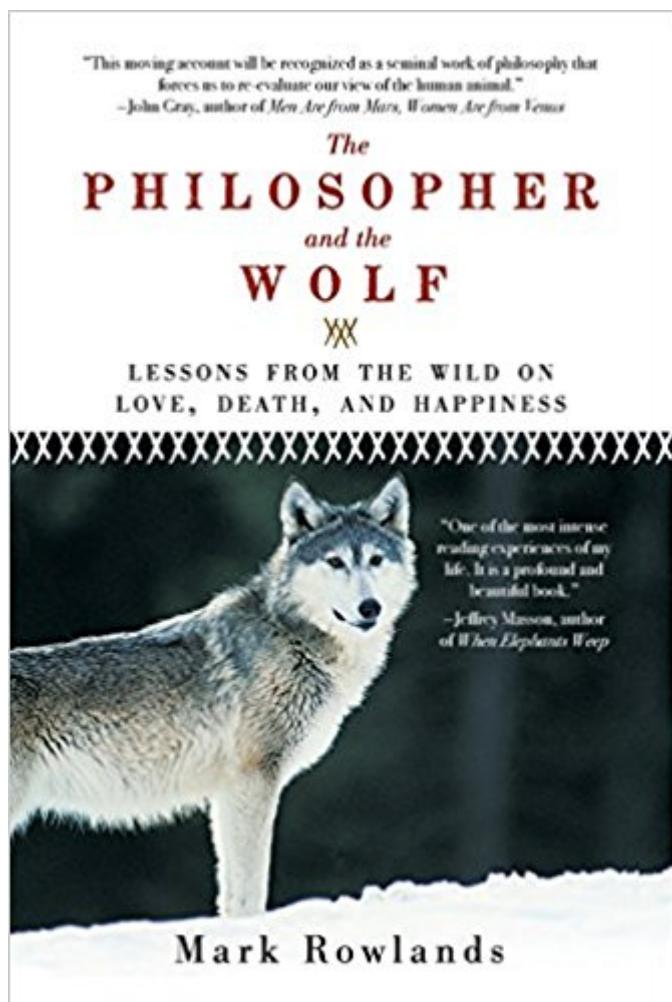


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# The Philosopher And The Wolf: Lessons From The Wild On Love, Death, And Happiness



## Synopsis

The charming and poignant story of the relationship between a philosophy professor and his pet wolf. Mark Rowlands was a young philosophy professor, rootless and searching for life's greater meaning. Shortly after arriving at the University of Alabama, he noticed a classified ad in the local paper advertising wolf cubs for sale, and decided he had to investigate, if only out of curiosity. It was love at first sight, and the bond that grew between philosopher and wolf reaffirms for us the incredible relationships that exist between man and animal. When Mark welcomed his new companion, Brenin, into his home, but more than just an exotic pet, Brenin exerted an immense influence on Rowlands both as a person, and, strangely enough, as a philosopher, leading him to reevaluate his attitude toward love, happiness, nature, death, and the true meaning of companionship.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“The wolf . . . is the clearing in the human soul. The wolf uncovers what is hidden.” A philosophy professor and author (Body Language, 2006), Rowlands grew up with dogs, big dogs, so when he saw an advertisement for wolf cubs, he went to have a look. When he saw the soft, fluffy cubs and their imposing parents, he took one home that day. Since his new pup, called Brenin, could not be at home alone without leaving utter destruction in his wake, Rowlands began to take him everywhere. By training the wolf to take his lead, Rowlands taught Brenin how to be comfortable with all sorts of circumstances. Their remarkable closeness, both physical and mental,

led to this book—â•a sort of autobiography mixed with wolf philosophy, human philosophy, and an exploration of the bonds between human and animal. Discussing what humans can learn from wolves, Rowlands elevates the run-of-the-mill memoir about life with an exotic pet into something more, a treatise on the meaning of true companionship. This one moves well beyond the Rascal mode. --Nancy Bent

“Not everyone can blend wildlife lore and Wittgenstein in an entertaining manner, but Rowlands has no trouble. Delightful and eye-opening.” - Connie Ogle, Miami Herald  
“A snarly misanthrope, Rowlands recovered his own humanity by loving a noble beast and (with a little help from Aristotle, Descartes, and Jack Daniel’s) learning to howl at the moon.” - O, The Oprah Magazine  
“One of the most intense reading experiences of my life. It is a profound and beautiful book.” - Jeffrey Masson, author of *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals*  
“This moving account will be recognized as a seminal work of philosophy that forces us to re-evaluate our view of the human animal.” - John Gray, author of *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*

