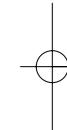
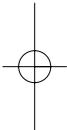


PART I

OPENING THE  
ANCIENT SCROLLS:  
CLASSIC  
PHILOSOPHERS AS  
COLONIAL PROPHETS



## 1

# HOW TO BE HAPPY AFTER THE END OF THE WORLD

*Erik D. Baldwin*

*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

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the only kind of happiness that's available to the "ragtag fleet." Nevertheless, we *do* think that many of the characters in *BSG* would be happier if they made better choices and had a clearer idea about what happiness *really* is.

### The Good Life: Booze, Pills, Hot and Cold Running Interns?

Aristotle (384–322 BCE), in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*), attempts to discover the highest good for humans, which he defines as *eudaimonia*. This Greek term roughly means living well or living a flourishing human life, what we may call "happiness." Aristotle claims, "Every craft and every line of inquiry, and likewise every action and decision, seems to seek some good; that is why some people were right to describe the good as that which everyone seeks" (*NE* 1094a1).<sup>1</sup> But people often disagree about the nature of the highest good: "many think [the highest good] is something obvious and evident—for instance, pleasure, wealth, or honor. Some take it to be one thing, others another. Indeed, the same person often changes his mind; for when he has fallen ill, he thinks happiness is health, and when he has fallen into poverty, he thinks it is wealth" (*NE* 1095a22–5). Despite such disagreement, Aristotle thinks we have at least *some* rough idea of what happiness is supposed to be. Starting from "what most of us believe" Aristotle articulates a set of formal criteria that the highest good must satisfy: it must be complete, self-sufficient, and comprehensive.<sup>2</sup>

For the highest good to be *complete* means it is something "we always choose . . . because of itself, never because of something else" (*NE* 1097b5). In order to be *self-sufficient* the highest good must "all by itself make a life choiceworthy and lacking nothing" (*NE* 1097b15). Finally, the highest good is *comprehensive* in that if one has it nothing could be added to one's life to make it any better. It's "the most choiceworthy of all other goods, [since] it is not counted as one good among many" (*NE* 1097b18–19). If a particular good fails any one of these criteria, then it can't be the highest good.

Many people clearly believe that the highest good is pleasure. But Aristotle thinks that a life lived in pursuit of pleasure is fitting for "grazing animals" and is desired only by "vulgar" and "slavish" people (*NE* 1095b20)—sort of like Baltar's estimation of the laborers

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on Arelon who like to “grab a pint down at the pub, finish off the evening with a good old fashioned fight.” Humans are capable of much more than pleasure, and so making the pursuit of pleasure our life’s goal, neglecting our higher-level cognitive capacities, would be shameful. Consider when Felix Gaeta pulls a gun on Baltar during the fall of New Caprica: “I believed in you . . . I believed in the dream of New Caprica . . . Not [Baltar]. He believed in the dream of Gaius Baltar. The good life. Booze, pills, hot and cold running interns. He led us to the Apocalypse” (“Exodus, Part 2”). Gaeta is rightly outraged at Baltar’s pursuit of pleasure and his failure to live up to his responsibilities as President. Baltar doesn’t deny his failure of character and literally begs Gaeta to shoot him. Despite having had more than his fair share of pleasure, Baltar’s despondency and self-loathing show that he knows something is amiss in his life. He’s *not* happy and thus illustrates that pleasure isn’t *self-sufficient*; pleasure alone doesn’t make life worthwhile. Since Baltar could add things that would make his life more worthwhile, such as protecting Hera, the human-Cylon hybrid child, or pursuing the “final five” Cylons with D’Anna/Three, pleasure isn’t comprehensive either. So pleasure can’t be our highest good.

