ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT AND PHILOSOPHY
ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT AND PHILOSOPHY
THEY’VE MADE A HUGE MISTAKE

Edited by Kristopher Phillips and J. Jeremy Wisnewski

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: And Now a Few Words from the New CEOs of the Bluth Company ix

INTRODUCTION
   Kristopher Phillips

PART ONE

FAMILY FIRST

1 Is the Examined Life a Huge Mistake?: Happiness, Self-Knowledge, and the Bluths
   Jason Southworth and Ruth Tallman 7

2 Kissing Cousins: Incest, Naturalism, and the Yuck Factor
   Deborah R. Barnbaum 23

3 Freudian Arrested Development
   Tim Jung 33

4 Don’t Know Thyself: Gob and the Wisdom of Bad Faith
   Daniel P. Malloy 46
PART TWO
A BUSINESS MODEL

5 Dr. Fünke’s 100 Percent Natural Good-Time Alienation Solution
Jeff Ewing

6 Family First: How Not to Run a Business
Brett Gaul

7 Bourgeois Bluths: Arrested Development and Class Status
Rachel McKinney

PART THREE
SOME HUGE MISTAKES

8 What Whitey Isn’t Ready to Hear: Social Identity in Arrested Development
J. Jeremy Wisnewski

9 “I Just Blue Myself”: The Use and Abuse of Language in Arrested Development
M. E. Verrochi

10 To Bias Tobias: Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Arrested Development
Darci Doll

11 I’m Oscar.com: The Problem(s) of Personal Identity in Arrested Development
Kristopher Phillips

PART FOUR
THE ONE WHERE THEY DO EPISTEMOLOGY

12 You Can’t Do Magic: Gob Bluth and the Illusionists’ Craft
Michael Cholbi
CONTENTS

13 Is Justified True Bluth Belief Knowledge? 162
   Brett Coppenger and Kristopher Phillips

14 Bunkers and Balls: Arrested Development,
   Underdetermination, and the
   Theory-ladenness of Observation 172
   Michael Da Silva

PART FIVE

SOLID AS IRAQ: POLITICS AND ETHICS
ARRESTED

15 No Touching! George Sr.’s Brush with Treason 185
   Douglas Paletta and Paul Franco

16 “I’ve Made a Huge Mistake”: George Oscar
   Bluth Jr. and the Role of Error in Character
   Development 197
   Christopher C. Kirby, Jonathan Hillard,
   and Mathew Holmes

17 The Comedy of Contradiction 210
   Erin Fay and Willie Young

PART SIX

AND ON THE EPILOGUE . . .

18 And Now the Story of a Wealthy Family
   Who Lost Everything: Arrested Development,
   Narrative, and How We Find Meaning 227
   Tyler Shores

CONTRIBUTORS: Banana Stand Employee Roster 241
INDEX: Banana Stand Inventory 247
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
And Now a Few Words from the New CEOs
of the Bluth Company

Three years ago we set out to keep this family together . . . and it looks as if . . . (pardon us if we get a bit choked up here) it looks as if we’ve succeeded in that goal. Okay, maybe we’re not really the CEOs of any company, and we certainly didn’t succeed in keeping the Bluths on television, let alone together, but we do have some people to thank for making this book happen.

We really lucked out a number of times and would like to extend serious thanks to our Banana Stand staff both for moving the Bluth Company down one floor to save on costs and ultimately saving the company, and for contributing wonderful works to our book without having made too many huge mistakes. We’re also endlessly grateful to Connie Santistiban for making this work sparkle, and Bill Irwin for his Michael-esque patience in working with Kris’s (very) Buster-esque pestering (panic attacks and all) about the viability of the project.

Kris would like to thank Shawn Akbar and Amber Griffioen for their help and encouragement; you guys are the Gob and Lindsay to his Buster. He would also like to thank various co-graduate students at the U of I for reading papers and giving him invaluable feedback, in particular Seth Jones, Sam Taylor,
and Matt Drabek. Kris would also like to extend thanks to his parents Jeff and Joyce Phillips, mostly for being nothing like George Sr. and Lucille, and by that he means, for encouraging him every step of the way. Most importantly, he would like to thank his wife Nateasa McGuire for reading, re-reading, and listening to him read the papers in this book, for giving him ideas much better than those that he came up with himself, and for all of your support.

Jeremy would like to thank Jackie Seamon for reading through the book, hunting out mistakes, and then yelling about them. He would also like to thank all of those friends who listened to him recite scenes from episodes of Arrested Development, patiently smiling, and indulging him despite the oodles of other things they had to do. You know who you are. Finally, Jeremy would like to thank his wife, Dorothy, for her continuous support. He wouldn’t make it without her. The children also deserve a thank you. It ain’t easy being a philosopher’s kid—so thanks are due to Audrey and Lucian.