The Philosopher and the Wolf is a profound and original book. But I never would have found it if it hadn’t been recommended to me. Even after I ordered it, it sat on my shelf for over a year before I finally picked it up. I can understand why the back cover copy didn’t grab my attention, because this is a rather difficult book to describe. It’s not quite an autobiography, because the author is often overshadowed by the wolf, and neither of them is the main character. It’s not quite philosophy although Rowlands presents complex theories with a brilliant ease that makes them applicable to everyday life. And it’s not quite a nature book, either. And so we’re stuck with that vague catch-all term “memoir.” But this feels unsatisfying somehow. Because to me this book is so much more. The Philosopher and the Wolf is a beautiful and often hilarious story about a man’s relationship with a wild creature who became his friend and brother: Brenin was an extraordinarily well-travelled wolf, living in the US, Ireland, England, and, finally, France. And because the wolf’s penchant for property damage meant he couldn’t be left at home alone, he was also the, largely unwilling, beneficiary of more free university education than any wolf that ever lived. He was a philosophy professor, and so he brought his wolf to work with him. Brenin sat

beneath his desk each day, through all his lectures. And their constant companionship forms the underlying thread of the story. The prose is crisp and powerful. And Rowlands’ honesty is admirable, and sometimes painful to read. This passage about the author is reclusive misanthropic tendencies really spoke to me: “There is something lacking in me. And, over the years, it has slowly dawned on me that the choices I have made, and the life I have lived, have been a response to this lack. What is most significant about me, I think, is what I am missing.” He attempts to come to terms with these realizations through the lessons that his friendship with Brenin have revealed to him. But to label this book as a memoir would be to ignore so much else. *The Philosopher and the Wolf* is also about ourselves as a species: the ways in which we differ from the creatures around us. And how our simian cunning and deceptiveness gradually shaped our worldview in ways that set us on a developmental path which veered sharply from that of other animals. And *The Philosopher and the Wolf* is also about our constant search for happiness. In one of the most moving chapters of the book, as Rowlands struggles to come to terms with Brenin’s death, he writes: “The human search for happiness is regressive and futile. And at the end of every line is only nevermore. Nevermore to feel the sun on your face. Nevermore to see the smile on the lips of the one you love, or the twinkling in their eyes. Our conception of our lives and the meaning of those lives is organized around a vision of loss. No wonder time’s arrow horrifies us as well as fascinates us. No wonder we try to find happiness in the new and unusual – in any deviation, no matter how small, from the arrow’s path. Our rebellion may be nothing more than a futile spasm, but it is certainly understandable. Our understanding of time is our damnation.” And in the end, *The Philosopher and the Wolf* is about how to find meaning in a life that doesn’t have an intrinsic meaning of its own. Rowlands’ life with Brenin taught him what he was made of in his greatest and most painful moments. And this is something that not even time or futility or the void can take away from us. “What is most important in your life is the you that remains when your hope runs out.”

A friend insisted I get this book. She said I would laugh, I would cry, I would love it. This book was torture to read. If he had stuck with the wolf, we would have been fine. There was way too much philosopher. I disagreed with 90% of his philosophy. The author said he wrote most of his books while drunk. I would believe that, though he claimed to now be sober. It reads like a narcissistic rant

when he starts going off on the views of various philosophers. If you can't stand animal torture, do not read this book. At that point, I was ready to give up but decided to wait for the laughs. They were not worth it. The wolves, I highly recommend, but they are too small a part of this book. I could not recommend the philosopher. I am glad he now has a happy life but the time I spent reading this, I will never get back.

Once I starting reading *The Philosopher and the Wolf* I was almost sure I wouldn't like it and would have to force myself to wade through it if I ever intended to get to the end. Having read a number of books on wolves, Rowlands' book challenged what I had come to believe: wolf-keeping should be left to the professionals; never allow a wolf off a leash in a city; wolf owners and their "pets" are tragedies waiting to happen, etc. But a funny thing happened about midway through the book.

Rowlands and Brenin won me over with their special bond. Oh sure, there were still times when Rowlands' actions made me roll my eyes and wonder 'what the hell were you thinking?' But beneath it all, this is a story about two very different souls who have much to teach each other - and us. Or maybe, as a middle-aged man and a bit of a misanthrope myself, I could just relate to Rowlands and his bond with Brenin which seems so close to my bond with my more conventional four-legged family. I suppose I could still quibble about how I'd rather see wolves running free in their natural environment rather than turned into pets, but once I got over my prejudices it made for fascinating reading. I know of no other book where you can find an account of a wolf tearing up an apartment only a few lines away from philosophical musings on time and life's meaning. But being a misanthrope myself I feel obligated to criticize Rowlands for something; thus let me state unequivocally that his writing style can get a bit pedantic when he starts loading up his sentences with too many independent clauses.

At the advice of a friend and colleague I have just re-read Rowlands' *The Philosopher and the Wolf*. It is a gem, not only through the author's powerful story about his life with a beloved animal, but as a deep reflection on many themes relevant to human life and our attempts to deal with these themes. I was encouraged to read this "wolf book" (actually a hybrid wolf-dog most likely, but no matter) as I am engaged in writing my own book about a wolf I lived with in England, New York, Oregon and Nova Scotia, where he died. In this book, *Lupey Journals: Lessons From The Heart Of A Wolf* (see [lupeywolf.com](http://lupeywolf.com)), I attempt to weave three themes together, the journals and my initial reflections upon what I observed, a brief summary of what science can tell us about nature, and the deep mysteries that experience and science open up to us. The task is not easy, as I need to speak in

different voices, and thus deeply admire Rowlands skills as a powerful thinker and literary craftsman. His experiences with his animal are deeply moving and insightful. I have much to learn from his writings and explorations of what makes us tick, as will all readers who have any compassion for the diversity of life with which we share this planet. I am delighted my friend suggested I give the book a re-read. Even better on the second read. It is a treasure. John C. Fentress, PhD

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