

SAGA
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An academic *Star Wars* fan journal

The Saga Journal is a monthly on-line academic review dedicated to the in-depth study of the Star Wars saga as presented in George Lucas's six-film series. Our goal is to deliver one of the best collections of scholarly essays on the subject that the internet has to offer.

Here at the Saga Journal, we believe Star Wars is more than just an enjoyable space opera set in a galaxy far, far away. We recognize it as a modern myth, a cultural phenomenon all its own. We want to encourage the literary exploration of all aspects of the story as presented in the Prequel and Original Trilogy films.

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Sidious the Serpent

by ami-padme

The devil has long served as the personification of evil in both religion and literature throughout the ages. In different cultures, histories, and stories, he has taken on a variety of easily recognizable forms and characteristics. Even in tales that do not specifically have Satan himself as a character – or are not based upon the beliefs of real-world religion – the devil is often found in characters meant to embody the archetype. This is true of the *Star Wars* saga, where the character of Palpatine serves as the true devil figure. As the Emperor and Dark Lord of the Sith, Palpatine is more than just another “bad guy.” He is *the* “bad guy” and takes on multiple markers of the devil throughout the films. *Star Wars* is often cast as a basic story of good versus evil; by relating Palpatine to the definition of evil, that main thrust of the story is strengthened and deepened.

To expound on the basic point, Palpatine acts as the most direct personification of evil in the *Star Wars* story. Palpatine is a Sith, one of “[a]n ancient order of Force-practitioners devoted to the dark side...a menace long thought extinct.”¹ The dark side essentially is evil – the audience learns that it consists of many (if not all) of the negative traits, emotions, and resulting actions that people experience and work to conquer or control. The dark side is based in selfishness and impulse, in lust for power and control. It is destructive and corrosive to people and the systems they have created; it feeds off confusion, anger, and suffering. The Sith are followers and users of the dark side, cultivating all of these negatives in a quest to attain supremacy and might in the galaxy. Palpatine is one of four Sith characters in the movies, but he is the only Sith Master the audience ever sees. He rules the Order during the 30-plus years between Episodes I and VI. Maul, Tyranus, and Vader all follow him, to varying degrees of slavishness. Until his defeat in *Return of the Jedi*, Palpatine is firmly in control of the Sith and his apprentices, masterminding a number of wide-reaching plots.

Wikipedia states: “The Devil is the name given to a supernatural entity, who...is the central embodiment of evil.”² In multiple religions (and in religion-based literature), the devil is God’s arch-nemesis, in opposition to all that is good. He commands Hell, or the Underworld, holding dominion over his subjects – those condemned to eternal suffering – and his followers, including demons, spirits, and worshippers. “In Christian teaching,” according to the Religion Facts website, “the leader of the rebellious angels was Satan, who [became] humanity’s chief adversary.”³ As with Palpatine, the central point is not simply that the devil is “bad,” but that he is true and pure evil.

George Lucas himself says of *Revenge of the Sith*, that Anakin “made a deal with the Devil... and lost.”

One of the manifestations of that malevolence is the ability of Satan, or a Satan-like character, to seduce, tempt, and otherwise successfully corrupt people and the systems they inhabit. Often, they are able to do this without their victims fully realizing what is happening. Palpatine, of course, is quite infamous for this, particularly with regard to his conversion of Anakin Skywalker to the dark side of the Force, and his later, unsuccessful attempt with Anakin’s son, Luke Skywalker. George Lucas himself says of *Revenge of the Sith*, that Anakin “made a deal with the Devil...and lost.”⁴ Palpatine spent years cultivating a relationship with Anakin, quietly planting the seeds that would later lead the young Jedi to reject his Order and the Republic he had served for most of his life, as well as his sense of right and wrong. There was no such luxury of time with Luke, however, he (with Vader’s help) was still nearly successful in getting him to succumb, showing the strength of Palpatine’s ability to confuse and ruin otherwise good people. It also can be assumed that Count Dooku went through a process at least

generally similar to that of the Skywalkers when changing from a respected Jedi Master to a Sith apprentice by the events of *Attack of the Clones*; his biography on StarWars.com states that “Dooku had been corrupted by the power of the dark side. After his departure from the Jedi order, Dooku was seduced to the dark side by Darth Sidious...”⁵