Of course, frozen bananas dipped in chocolate deserve the most thanks of all. When things get rough, after all, there’s always money in the Banana Stand.
This is the story of a wealthy family who lost everything (including their show) and the group of philosophers who had no choice but to write a book about it.

Well, it’s a matter of philosophical debate whether or not we really had a choice in the matter (or ever), but one thing is for sure—we really wanted to.

The reasons for wanting to write on the philosophical underpinnings in Arrested Development are probably as diverse as the characters in the show—I, for one, had many different reasons, including (and certainly not limited to) an intense desire to watch and rewatch the entire series with friends and professors. As I watched, and rewatched, I found myself wondering whether the Bluths really are as unrelatable as they think they are (at least in the third season).

As I watched Buster, the youngest of the Bluth boys and the self-proclaimed “scholar” of the family, it occurred to me that perhaps the show ended prematurely not because the
family is weird and difficult to relate to, but rather because each character might be seen to exhibit the traits that we are afraid (“fear turns to anger . . . so frightened inmate number 2 isn’t frightened at all, he’s a crabby old coot!”) that we exhibit in the various roles we fill. For example, I often fear that Buster represents academics in general (or at least perpetual graduate students), especially those of us that tend to study the more esoteric—heady—topics. Buster is someone who is “moderately intelligent” and uses his family’s considerable assets to pursue academic avenues that—well, let’s face it—really don’t offer much by way of preparation for the real world; didn’t everything get mapped out by Magellan, or NASA? Buster’s life embodies the spirit of the question most often asked to students of philosophy: “What are you going to do with that?”

And Buster is not alone in representing what academics might fear about themselves; just take a look at Tobias. Qua (in the role of) academic, Tobias has an impressive resume: He “was chief resident of psychiatry at Mass General for two years and did [his] fellowship in psycholinguistics at MIT.” Not too shabby. Not to mention the fact that he was both a practicing therapist and a practicing analyst—a professional twice over . . . but the business cards almost got him arrested, and with good reason! Tobias engenders the old archetype of the academic who is so well educated that he just doesn’t really know how to be a real person; he lacks common sense entirely, which might explain the “analrapist” business cards, and the administering of CPR to a sleeping (but healthy) tourist. The traits he embodies, when we look at him as an academic, make him an exaggeration of those fears that academics may have—the total loss of ability to relate to anyone else, complete failure to function in the world, and so on, and all for the cost of an impressive academic resume.

While it’s not always obvious how some academic pursuits prepare their scholars for the real world, surprising and
extenuating circumstances do pop up.\textsuperscript{1} I am optimistic that even if the principles of seventeenth century agrarian business don’t quite apply to the housing development business today (we’re not too concerned about any uprisings . . . are we?), by the end of this book, the philosophers who contributed to it will have convinced you that the principles of seventeenth-century \textit{philosophy} (and those that are “much, much . . . MUCH older”) really do apply to everyday life in the O.C. (don’t call it that)—as well as to life in general. Besides being relevant to everyday life, philosophy might even be able to help prevent you from emulating Gob—that is, we might even help you to avoid making “a huge mistake.”

\textbf{NOTE}

1. Who would have guessed that a philosophy education could be used to edit a book on the Bluths?
PART ONE

FAMILY FIRST
Ignorance is bliss—or is it? While you hear that little nugget of folk wisdom fairly often, some people desire the truth regardless of the repercussions. On the side of ignorance, George Michael decides not to tell Maeby that she’s adopted (she’s really not) because he thinks she is happier believing she is her parents’ biological child. Michael chooses not to tell George Michael that he slept with his ethics teacher (after George Michael professed his love for Ms. Barely), because George Michael is happier not knowing. Yet, on the side of truth, George Sr. escapes from a Mexican prison only to go home to verify his wife’s relationship with his brother. So what makes us happier, ignorance or knowledge?
For centuries, analrapists and philosophers have come down on the side of knowledge. I mean, we philosophers really need to know the truth (about everything!); we need to know so badly that we even need you to need to know. If you don’t, we’re unhappy. On the other side of the debate is... basically everyone else. Sure, when we’re feeling uncharitable we’ll point to the MR. Fs and “moron jocks” (Steve Holt (!)) who prefer ignorance, but when we’re being fair, philosophers will admit that there are plenty of smart people who seem to think we’re wrong about self-knowledge being the key to happiness. Since there are no smart people on television, let’s take the Bluths as our guides in reconsidering whether ignorance really is bliss.

