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Stoicism in the Stars: Yoda, the Emperor, and the Force

WILLIAM O. STEPHENS

Stoicism is the ancient Greek philosophy that originated in the third century B.C.E. in the “Stoa” or porch where Zeno of Citium taught in Athens. Stoicism counsels acting virtuously and without emotional disturbance while living in harmony with fate. But why care about Stoicism today? For one thing, Zeno’s followers, the Stoics, exerted enormous influence on Roman culture, Christianity, and Western philosophy for centuries. Today, Stoicism continues to receive a lot of attention from philosophers,¹ novelists,² soldier-politicians,³ and psychologists.⁴ This is because Stoic ideas provide an effective strategy for addressing conflicts and kinds of adversity faced in the real world. *Star Wars* fans too can benefit from some Stoicism.

Understanding the Force is key to understanding the *Star Wars* universe since how the Force is conceived, used, or ignored by the characters goes a long way to determining their identities, allegiances, and goals. What is it that makes the Force and the discipline necessary to master it so compelling to figures

¹ Check the internet for *The Stoic Voice Journal*, The Stoic Registry, The Stoic Foundation, The Stoic Place, and the International Stoic Forum.

² See Tom Wolfe, *A Man in Full* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998).

³ Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale is one of the most highly decorated officers in the history of the U.S. Navy. He credited Stoicism for his survival while a prisoner of war in Vietnam. He was Ross Perot’s Vice Presidential running mate in 1992.

⁴ Dr. Albert Ellis’s Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy is inspired by a Stoic approach to emotional problems.

like Luke, Yoda, and the Emperor? Stoicism helps reveal both the logic of the Light Side of the Force and the logic of the Dark Side. How Yoda and the Emperor understand the Force radically shapes their moral characters and drives their actions. A brief study of Stoicism will allow us to understand why Yoda and the Emperor can each be so devoted to contrary sides of the Force.

Appearance versus Reality: Jester or Jedi Master?

When Luke and Artoo arrive on Dagobah in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke instinctively brandishes his blaster when they are startled by an unthreatening, wizened, olive-skinned dwarf clad in rags. “Away put your weapon! I mean you no harm,” the cringing dwarf pleads. With his quirky sense of humor, Yoda remarks that Luke has *found* someone, though Luke doesn’t realize he has found the very Jedi master he is *looking for*. But while this puny goblin assures Luke he can help him, Luke doubts him. Luke explains that he is looking for a great warrior. Laughing, Yoda responds: “Wars not make one great.” This remark is ironic since “yoda” is Sanskrit for “warrior.” Yoda certainly *looks* nothing like a great warrior.

Yoda then *acts* like a silly beggar. He finds, nibbles on, and discards an untasty snack bar in Luke’s supplies. When he fights over a tiny power lamp with Artoo, Yoda looks even sillier. Luke is impatient to find the Jedi master, but the goofy goblin wants to eat first. So our first impression of Yoda is of a solitary, harmless, vulnerable, shabby, hungry geezer with a quirky sense of humor and an odd manner of speech. Yoda’s *appearance* inspires no awe at all.

Contrast this image with the first appearance of Darth Vader in *A New Hope* and the Emperor in *Return of the Jedi*. Moments after the first wave of stormtroopers, all clad in white armor, have blasted their way onto Princess Leia’s ship, a tall, dominating figure in a face-concealing helmet, cape, and armor, all in black, strides confidently amidst the victorious stormtroopers. He issues commands in a deep, rasping, mechanical, monotone voice. Vader appears menacing, invulnerable, and powerful, surrounded by his minions, who instantly obey his every command. This dark, imposing man-machine inspires awe. He is obviously a great warrior and a very powerful leader. As the

saga unfolds we discover that this great warrior obeys an even *more* powerful master. Massed ranks of Imperial officers and stormtroopers honor the arrival of the almighty Emperor on the second Death Star when he first appears in the flesh.⁵

Luke's first impressions of Yoda are of a jester, not a Jedi. Luke fails to see past appearances to the reality of Yoda's virtues. Yet the virtues that emerge from Yoda's words and actions reveal him as a Jedi master. Similarly, the virtues of the Stoic wise man are precisely what enable him to be happy no matter what. What specific virtues does Yoda display? When Yoda offers to take Luke to the Jedi master he seeks, Luke insists that it be done immediately. Instead, Yoda suggests that they first eat. When Luke objects, Yoda replies "For the Jedi it is time to eat as well." *Timeliness* is a virtue for Yoda. Why is it a virtue? Because just as *what* one does and *how* one does it matters, so too *when* one acts matters. Whereas Luke often doesn't act appropriately for the moment, Yoda's acts are timely. Timeliness is a key virtue for a Jedi, as it is for the Stoic wise man.