Other people think that the highest good is honor and fame. Such is Lampkin’s goal. When President Roslin asks him why he wants “to represent that most hated man alive,” he responds, “For the fame. The glory” and even claims, “I was born for this” (“The Son Also Rises”). But Aristotle argues that the pursuit of fame and honor “appears to be too superficial to be what we are seeking [the highest good]; for it seems to depend more on those who honor than on the one honored, whereas we intuitively believe that the good is something of our own and hard to take from us” (*NE* 1095b25). Sure, Lampkin’s actions will be recorded in historical and legal texts, but when the “next big thing” happens, people are likely to forget about the significance of his deeds. And if the Cylons could wipe out the fleet, Lampkin’s fame would be completely extinguished. Perhaps, for the time being, Lampkin could be pleased that people *were* impressed by his accomplishments and that his accomplishments were “for the good.” But this would reveal that he merely pursued honor to convince himself that he’s good (*NE* 1095b27), and that his pursuit of fame and honor would be for the sake of something else. So Lampkin’s life goal would fail to be complete on Aristotle’s terms. It’s

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also far from clear that defending Baltar is the sort of thing for which one should want to be or even could be rightly famous.

Aristotle defines fame as “being respected by everybody, or having some quality that is desired by all men, or by most, or by the good, or the wise” (*Rhetoric* 1361a26).<sup>3</sup> Because he shows that Baltar isn’t guilty in the eyes of the law, Lampkin appears to be a good lawyer—he gets the job done. But Lampkin’s defense relies on manipulation and misrepresentation. He wears sunglasses to intimidate others and to hide his “tells.” He steals personal items from others “with the noblest of intentions” to learn what makes them tick. When Lee gets some dirt on Roslin, but claims that “it’s probably not even true,” Lampkin quips, “I like it already.” The *coup de grace* comes after Captain Kelly tries to kill him. Lampkin plays up the extent of his injuries by walking with a limp and a cane to engender sympathy. In “Crossroads, Part 2,” when the trial is over and he parts company with Lee, Lampkin casually discards his cane and does away with his limp. While these tactics help Lampkin successfully defend Baltar, the wise and the good cannot admire or respect Lampkin. Because of his manipulation and trickery, Lampkin can’t be famous according to Aristotle’s account of fame. Surely, Lampkin would be a much *better* and more virtuous lawyer if he were able to successfully defend Baltar without resorting to dirty tactics. In the end, because fame isn’t complete, self-sufficient, or comprehensive, pursuing it can’t be the highest good either.

We’ve ruled out two commonly proposed candidates for the highest good: pleasure and fame.<sup>4</sup> So Starbuck’s and Tigh’s alcohol abuse, Kat’s stim addiction, Baltar’s sexual misadventures, and Lampkin’s pursuit of fame and honor all fail as candidates for the highest good. We’re left asking: What life goal *does* satisfy Aristotle’s criteria for the highest good?

### “Be the Best Machines (and Humans) the Universe Has Ever Seen”

Aristotle contends that what’s good for something depends on its distinctive *function* and performing its unique function *excellently*. A Viper is excellent if it’s in good mechanical order, its guns are loaded with ammunition, its canopy isn’t cracked, and so on. A Viper in top

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condition can perform its function well—as a tool to flame Cylon Raiders. Similarly, Aristotle concludes that *if* human beings have a unique function, then what’s good for us depends on that function. He points out that the individual parts of a human body have specific functions: the heart pumps blood, the eyes see, and so on. Also, individual humans are able to perform various tasks: Chief Tyrol and his crew can fix Vipers and Doc Cottle can fix humans (although Dualla has her doubts). Given these facts, Aristotle claims that it’s reasonable to think that, just as Vipers have a unique function, humans, as a *species* and not just as individuals, also have a unique function.

With the rise of naturalism, atheism, and Darwinism, many people now reject the notion that humans have been “designed” or created. But other people have no problem accepting that we were created and given our unique function by God (or the Lords of Kobol). Despite disagreements about creation, most of us readily agree that knowledge of our *nature* is essential if we’re to discover what’s good for us as human beings. Everyone in the fleet knows that a diet consisting of tyllium, paper, and spare Viper parts isn’t healthy, but that processed algae, even though it tastes terrible, is good for them. Similarly, everyone in the fleet pursues familial, romantic, and other types of relationships because they know that such relationships are necessary for their psychological health and well-being. So in the same way that we know that we can’t go around eating anything and be healthy, we can’t pursue just any life goal if we want to be happy. We have an intuitive idea of what human nature is and how it determines our good.