The Life of Arrested Development Is Not Worth Living

Plato (428/427 BCE–348/347 BCE) is the most famous proponent of the view that self-awareness is the hallmark of a happy person. In his account of the trial and death of his mentor, Socrates (c. 469 BCE–399 BCE), Plato depicts a man who thought pursuing the truth about himself, others, and the world was the most important thing anybody could ever do—indeed, that it was worth dying for (would any member of the Bluth family do that?). Socrates spent his life trying to convince those around him to reflect on their lives and on their values, and to think critically about the kinds of people they were. This comes through clearly in his rebuke of the accusers at his trial: “Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul?”

Socrates’s actions made him an enemy of many in Athens (no one likes to be told they’re behaving badly). Despite the lack of support, and outright hostility of many, Socrates continued
to reflect on his own life and urged others to do the same, saying, “Examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living.” Eventually, the people of Athens had enough and gave Socrates a choice—stop with the philosophy or face the death penalty. If this seems like an awfully strict punishment, you might not realize just how obnoxious Socrates could be.

Facing death, he had this to say: “You are mistaken, my friend, if you think that a man who is worth anything ought to spend his time weighing up the prospects of life and death. He has only one thing to consider in performing any action; that is, whether he is acting justly or unjustly, like a good man or a bad one.” Socrates would say that Gob’s worries about the next illusion, Lindsay’s worries about finding a suitable partner in adultery, and Tobias’s fears of being nude all fail to consider what is really important. Our crucial concern should always come down to one question: Am I being moral?

Socrates not only believed that self-reflection was essential—he thought it was desirable. Thinking critically and pursuing truth, he believed, leads to the greatest happiness. He often conveyed his teachings through stories, and one of his most famous is called the Myth of the Cave. In this story, Socrates describes the human condition as analogous to people who are imprisoned—chained in a dark cave, where they never see anything real, but rather, only see shadows of real people and objects as they are reflected by firelight on the walls of the cave. As far as the prisoners know, the limited existence they experience in the cave is the whole of reality. If one of those prisoners were to get free and emerge from the cave into the light, he would be temporarily blinded, much like George Sr. probably was when he emerged from his underground hiding place. In the myth, though, things are even worse for those who see the light outside the cave. They’re seeing it for the first time. After a period of adjustment, the escaped prisoners
will finally see the world as it really is, rather than as shadowy reflections. They will, in fact, find that reality is far more fulfilling than cave life ever could be.

The story doesn’t end there, however. If one of the freed prisoners were to return to the cave and explain to those still chained what he’d witnessed in the world above, they would laugh at him. They would scoff because, after being in the sunlight, his sight in the darkness of the cave would be far less keen than theirs. Like Buster Bluth, the freed prisoner would be inept in the everyday world of the cave dwellers. Unlike Buster Bluth, though, this ineptitude would be the result of seeing the truth. The former prisoner of the cave would claim to be happier than those chained below, but the cave dwellers would have no interest in leaving the warm complacency of cave life.8

What does this strange story mean? Socrates thinks that most of us spend our lives shrouded in illusion. We think we’re great magicians, or awesome actors, or brilliant businessmen. Our understanding of the world is clouded and inaccurate, just like the people in the cave. Unlike the prisoners in the story, however, our chains are of our own making. We can break free anytime we like, just by opening our eyes, looking around, thinking critically, and refusing to let our minds be lulled and soothed by false but comforting beliefs. Shaking off our familiar misconceptions will be uncomfortable at first, just as it was uncomfortable for the prisoner when he first emerged into the light. But once we adjust to the sharpness and purity of reality, we’ll achieve a happiness that is equally sharp and pure, and we’ll never again be content to live a life of self-delusion. This is what Socrates called “happiness.” Happy people are those who have seen illusion and reality and are in a position to choose between them. And every person in that situation will embrace truth, even when it’s difficult or painful. Socrates says that this happiness is so compelling, he will not deviate from his pursuit of truth, no, “. . .not even if I have to die a hundred deaths.”9
The Myth of the Cave shares some things in common with the pilot of *Arrested Development*. Think back to the first morning we met the Bluths. Michael was excited, because he believed he would be made partner that day. Michael was living in the cave with his family. He was not seeing reality for what it really was. Though he had worked at the company faithfully every day, he was totally unaware of what had been going on around him. He didn’t know that everyone else in the family was happily living off the company money, that his twin sister had been in town for weeks, or that his father was in serious danger of being arrested for illegal business practices too numerous to mention. He dreamily reminds George Michael that family (not breakfast) is the most important thing.