While Yoda prepares their first meal together, Luke is impatient to be brought to the Jedi master. Yoda urges Luke to have *patience*—a virtue Yoda has cultivated over centuries. Luke's impatience turns into frustration and vexation. Disappointed, Yoda addresses Obi-Wan Kenobi's disembodied presence, "I cannot teach him. The boy has no patience." It finally dawns on Luke that this weird, elderly goblin is the Jedi master himself. Appearance had blinded Luke to reality.

Yoda criticizes Luke for his inability to focus on his present situation. Yoda says, "All his life has he looked away . . . to the future, to the horizon. Never his mind on where he was . . . what he was doing." Yoda dismisses Luke's lust for adventure and excitement as things a Jedi does not crave. Yoda is never distracted by frivolous desires for adventure or excitement, nor does he worry about things beyond his control. This too is characteristic of the Stoic, who enjoys equanimity and peace of mind. Yoda focuses on the task at hand and how to act in the present, whether consulting with other Jedi, eating, training Luke, or resting. Focus on the present is another Jedi virtue, and one which is shared by the Stoic.

⁵ As opposed to the hologram in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Yoda cautions the young Anakin that "A Jedi must have the deepest commitment, the most serious mind." This warning is repeated decades later to Luke. Yoda's mental seriousness, deep commitment to the lifelong Jedi pursuit of mastering the Force, and rejection of frivolity, however, do not mean that he's humorless. Yoda indulges his sense of humor in allowing Luke to be blinded by his presumptions about what a Jedi master looks like.

Yoda observes in *The Empire Strikes Back* that there is much *anger* in Luke, like there was in his father. Yet Yoda, in contrast, never gets angry. As he says, "Fear is the path to the Dark Side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." Wiser words are never spoken in all of *Star Wars*. Later Yoda tells Luke: "Anger . . . fear . . . aggression. The Dark Side of the Force are they." This is the logic of the Light Side of the Force: (1) Fear leads to anger, then to hate, then to aggression. (2) Aggression leads to the suffering of *both* aggressor *and* victim. That Yoda is never seen to *suffer* implies that he is never fearful, angry, hateful, or aggressive. The Stoic wise man, just like Yoda, lacks the vices of fear, anger, hatred, and aggression. But does rejection of aggression require pacifism? When can a Jedi fight? Yoda says, "A Jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defense, never for attack." Although Yoda actively defends and protects when necessary,⁶ he lacks the vice of aggression.

Yoda wisely knows that fear, anger, hate, and aggression lead to suffering and the Dark Side of the Force, and his wisdom allows him to tell the difference between the Light Side and the Dark Side of the Force. Yoda explains to Luke that he will know the difference between the two when he is "calm, at peace, passive."

Stoicism and the Virtues of the Sage

Several elements of Stoicism help us to better understand Yoda's virtues. The Stoics believed that the goal of life was to live in agreement with Nature. This meant several things. First, Nature,

⁶ In *Attack of the Clones* Yoda, hobbling forward on his cane, uses the Force to defend himself from Count Dooku's telekinetic attacks. Yoda and Dooku, his former padawan, duel with lightsabers and Yoda protects his wounded comrades Obi-Wan and Anakin.

that is, the cosmos as a whole, is structured and well-ordered through and through according to *Logos*, reason. As I will explain more fully below, *Logos* is akin to the Force. Second, to live in agreement with Nature requires embracing and making good use of all events that unfold in this rationally structured universe. So living in harmony with cosmic events entails living in agreement with our distinctive human nature. While we have various functions in common with other animals, the Stoics believed that reason is our special, distinctive natural endowment. So to live well is to harmonize our distinctive human reason as individuals with the larger rational structure of the universe. The Stoic Epictetus (*ca.* 55–*ca.* 135 C.E.) says:

God has introduced humans into the world as spectators of himself and of his works; and not only as spectators, but interpreters of them. It is therefore shameful that humans should begin and end where irrational creatures do. We ought rather to begin there, but to end where nature itself has fixed our end, and that is in contemplation and understanding and a way of life in harmony with nature.⁷

The Stoics understood the perfection of reason to be virtue itself. So the successful, good human life is the life in agreement with virtue. Virtue is the one and only necessary and sufficient condition for the happy life, according to the Stoics. Vice guarantees misery. Because of this, they believed that virtue is the only thing that is really good, and that vice is the only thing that is really bad. Knowledge of what is really good, what is really bad, and what is neither, they thought, is crucial to living well. Moreover, the Stoics believed that all the virtues—wisdom, justice, courage, self-control, piety, and generosity—were really just perfected reason applied to various spheres of conduct.

Reason leads the Stoic to concentrate his mind on what is up to him and under his control rather than worrying about, fearing, anticipating, or being distracted by anything that is beyond his control and not up to him. Timely behavior, for example, is under one's control and is a virtue of the Stoic. This mindful concentration on what is within one's control allows the Stoic to

⁷ *Discourses* I.6.19–21; translation adapted from *The Discourses of Epictetus, The Handbook, Fragments*, edited by C. Gill (London: Dent, 1995), p. 17.

be calm and even-tempered no matter what happens, and to be high-minded and noble of heart by rising above trivial or frivolous matters that plague non-Stoics.

In addition, the Stoic seeks to free himself from all passion, excitement, and frivolity in order to be able to apply his reason reliably. The Stoics understood “passion” (*pathos* in Greek) to be a disturbing, unhealthy movement of the soul. That is why a sickness (of the soul) is called a *pathology*. The Stoic who has succeeded in freeing himself from all disturbances to his reason has become good. The Stoics believed that there are no degrees of goodness. Until a man is good, he is bad. For the Stoics, the good man thus functions as a prescriptive ideal known as the perfect wise man or “sage.” The sage’s soul is steady, orderly, completely virtuous, and it does not suffer from any “passion.” However, the Stoic sage is not devoid of all emotion. The Stoics believed that there were three “good emotional states” that were not pathological movements of the soul, namely, benevolence (wishing someone good things for his own sake), joy (in virtuous deeds), and caution (reasonable wariness).

Clearly Yoda has many Stoic traits. Yoda is free from the emotions that subvert reason. Yoda is not reckless or impatient, as Luke is at first. Nor is Yoda frivolous. Like a Stoic, Yoda never becomes perturbed or excited. Most significantly, Yoda does not succumb to anger. The ancient Roman Stoic Seneca (*ca.* 3–*ca.* 65 C.E.) called anger “the most hideous and frenzied of all the emotions.” Seneca thought angry people were insane, saying of anger:

Oblivious of decency, heedless of personal bonds, obstinate and intent on anything once started, closed to reasoning or advice, agitated on pretexts without foundation, incapable of discerning fairness or truth, it most resembles those ruins which crash in pieces over what they have crushed.⁸

Yoda also exhibits the positive emotions allowed to a Stoic. Since Yoda doesn't fear, get angry, or hate, he doesn't *suffer*. Yoda concentrates on what is up to him and what he can do in the present. He thus enjoys impassivity, the lack of disturbing

⁸ *On Anger* I.1.2, in *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays*, translated by J.M. Cooper and J.F. Procopé (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 17.

passions the Stoics called *apatheia*. Yoda is calm and even-tempered. He can tell the difference between the good and bad sides of the Force, and knows what is good, what is bad, and what is neither. Knowing that only virtue is good, only vice is bad, and everything else is really indifferent to one's happiness is the heart of Stoic wisdom.

Yoda is also benevolent and cautious. His quirky humor displays a quasi-Stoic joy. His odd wit and unusual pattern of speech humanize him by tempering his seriousness. One of the ancient Greek names for the Stoic sage is *spoudaios*, which means "serious person." Perfecting one's mind by conditioning it to make only rational judgments about all things that occur is a very serious business that requires commitment. The Stoics called this arduous training and disciplined practice *askêsis* (from which we get the word "ascetic," a person devoted to austere self-discipline). Yoda too displays the virtue of commitment and lives an ascetic lifestyle in both his sparse quarters in the Jedi Temple on Coruscant and his simple mud-hut on Dagobah.