Aristotle maintains that we must discover what function is distinctive or unique to humans if we’re to discover our highest good. Since humans share purely biological functions, such as nutrition, growth, metabolism, and the like, with other animals as well as plants, these can’t be the *proper* human function. Humans also share with animals the capacity to have desires and cognitions that allow environmental interaction. But while we have emotions, desires, attractions, and aversions, Aristotle argues that we must regulate them in accord with *reason* if we’re to live excellent *human* lives. He concludes that what separates us from all other animals is our ability to act rationally (*NE* 1098a9). To live an excellent, rational human life, one must cultivate *virtues*—particular character traits such as bravery, temperance, generosity, truthfulness, justice, and prudence—that regulate, but not tyrannically control or eliminate, our animal-like passions (*NE* 1106a16–24):

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By virtue I mean virtue of character; for this is about feelings and actions, and these admit of excess and deficiency, and an intermediate state. We can be afraid, for instance, or be confident, or have appetites, or get angry, or feel pity, and in general have pleasure and pain, both too much and too little, and in both ways not well. But having these feelings at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to virtue. (NE 1106b17–24)

Aristotle emphasizes that the human function is excellent *activity* that accords with reason and virtue in a complete life (NE 1098a10, 15–20).<sup>5</sup> As humans we must *actualize* our capacity for virtue to *be* virtuous. But once a particular virtue is attained, one maintains it as a *disposition* to act virtuously even when they’re not active. Starbuck is one of the best Viper pilots around, but if she’s in hack again for “striking a superior asshole,” her piloting skills are useless. Starbuck, though, isn’t a nugget and already has the *disposition* to be an excellent Viper pilot: she’s ready to exercise her skills to defend the fleet when necessary. So as long as she’s ready to go, Starbuck can be a virtuous Viper pilot even when she’s asleep (or doing whatever else she does under Hot Dog’s watchful eye) in her rack.

In addition to exercising virtue, Aristotle contends that a *complete* life must also include “external” goods:

Happiness evidently needs external goods to be added . . . since we cannot, or cannot easily, do fine actions if we lack the resources. For first of all, we use friends, wealth, and political power just as we use instruments.<sup>6</sup> Further, deprivation of certain [externals]—for instance, good birth, good children, beauty—mars our blessedness. For we do not altogether have the character of happiness if we look utterly repulsive or are ill-born, solitary, or childless. (NE 1099a25–b4)<sup>7</sup>

Constituents of happiness also include external goods such as fame and honor (for doing what’s good), good luck, and money (*Rhetoric* 1360b20–5). And so Aristotle views virtue as *almost* complete and self-sufficient for happiness; virtue is choiceworthy in itself in that, for the most part, it makes life worth living all by itself. But a life centered on virtue isn’t comprehensive because it can be made *more* choiceworthy if it includes external goods. And although virtuous people are more likely to secure for themselves external goods, they

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can fail to secure such goods and thereby miss out on the highest good. So virtue isn't to be identified with the highest good, but is instead the dominant part of happiness. Putting all this together, we see that while Aristotle thinks the virtues may be complete and self-sufficient for happiness *once attained* and able to be put into *action*, attaining and properly exercising the virtues requires external goods. Without such goods, one can't become or remain virtuous and so will miss out on happiness, the highest good for humans.