More subtle examples also exist. For instance, in *The Phantom Menace*, Palpatine leads an unknowing Padmé astray as he maneuvers her into taking a critical step in his scheme to rule the Galactic Republic. His discussions with her upon her arrival to Coruscant are designed to lead her to the conclusion that a no-confidence vote is her planet’s best chance of gaining the government’s help with the recent invasion. During the session in the Senate chamber, Palpatine drives his point home with a few careful and well-placed words to Padmé, as she watches the Chancellor fail to act. The imagery of this scene evokes a clear image of the devil – Palpatine whispers in Padmé’s ear much as the devil, in the guise of a snake, whispers to Eve as she considers whether to eat the fruit in the Garden of Eden.⁶ More generally, Palpatine manipulates the entire Republic, pushing it into war with the Separatists, staying in office well beyond his term limits, and finally, creating an oppressive Empire to the delight of his deluded Senate colleagues.

Satan delights in the downfall of people and the ruin of systems, and seems to constantly work to pull people from the right path. In the Bible he is referred to directly as “the tempter”⁷ and Wikipedia adds, “None escape his temptations. He is continually soliciting men to sin.”⁸ The Christian Bible contains several stories of the devil’s efforts to tempt people – including Eve, of course, and a famous failure with Christ.⁹ In the Old Testament, the fate of Israel and the Jewish people as a nation often related to their leaders’ or fighters’ decisions to listen to God’s instructions and follow His will.

Palpatine’s duplicitous nature is not only key to his ability to tempt and lead others astray, it also plays into his overall physical appearance and mannerisms, and the look of the devil is an important facet of the archetype. Though Satan’s physical appearance is only described once in the Bible (as a particularly fantastic monster-creature in the book of Revelations), many traditional ideas of his appearance have emerged in art and literature. The devil has horns, hindquarters, and a forked tail. He carries a strident spear.¹⁰ He has red skin and a generally frightening visage. However, he apparently has the ability to change his appearance – his coming to Eve as a snake suggests that, and it is unknown how he appeared to Christ.

Palpatine also relies on being able to control his look, and eventually, his look reflects his inner, evil nature. Palpatine the politician is a perfectly normal, even kindly, non-threatening older man. He mentors both Padmé and Anakin, and appears to be well-liked and trusted by those he works with and rules over. Sidious the Dark Lord of the Sith is a dark, hidden figure, lost within the black robes that constantly conceal him. He speaks with a deeper, more deliberate, and more threatening voice. In Episode III, his face is badly disfigured and his voice is likewise distorted by his own Force lightning during his duel with Mace Windu. He maintains this look, without any attempt at the further pretense of the Palpatine persona’s appearance, for the rest of the saga as his ruthless plans are finally executed.

Aside from revealing Palpatine’s true nature, the fight with Mace Windu – and with three other Jedi Masters – shows Palpatine’s great power in the Force. The devil also has great power. The devil cannot claim final victory over God (and is eventually portrayed as defeated following a large battle against God¹¹), and in *Star Wars*, the dark side is finally defeated by the Light, with Palpatine destroyed, evil often gives the impression of winning important battles, despite losing the overall war. The power of the devil in religion provides a heightened sense of drama in the battle of individuals and their souls, and in the context of *Star Wars*, Palpatine needs to be powerful to create a credible threat to venerable

institutions such as the Jedi Order and the Galactic Republic. He also must be a Master to a rabid fighter like Maul, a seasoned Jedi like Dooku, and a powerful but troubled Anakin, all while responding to the Jedi-Separatist-Rebellion threats to his rule, and running a Republic and Empire. His power, and his ability to challenge the “good guys” and their institutions (though ultimately losing to them) is a key part of the story, and to his devil-like figure.

Palpatine/Darth Sidious is one of the *Star Wars* saga’s most memorable and intriguing characters, because of his powerful, duplicitous, deceptive, frightening, and evil natures. His connection to the religious and literary traditions of the devil helps bring depth to the contemporary story told in these six films.

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⁴ Windolf, Jim. “Star Wars, The Last Battle.” *Vanity Fair*. 11 January 2005.