George Sr.’s boat party was a turning point for Michael. It was then that Michael was yanked out of the warm, comforting darkness of the cave and shoved up into the cold light of reality. Within minutes, Michael’s illusions about his father, his importance in the company, and his future were shattered. First he learns, publicly and with no explanation, that his mother, who as far as he knows doesn’t even work for the company, bypassed him as partner. Moments later, he learns that his father has obviously been involved in some pretty bad stuff, as he is hauled away in handcuffs. Michael is shocked but quickly makes the decision to face reality. Now, he says, he really sees the world clearly. Now he knows the score. He will not return to the cave. He will go out and make a life for himself and his son in Phoenix, far away from his cave-dwelling relatives.

The remaining Bluths see things differently, however. From their vantage point in the cave, Michael looks like a fool. Where does he think he’s going? In fact, Lucille “would rather be dead in California than alive in Arizona!” So, the family stages an intervention (which sounds more like an imposition). Michael, though, is already out of the cave. His eyes have
adjusted to the sun, and he realizes that what he’s done doesn’t call for an intervention (I’d love to call it an imposition). Those in the cave and those who have emerged literally see things differently. Both prefer to remain where they are, and think those who do otherwise have made a huge mistake. This disagreement about how to live is clear throughout the series. Michael frequently criticizes his family’s behavior, urging them to think about their lives and behave differently. Of course, this makes them angry and resentful (Lucille tells Michael that he is her second least favorite child, and Gob repeatedly calls him a robot... “the boy who couldn’t cry”). Both sides think they’re right, but Socrates’s point is that only those who have emerged from the cave are in a position to make a call about which life is better. Socrates’s claim is that a life of self-reflection and the critical search for truth is a better life, and will lead to more happiness. But let’s take a look at the Bluths to see if the wisdom of Socrates can be confirmed.

**Michael: “The Good One, the Moral One, the Fool.”**

Socrates would predict that Michael would be the happiest Bluth. After all, Michael is the member of the Bluth family who has most clearly emerged from the cave. He pokes his head back in sometimes to talk to his loved ones who still live there, and sometimes his perception of reality gets confused, but Michael tries to live a just, thoughtful life. He thinks critically about his actions and is aware of the fact that his behavior sometimes falls short of his own ideals. When this happens, he doesn’t brush it aside, instead he reflects and considers how to behave better in the future. When Michael realizes that much of his dislike for Ann (George Michael’s bland girlfriend) stems from jealousy over his son’s affection, Michael takes steps to accept her as a part of his son’s life. Michael thinks this is the right thing to do, but he also sees this type of reflective
life, of striving to know and better oneself, as the path to happiness. After getting to know Ann, however, Michael faces a sad truth—he really doesn’t like her. Michael bravely faces the reality many parents face—he just doesn’t like the person his son has chosen to date. Michael embraces the truth and is left disappointed.

The situation with Ann doesn’t look like a fluke either. It looks as if Michael’s level of happiness is proportionate to his level of self-deception. When is he saddest? When he sees reality most clearly; when Michael realizes that George Michael prefers to hang out with “Egg” over bikeriding with his dad. When he realizes (repeatedly) that his father doesn’t trust him and continues to deceive him. When he’s the only attendee at his mom’s surprise party (twice). When he learns he is about to marry an MR F. When is Michael the happiest? When he is violating his own moral code by doing things he thinks he shouldn’t. This usually involves sex with a forbidden partner—his brother’s girlfriend, his son’s teacher, his father’s prosecutor. When he thinks his mother is genuinely concerned about his well-being after a car accident (really, she’s framing him for an accident she caused; after all, she is one of the “world’s worst drivers”). When he allows himself to be swept up in a delusion, like the time he almost married an MR F. Sure, he was unhappy when he discovered the truth, but Michael was happy as a clam as long as the deception held. Michael’s awareness of reality makes him less happy than deception. Let’s not be hasty though; perhaps some of the other Bluths can lend credence to Socrates’s claim.