The Stoics believed that the wise man, the virtuous person, was as rare as the phoenix, due to the difficulty of disciplining oneself to make consistently rational judgments. Such mental discipline, they thought, required an entire life to cultivate. That is why the Stoics distinguished between those who are simply vicious and those who are making progress toward virtue, though still suffering from vice. Even if becoming a sage turns out to be unachievable over the course of an entire life, progress toward this ideal state is possible. Someone who is progressing toward virtue they called a "progressor." Similarly, Luke can be seen as a "progressor." He is an apprentice—first of Obi-Wan, then of Yoda—as he strives to learn the ways of the Force and become a Jedi.

To recap, the virtues the Jedi shares with the Stoic sage are patience, timeliness, deep commitment, seriousness (as opposed to frivolity), calmness (as opposed to anger or euphoria), peacefulness (as opposed to aggression), caution (as opposed to recklessness), benevolence (as opposed to hatred), joy (as opposed to sullenness), passivity (as opposed to agitation), and wisdom. Given all these virtues, Yoda certainly resembles what the ancient Stoics described as the sage—the ideal person who has perfected his reason and achieved complete wisdom. In contrast

with Luke's youth and inexperience, Yoda has had over eight centuries to study and attune himself to the Force.

The perfection of the Stoic sage's character in his human reason mirrors the perfection of all of Nature, which the Stoics believed was coherently structured through and through. The sage acts in accord with and accepts events that occur in the world since his personal reason and his will harmonize with cosmic reason and fate. The sage understands the principles of regularity by which the universe operates. His knowledge of Nature thus guides his conduct. Is this similar to following the Force?

Yoda says that life creates the Force and makes it grow, and that the energy of the Force surrounds people and binds them, and that it pervades the entire physical world. This description resembles the ancient Stoics' idea of the "breath" that pervades all objects in the cosmos. This "breath," composed of the elements air and fire, is the sustaining cause of all bodies, and it controls the growth and development of all living bodies. It holds the cosmos together as the passive principle of all matter. The active principle pervading the cosmos is the "reason" that is one and the same as Nature, fate, providence, and the Greek god Zeus. When Yoda uses the telekinetic power of the Force to lift Luke's X-wing fighter from the swamp on Dagobah, he uses the power of his mind to move matter. A Jedi master, it seems, while not omnipotent, can use the active power of reason to move passive matter. In this modest way, Jedi who use telekinesis act something like Zeus or providence, as understood by the Stoics. Telekinesis, psychic perception of events that are distant in space and time, and the luminous afterlife of dead Jedi constitute the mystical side of the Force.

The Stoics emphasized that ethics, physics (the study of Nature), and logic (the study of speech, language, and argument) are the three *interconnected* branches of philosophy. So does Stoic philosophy allow for the mystical? The mystical element of the Force conflicts with the Stoics' understanding of the physical world. Yoda tells Luke: "Luminous beings are we . . . not this crude matter." This is confirmed by the scenes that show the deceased Obi-Wan, Yoda, and Anakin as non-physical, yet luminous, visible disembodied spirits. Since the Emperor was a master of the Dark Side, would he too continue to exist as a luminous, disembodied spirit? Or would he be a dark, shadowy

disembodied spirit? For the Stoics, these kinds of metaphysical quandaries are ludicrous. The Stoics were physicalists who believed that souls (minds) were just as physical as flesh and blood bodies. They reasoned that since one's soul causally interacts with one's body, and one's body is physical, then one's soul must be physical too. So the Stoics rejected the notion of non-physical souls (or minds or spirits) that are the "luminous beings" Yoda claims to be the real Luke and Yoda. For the Stoics, a person is destroyed when his body is destroyed, whereas deceased Jedi apparently enjoy an afterlife which allows them to speak with, see, and be seen by, the living.

