artifact of pop culture. Kevin Smith’s charge – voiced by slacker Randal in the film *Clerks* – that the Rebellion is actually a terrorist organization comes up for debate. Other chapters engage with the legacy of Joseph Campbell to examine the dark side of the saga’s mythological foundation, or offer a framework for understanding what’s “canonical” in *Star Wars* – giving fans good reason to assert once and for all that Han shot first.