Probably no one in the Colonial fleet can acquire all the external goods that Aristotle believes are necessary to achieve the highest good. Humans have basic needs, such as food, water, shelter, and access to other natural resources. Ideally, the fleet should settle on a Cylon-free planet. But so long as the Colonials remain cooped up in spaceships, where they can't enjoy sunlight or natural beauty, must eat foul-tasting processed algae, aren't able to give their children a good upbringing, or amass much in the way of property or wealth, they can't have the external goods necessary for happiness. So, sadly, if Aristotle's view of happiness is correct, it would be quite difficult for the humans in the fleet to be happy in their current situation. They can only hope to be happy under better circumstances, and hence their desperation to find Earth. But is there a sort of happiness that's attainable in the Colonials' present situation?

**“Be Ready to Fight or You Dishonor the  
Reason Why We're Here”**

In contrast to Aristotle, the Stoics, a school of Greek philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium (333–264 BCE), maintain that virtue is not only necessary, but sufficient for happiness. The Stoics contend that while it's natural for humans to want “primary natural goods”—Aristotle's “external goods”—such as health, food, drink, shelter, property, and social well-being, only the cultivation of virtue is to our good. Thus, unlike Aristotle, the Stoics view virtue as the *only* thing that's good and vice as the only thing that's bad. Everything else is indifferent in that it doesn't add to or take away from our good. The Stoic philosopher Cicero (106–46 BCE) writes, “This constitutes the good, to which all things are referred, honorable actions and the

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honorable itself—which is considered to be the only good . . . the only thing that is to be chosen for its own sake; but none of the natural things are to be chosen for their own sake.”<sup>8</sup>

The Stoics think that we should aim at primary natural goods to act in accord with our unique natural function and exercise virtue. But we don’t need to actually acquire primary natural goods to be virtuous: “to do everything in order to acquire the primary natural things, even if we do not succeed, is honorable and the only thing worth choosing and the only good thing” (5.20). A Viper pilot who does his best to shoot down a Cylon Raider acts honorably and virtuously whether or not he succeeds. If Hot Dog “gives it his all,” then failure or success isn’t something he can control, and so he shouldn’t be blamed for a mission gone bad—so long as he really did do his very best to succeed (3.20). This is why Apollo awards Hot Dog his wings for helping Starbuck fight off a pack of Raiders, even though the battle ended with Starbuck missing and Hot Dog in need of rescue (“Act of Contrition”). The Stoics think the goal we ought to strive for isn’t success or external goods. Rather, our goal should be to do everything in accord with virtue, which is the will of Nature. The Stoics believe that Nature is Divine and that everything happens in accord with the providential will of Divine Reason: “no detail, not even the smallest, can happen otherwise than in accordance with universal nature and her plan.”<sup>9</sup> Hence, everything that happens is “for the good.” No matter how bad things might seem—even the destruction of the Twelve Colonies—the Stoics argue that we can take comfort in knowing that everything is for the good. If the Cylons invade Earth and all our family and friends die, we needn’t start drinking, carousing, or whatnot, but can seek to carry on and live virtuous lives to the extent we’re able.

Stoic ideals are attractive to people who undergo great suffering and hardship, and thus can have great practical benefit. The former slave Epictetus (ca. 55–135 CE) provides a short handbook on Stoic philosophy to encourage others to discover for themselves the sort of happiness Stoics seek.<sup>10</sup> He recommends that if we desire whatever happens, there’s no way for us to be unhappy (§1, §2). We ought to treat everything we lose as if it were a small glass, as no matter of great consequence, even the death of a spouse or child (§3). We should “never say about anything, ‘I have lost it,’ but instead, ‘I have

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given it back'” (§11). In a sense, we're merely guests in this life and should treat our possessions as “not our own,” as if they were items in a room at an inn (§12). These may be tough ideals for some of us to accept, but in many ways they seem particularly well-suited to the Colonials. By Stoic standards, even Colonel Tigh could achieve the highest good and be happy.