**Gob: “They’re Laughing with Me, Michael, They’re Laughing with Me.”**

What do we know about Gob? He is in his mid- to late-thirties. He’s never been in a serious relationship. He’s been blackballed from the professional organization of his chosen
trade (which he founded), the Magicians’ Alliance. He has no stable income or home. Yet, Gob sees himself as a superstar. Despite the fact that his illusions end in failure more often than not, despite the fact that he can’t find work and is considered a joke within his profession, and despite the fact that his family openly ridicules his trade, Gob sees himself as a master illusionist. His professional identity is tied up in a self-conception that has no basis in reality. There are many, many signs that would cue a normally functioning human being into the fact that Gob is a terrible magician. He regularly kills his live props (and then returns them from whence they came), his fireballs never trigger (but still, where did the lighter fluid come from?), and bystanders with no experience in magic can figure out how his illusions work. Yet Gob never sways in his deep, ungrounded belief that he is an excellent illusionist.

When he is made figurehead president of the Bluth Company (and we’re fine with that), he immediately begins to self-identify as an expensive suit-wearing CEO (C’mon!), despite the fact that he does no real work for the company. And Gob’s self-deception is not restricted to his professional life. He fancies himself a philanderer but rarely manages to actually “seal the deal.” Just consider his marriage, which remained unconsummated for months, despite his repeated claims to the contrary. Gob has every reason to see his life as a failure. Yet he appears to be one of the happiest members of the Bluth family. He is confident and vivacious, certain he is always in the know, even though every adult member of his family repeatedly and successfully deceives him. In fact, the only times Gob appears to be unhappy are in the rare moments when he sees himself clearly for what he is (like when he wakes up in the hospital, having failed in an illusion and having been stabbed with a shiv. He made a huge mistake). But for times like that, Gob has a steady supply of forget-me-nows.
Lindsay: “You Call Yourself an Environmentalist, Why Don’t You Go Club a Few Beavers?”

A stereotypical privileged daughter, Lindsay has not pursued a career. Instead, she devotes herself to maintaining her appearance and is a crusader for social justice. Unfortunately, Lindsay couldn’t care less about any of the causes she spends her time championing. She wastes food at a benefit for world hunger, opposes the war in Iraq because her hairdresser is being called to active duty (leaving her in need of a stylist), and is uncertain about what exactly she is supposed to be doing with the wetlands. “Dry them?” she guesses.

Lindsay sees herself as a good mother, yet fails to recognize that her daughter is flunking out of school. Believing it to be an award, she has Maeby’s expulsion letter from the “new age feel-goodery” Openings framed. She also considers herself to be a good daughter, but only visits her father in prison three times, with each visit motivated by the frustrated desire for leers and cat calls from the inmates (in her distorted version of reality, this would be the ultimate self-esteem boost). Lindsay brags about being employed while everyone else loafs around, but all she ever managed was a job offer (anyone can get a job offer), and she is fired for sleeping through the job after celebrating the job (offer) with money that she had not yet earned. To be fair, she did work at a clothing store once, but she was so invested in her public image she lied about the job, preferring that everyone believe she was stealing.

Similarly, Lindsay brags about keeping the house clean, but the two times she claimed to clean it she actually tricked someone else into doing the job (Lupe the first time, and Tobias—Mrs. Featherbottom—the second). Whenever she begins to see the ugly truth of her life, Lindsay immediately descends deeper within the cave. When she and Tobias finally admit to each...
other that their marriage is not working, she quickly switches gears. After an admittedly delusional suggestion of Tobias’s ("it never works; these people somehow delude themselves into thinking that it might but—but it might work for us"), Lindsay proclaims their relationship an open marriage. She then happily engages in an imagined competition with Tobias over who will manage to have an affair first, even though neither of them do more than brag and scheme. Lindsay guards carefully against ever having to face her life for what it really is—and she’s happy because of it.

**Tobias: “You Blow Hard.”**

Tobias is perhaps the saddest member of the Bluth family, though he rarely recognizes this himself. He usually manages to glide along, deeply, happily self-deluded. Even more so than Gob, Tobias’s professional identification is simply in his mind. Like Gob, Tobias has no reason to believe that he’s any good at his chosen profession. After a few failed attempts to land work, Tobias is happy to spend most of his time on the couch. He blissfully wallows in his conception of himself as a misunderstood actor who strives for work, while actually watching bad TV and experimenting with his wife’s wildly overpriced beauty products.

Tobias twists every situation to better match what he takes himself to be (an actor) and what he takes himself to be doing (searching for his breakthrough role). Despite good evidence to the contrary, Tobias insists on understanding his gym buddy, Frank, as anything but what he really is. When it becomes clear that Frank is not interested in him sexually, Tobias hears “agent” and assumes it to mean “talent agent.” He misunderstands Frank as saying that he works for the CAA (Creative Arts Agency), when in fact he works for the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). He interprets Frank’s request that he be a mole as Frank wanting him to don a giant mole suit and