⁵ Count Dooku databank entry from the official *Star Wars* website, StarWars.com, <starwars.com/databank/character/countdooku/index.html>

⁶ Genesis 3. *The Holy Bible*, Authorized King James Version. Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1989.

⁷ Matthew 4:3. *The Holy Bible*.

⁸ Wikipedia.com. “Devil in Christianity.”

⁹ Matthew 4:1-11. *The Holy Bible*.

¹⁰ Wikipedia.com.

¹¹ Wikipedia.com.

Thwarted by the Dark Side: Poor Leadership and Vader's Legacy

by Michelle Drumm

The effort to understand and account for the varying styles of leadership, and the effectiveness of each in a particular situation, has resulted in a wealth of literature. Over the years, new theories and models of leadership have emerged, each purporting to account for factors that affect leadership and, in turn, followership. Scholars of the subject have examined leaders from history and business to analyze their styles, their strengths and weaknesses, and have attempted to trace a link between their legacies as leaders and the practices they engaged. The assumption here is that it is possible to learn by examples – both good and bad – and mimic or build upon successful approaches, and shy away from those that had devastating effects. Rarely, however, has anyone taken to explore the world of fictional leaders, and attempted to learn from examples not real, but imagined.

Fiction, in all its forms, allows for creators to draw out characters that are believable because they reflect real, lived experience – proportionally or through caricature. Screenwriters and novelists, poets and playwrights all have at one point or another worked for someone else. They have lived through work relationships and have learned from them. When they engage in the creative process, they write what they know, what they have seen, and what they have learned. Their creative work, then, while it may engage in the use of caricature to accentuate or amplify strengths and weaknesses, is a record of years of participation in working relationships and/or a record of history lessons well-learned. Additionally, the characters they create resonate with the consumers of their art because of shared experiences and shared values. These fictional characters are not free from the forces that control real relationships but are a product of them; they do not lead in a vacuum, but are drawn into a world that is similar to our own.

That said, the ability of fictional characters to provide instructive examples of leadership styles is evident. As mentioned above, caricature can be helpful because the qualities in which we are interested are amplified, which allows us to read them easily, and to interpret their success or failure as appropriate. In recent decades, a spate of pop culture representations of good and bad leadership has erupted. Homer Simpson can be seen as the ineffective father; *Braveheart's* William Wallis is the valiant and inspirational motivator; most of the characters from *Office Space* would be fired in a well-led business operation; J. K. Rowling's Dumbledore manages to ward off evil, keep spirits high (pun intended), and to engage the hearts, minds, and imaginations of hundreds of young students in the *Harry Potter* novels. However, despite this abundance of examples, perhaps George Lucas has succeeded in creating one of the greatest cautionary tales for the aspiring leader in his portrayal of Darth Vader's devastating reign of terror. Darth Vader embodies traits that make most contemporary leadership scholars cringe. To illustrate this point, below are several leadership traits considered to be admirable or desirable in a leader, and a brief analysis of how Darth Vader meets, or more commonly, does not meet the requirement. Through this analysis, it should be apparent that Darth Vader, while perhaps an excellent manager, is hardly a skilled leader.

Power versus Authority

Joseph Cangemi suggests that the true leader must receive his power from his followers, but in most circumstances, leaders in fact wield authority over their followers. To further explain the critical difference between power and authority, he writes, "Authority grants the legitimate right of a leader to entice, even force, others to do what is considered important to achieve. Authority gives the right to coerce, punish, or reward individuals in the leader's endeavor to achieve goals (161)." However, "Power is the individual's capacity to move others, to entice others, to persuade and encourage others to attain

specific goals...it is the capacity to influence and motivate people (161).” He points out that authority is merely granted by an organization, while power is awarded by those who will follow. This difference is crucial in that the way in which followers perceive their relationship with their leaders is defined by whether they regard their leaders as powerful, or merely authoritative. Followers will happily follow those who they have empowered, but will only grudgingly follow a person instilled with authority who has no power.