Tigh is plagued by personal problems and misfortune. But, from a Stoic point of view, is he really all that far away from happiness? While his struggle with alcoholism clearly gets in the way, his heart is set on being a good soldier, not for the sake of pleasure or fame, but because it's his duty. Michael Hogan (who portrays Tigh) says of him, “Tigh [realizes] that his life is with the military; he's a warrior, a career soldier, and that's what he does . . . His lot in life is to protect people's ability to live their lives of freedom . . . He's an old soldier and he feels someone's got to stay and fight.”<sup>11</sup> This conviction is ever-present and never completely wavers, even though it's severely strained by his drinking, his poor choices as commander of the fleet after Adama is shot, his torture and the loss of his right eye in the Cylon detention center on New Caprica, and the heart-wrenching fact that he killed Ellen for collaborating with the Cylons. Even after all of this, paradoxically, his discovery that he's a Cylon seems only to reinforce the importance of his life's goal.

In “Crossroads, Part 2,” in response to Tyrol, Anders, and Tory's confusion after discovering they're all Cylons, Tigh pulls himself together as soon as the alert klaxon sounds, “The ship is under attack. We do our jobs. Report to your stations!” The others are hesitant, but Tigh proclaims, “My name is Saul Tigh. I am an officer in the Colonial Fleet. Whatever else I am, whatever else it means, that's the man I want to be. And if I die today, that's the man I'll be.” As if he were following Epictetus' handbook, Tigh now wants things to be just as they are: he has a job to do no matter what happens, and no matter what happens he will do his job. This clearly fits with Stoic ideals, such as doing one's duty, as well as understanding and accepting one's lot in life. Tigh reports to the CIC and tells Admiral Adama that he can count on him in such a way that one can't help but get the impression that he's realized his life goal and purpose and that he accepts who he is, what he's doing, and why he's doing it. It seems that Tigh, despite the recent discovery of his Cylon nature, may yet find happiness as defined by the Stoics.<sup>12</sup>

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### “Each of Us Plays a Role. Each Time a Different Role”

In *The Encheiridion*, Epictetus writes, “Remember that you are an actor in a play, which is as the playwright wants it to be: short if he wants it short, long if he wants it long. If he wants you to play a beggar, play even this part skillfully, or a cripple, or a public official, or a private citizen. What is yours is to play the assigned part well. But to choose it belongs to someone else” (§17). The Colonials’ religious beliefs are in many ways similar to the Stoics’ beliefs. Roslin echoes Epictetus when she says, “If you believe in the gods, then you believe in the cycle of time, that we are all playing our parts in a story that is told again and again and again throughout eternity” (“Kobol’s Last Gleaming, Part 1”). Like the Colonials, the Stoics accept a cyclical conception of time and believe that the same events occur over and over again. Even though we can’t fully understand how everything fits together, the Stoics believe that, because “Divine Reason” is in control, everything that happens is for the best and that “nothing bad by nature happens in the world” (§28).

Humans can understand the hand of Divine Providence “naturally” through the use of reason and the cultivation of the virtues, and so we can, to some small extent, understand the part that we’re playing in the overall story. Since our reasoning powers are limited, though, we can only figure out so much. But what we can figure enables us to be content in knowing that all things work together for the good. While the Stoics advocate the use of reason to gain an understanding of Divine Providence, in *BSG*, seeing Providence—be it the Lords of Kobol or the Cylon God—involves visions and mystical experiences. During his interrogation by Starbuck, Leoben claims to have a special insight into reality: “To know the face of God is to know madness. I see the universe. I see the patterns. I see the foreshadowing that precedes every moment of every day . . . A part of me swims in the stream. But in truth, I’m standing on the shore. The current never takes me downstream” (“Flesh and Bone”). President Roslin has visions induced by chamalla extract (“The Hand of God”). D’Anna/Three has a vision of the “final five” in the Temple of Five on the algae planet and immediately dies (“Rapture”). The Hybrid

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who controls each Cylon baseship seems to babble nonsensically to most ears, but not to Leoben and Baltar. She recognizes Baltar as “the chosen one” and tells him a riddle that allows him to find the Eye of Jupiter (“Torn”; “Rapture”). Athena, Roslin, and Caprica Six share a simultaneous dream involving Hera (“Crossroads”). And Starbuck has a vision that allows her to make amends to her mother and encourages her to give herself over to her destiny, “to discover what lies in the space between life and death” (“Maelstrom”).

As these and other events unfold in the *BSG* story, it seems more and more obvious that *something* is orchestrating, that there is a grand plan. Clearly, there’s something very mysterious about the fact that Tigh, Anders, Tyrol, and Tory not only survived the destruction of the Twelve Colonies, but all ended up on *Galactica*. It seems that whoever is in charge of events—whether it be the Lords of Kobol or the one true God of the Cylons—set things up to unfold in just this way. Several other characters have either realized or are beginning to realize that they have a part to play, and that although they didn’t choose to play it, it’s best if they embrace their destiny and desire what has been given them. In so doing, they seem to progress towards accepting something very similar to the Stoic view of happiness. Starbuck not only embraces the idea that she has a special destiny, she’s starting to fulfill it. As events unfold, it looks like Baltar really is “the chosen one”—at least in the eyes of some attractive young women. With the return of her cancer, and her special role as the Colonial president, Roslin has good reason to believe she’s fulfilling the role of the dying leader who will guide the Colonials to Earth.

While *BSG* is “just a story,” it’s a good story that encourages us to think about providence, fate, and the meaning of happiness. Like Aristotle, many of us think that external goods are necessary for happiness. But we know that we can’t always acquire these goods, or least not enough of them, and so many of us continue to live more or less unhappy lives. Like the Colonials, many of us tend to think that we can’t be happy in this life. Thus, while we might at first be put off by the Stoic view of happiness, it may end up looking more appealing after careful reflection. Perhaps we’d be better off acting in accord with Nature, being indifferent towards external goods, and choosing to live the role that we may be destined to fulfill in the cosmic “story.”

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## NOTES

- 1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd edn. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999).
- 2 Aristotle doesn't start from "what most of us believe" in order to beg any questions or because he's intellectually lazy. Rather, he tells us that "it would be futile to examine all these beliefs [about the highest good], and it is enough to examine those that are most current or seem to have something going for them" (*NE* 1095a30).
- 3 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Dover, 2004).
- 4 Another kind of life is that of the moneymaker. But Aristotle rules the moneymaker's life out of hand because "wealth is not the good we are seeking, since it is [merely] useful, [choiceworthy] for some other end" (*NE* 1096a8). Although the characters in *BSG* have no reason to concern themselves with money in their current lifestyle, we're shown the unhappy consequences of underhanded dealing for goods and services—and people ("Black Market").
- 5 One might wonder whether Cylons have the same function as humans. This turns on whether Cylons are mere machines or are in some sense persons. In either case, being created by humans, Cylons aren't naturally occurring, but are *artifacts*. As such, Cylons don't have a natural goal or unique function. Whatever unique function Cylons may have was originally given by the humans who made them "to make life easier on the Twelve Colonies."
- 6 Aristotle isn't saying that we merely *use* our friends, as Lee seems to use Dualla as a romantic replacement for Starbuck, but that we must rely on them to help us in mutually beneficial ways.
- 7 Some of the specific external goods Aristotle cites are unique to his day and age, and so this list may be different in contemporary circumstances or in the context of *BSG*.
- 8 Cicero, *On Goals*, in *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, trans. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson, 2nd edn. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 3.20.
- 9 Chrysippus, *On Nature*, Book I, in *The Stoics*, trans. F. H. Sandbach, 2nd edn. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 101–2.
- 10 Epictetus, *The Encheiridion*, trans. Nicholas P. White (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983).
- 11 David Bassom, *Battlestar Galactica: The Official Companion—Season Two* (London: Titan Books, 2006), 127.
- 12 Of course, this impression that Tigh has found his life's purpose and, perhaps, even happiness remains apparent depending on what personal issues he may have yet to face in Season Four.