Darth Vader is of course a man endowed with authority – great authority – over his followers, but devoid of any real power over them. While many Imperial commanders fear him, they do not genuinely believe in him. Consider, for example, the sequence in the first movie, *Star Wars: A New Hope*, in which, despite his handed-down authority, Vader encounters resistance from one of the commanders. Vader cautions the men not to be too dependent upon the destructive power of the Death Star, as that “technological terror” is no match for the power of the force. While Vader receives his authority from the Emperor Palpatine, the force can be considered his source of power. Yet, the commander says to him, “Don’t try to frighten us with your sorcerer’s ways, Lord Vader. Your sad devotion to that ancient religion has not helped you conjure up the stolen data tapes...” To which Darth Vader responds, “I find your lack of faith disturbing,” while nearly strangling the commander to death. The behavior of the commander reveals that he does not want to grant Vader power, but he does recognize Vader’s authority over him, as acknowledged by his use of Vader’s title of Lord. Vader’s authority is inherent in his position. His attempt to lead by a personal strength that could be a true source of power fails miserably, and he is then left to depend upon his hollow authority.

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Inspiring Trust

Most scholars of leadership will agree that in order to lead effectively, it is necessary for the leader to win the trust of his followers. Cangemi suggests that successful leaders exhibit traits that lead their followers to believe that they should be trusted (166). Ira Chaleff goes as far as to say, “...trust is the single most important factor on which followers evaluate a leader (27).” Warren Bennis delves further into this phenomenon when he writes, “A leader creates a climate of trust...To do this, reward people for disagreeing, reward innovation, and tolerate failure. Don’t fire people because they goof (97).” It is the inspiration of trust that compels followers to imbue their leaders with the power spoken about above. Without trust and faith, a leader will have no followers, though she may have subjects, in the monarchic sense of the word.

Again, we see Darth Vader is not one to inspire trust in his followers. Rather, he controls by fear, building an environment charged with anxiety that is not conducive to productivity. For example, in response to the challenge offered by the member of the Imperial command mentioned above, Vader nearly strangles the man to death, which has a visible impact on the others at the table. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Vader goes so far as to kill another one of his followers for a miscalculation that reveals the Imperial presence to the Rebel Alliance on the planet Hoth, saying, “You have failed me for the last time, Admiral.” Immediately, he turns to a shaken nearby Captain and appoints him to the position of admiral – an outcome that makes the new Admiral visibly uncomfortable. Vader is not one to tolerate failure, nor to reward his followers for disagreeing. Under these circumstances, it is impossible for Vader to do anything more than merely control his followers by force or coercion. With this approach,

Vader is doomed to ultimate failure in that his people are merely following orders and not fighting for what they truly believe in.

Shared Values/Ability to Communicate Vision

Of course, the issue of what people believe raises further difficulties for our anti-hero. The creation and communication of a shared vision is another trait commonly considered essential to success in leadership. Chaleff suggests that “Followers and leaders both orbit around the purpose; followers do not orbit around their leader (41).” He explains that the core purpose (shared values) is the glue that binds participants in pursuit of a shared goal. Bennis writes, “To make dreams apparent to others, and to align people with them, leaders must communicate their vision (84).” This is of course not as simple as merely telling your desired followers your intentions – rather this means engaging them on a personal and passionate level. To do this, one must have certain shared values; otherwise the vision will be devoid of meaning. Gary Wills sums this up when he writes, “A leader whose qualities do not match those of potential followers is simply irrelevant: the world is not playing his or her game (65),” and later, “A corrupt people is not responsive to virtuous leadership (66).” The flip side of this is equally true: virtuous people are not likely to respond to corrupt leadership. To communicate a vision to your followers, you have to speak their language.

It is this point that Vader seems to miss entirely. He knows what he wants, but he fails to recruit others who feel passionately the same as he does. His vision is one that he does indeed passionately pursue, however, his most desired follower is one that does not share the same core values. Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader’s son and most desired companion in becoming master of the universe, is a man that honors self-knowledge and self-control, whereas Vader has lost his own self in the dark side of the Force and desires control over others. Young Skywalker even goes so far as to tell Darth Vader that he is out of touch with his true self. In *Return of the Jedi*, Vader lashes out at Luke telling him that the name of Anakin Skywalker has no meaning for him, to which Luke responds by saying, “It is the name of your true self; you’ve only forgotten.” This we later find out is true. In the meantime, however, Vader persists in trying to sell Luke on a vision that is the complete opposite of what he would desire, and is based on conquest and control. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Vader says to Luke, “Luke, you can destroy the Emperor...Join me and together we can rule the galaxy as father and son.” Vader’s value system is one that views authority and control over others as the ultimate goal – a goal that Luke does not share, which results in Luke’s steadfastness.

Conclusion

The closing sequences of *Return of the Jedi* reveal that it is the denial of self and absolute power that drives potentially good men to be bad leaders. Luke, perhaps by virtue of his mentoring relationship with the immortal transformational leader Yoda, is able to achieve the impossible by driving Vader to find the goodness within himself again, and against all odds. Vader was at one point the virtuous and integrity-filled Anakin Skywalker, but he was seduced by the dark side of the force and grew further and further away from his true self. The consequences of that behavior destroyed him.

In terms of the most basic definitions, Darth Vader is no leader; rather, he is a manager, capable of obtaining results. The question is, of course, are the results admirable? In short, they are not. Vader may, to paraphrase Peter Drucker, do things right, but he rarely does the right thing. He is able to control subordinates, but only by fear. He is able to marshal the troops, but is unable to inspire them to self-directed action. And, most unfortunately, he is unable to win the support of those he needs most to achieve his vision. These factors alone can foretell the failure of an over-zealous aspiring leader, but perhaps the most striking aspect of this extended metaphor relates to one of Peter Drucker’s convictions. Drucker has said, “The test of any leader is not what he or she accomplishes. It is what happens when

they leave the scene. It is the succession that is the test. If the enterprise collapses the moment [the leaders] leave, that is not leadership. That is – very bluntly – deception.” Vader’s death at the end of *Return of the Jedi* is quite literally the end of the Empire. Not having inspired others to his vision, Vader’s legacy of the Empire is nothing. The Rebel Alliance, led by such inspirational leaders as Yoda, Luke Skywalker, and Princess Leia Organa, is able to endure and to conquer darkness.

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Recommendation

Simple Studies

Title: *The Tao of Star Wars*
Author: John M. Porter, MD
ISBN: 0-89334-385-4
Publisher: Humanics
Copyright: 2003



Reviewed by lazypadawan.

Written by a surgeon/professor at the University of Arizona who has been a Taoist for several years, *The Tao of Star Wars* aspires to explain the basic tenets of Taoism through *Star Wars*. The most famous example of applying Taoism to popular culture is *The Tao of Winnie the Pooh*, and it pretty much follows the same principle. The idea is to use something familiar to help explain concepts that are foreign to the reader.

The Tao is based on the Tao te Ching, written by Lao Tzu over 2500 years ago. Along with Confucianism, it is the basis of Chinese philosophy and culture. The Tao te Ching is a fairly short document at 81 chapters, as compared to say, the Bible. And so is this book...it's only 114 pages long. With large text. But there's a plenty to learn from reading this book, beginning with a short crash course in the basic tenets of the Tao and then several chapters discussing these tenets in the context of the *Star Wars* saga. The chapter on Acceptance is quite prescient of the conflicting views of death in *Revenge of the Sith*: accepting that death is a part of life or fighting it tooth and nail. Present Moment Living could be reinterpreted as the Living Force or as Yoda's admonition to Luke about never keeping his mind where he was. Other tenets like Humility and Simplicity represent the Jedi's best ideals.

Not only is the book helpful to those who don't know anything about Taoism, the book is also beneficial for fans who have a hard time understanding some of the Eastern philosophical/religious influences on the saga. In short, you can see where Yoda's coming from.

Since the book was published in 2003, Porter's analysis covers Episodes I and IV-VI. However, it's easy to extrapolate the ideas presented in the book to *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith*. And, Porter intended the book as a springboard not only for discussion of the saga, but also as the beginning of an exploration of the Tao.

Discovering *Star Wars*

Bree

I got in big trouble in 7th grade, so I had to go to my brother and sister's babysitter's house with them over the summer, and they are big fans of *Star Wars* (the whole family). I saw a magazine that had Hayden Christensen and I thought he was so cute, and they told me that he was in Episode III. I really wanted to see it and they told me that I had to see all the movies to understand Episode III. And I watched all of them but III and I loved them. So that's my story of how I came to like *Star Wars*!

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