While the naturalism of Stoicism rules out supernatural, disembodied spirits, the sage's understanding of Nature is amazingly profound and total. In fact, the Stoic sage has *infallible* knowledge of what should be done in every situation. The sage takes the right steps at the right times and does them in the right way to accomplish the right goal. But is Yoda a Stoic who acts from *reason* in every situation? No, Yoda *feels* the Force guiding his actions and the counsel he gives. Qui-Gon says to Anakin, "Feel, don't think, use your instincts." Obi-Wan tells Luke, "Trust your feelings." So the character traits that make reason possible for a Stoic resemble the traits that make it possible for Jedi like Yoda to feel and harness the Force.

In *Star Wars*, of course, there is also a Dark Side of the Force. Darth Vader and the Emperor also harness the Force to achieve their goals. How does the Dark Side shape Darth Vader and the Emperor? What makes them evil if Yoda is supposed to be good?

The Logic of the Dark Side

To answer these questions we must reconstruct the logic of the Dark Side of the Force. Here again the contrast between appearance and reality reveals clues. In Qui-Gon's first meeting with the Jedi Council, Yoda observes: "Hard to see, the Dark Side is." Is this double entendre intended as a joke or a serious insight? In any case, it well describes how the Emperor appears. His head and face are hidden inside a dark, hooded cloak. Like the Dark Side itself, the *Emperor* is hard to see and an obvious foil to Yoda. Both Yoda and the Emperor are ascetic devotees of the Force. Both wear simple robes. Neither is tempted by bodily pleasures. Both appear to live monkish lives of religious devo-

tion. Is the Emperor merely evil or is his character more complex?

The Emperor does seem to have several virtues. Like Yoda, the Emperor has a serious mind and the deepest commitment, though his is to the Dark Side. The Emperor is *the* Master of the Dark Side, and this surely must count as a kind of supremacy. Moreover, in *Return of the Jedi* the Emperor urges patience on Vader in his search for Luke, a virtue Yoda shares. In these respects, the Emperor and Yoda *appear* to be similar. How are they *really* different?

A few scenes later the Emperor says that Luke's compassion for his father will be his undoing. The Emperor sees compassion as a weakness, not a strength, a vice, not a virtue. The Stoics rejected compassion as irrational. Taking on the "disturbing passion" (*pathos*) of someone who is miserable makes you miserable too, so it's foolish to be misery's company by *feeling* compassion. Unlike the Emperor, however, the Stoics thought that it's virtuous to *show* compassion to others by acting to help them. Doing things to help others is beneficence. Beneficence can be motivated by philanthropy, kindness, or simple recognition of one's fellow beings as members of the community of rational persons in the cosmos we all inhabit. The ancient Greek Stoics originated this idea of a citizen of the universe or "cosmopolitan." The Emperor clearly has no such inclusive vision of the subjects populating *his* Empire.

So while the Emperor is correct, from a Stoic perspective, to reject the *feeling* of compassion as a weakness, he is wrong to be cruel by failing to *show* compassion to those he can help. From the Stoic perspective, his logic is twisted. But what twists it? What makes the Dark Side of the Force *dark*? Why think the Emperor is evil rather than simply eccentric or illogical?

The logic of the Dark Side is glimpsed in the moving conversation between Luke and Vader. Vader wants to turn Luke to the Dark Side, so that he will join Vader and the Emperor. Luke senses the moral conflict within Vader, and wishes to turn his father back to the Light Side. Vader tells Luke "You don't know the power of the Dark Side.⁹ I must obey my master."

⁹Yoda, in contrast, denies that the Dark Side of the Force is stronger. He tells Luke it is quicker, easier, and more seductive than the Light Side. Greg Bucher has suggested to me that the partisans of the Light and the Dark Sides of the

The Force is power that can be directed toward good or bad ends. Obi-Wan, Yoda, and all the “good” Jedi use the Force to achieve their goals. Vader and the Emperor do the same. Yoda says that the Force is his *ally*. Vader, however, is a *servant* of the Dark Side. Vader is in its power, because he must obey his Master, the Emperor. So the essence of the Dark Side is mastery over others, or tyranny. But the Dark Side limits the masters to only two Sith at a time—the Master and the Servant.

When Vader brings Luke captive to the Emperor, the Emperor says he looks forward to completing Luke’s training as his new master and gloats about the trap he has set for Luke’s friends on the moon of Endor. The Emperor goads Luke by urging him to take his lightsaber:

You want this, don’t you? The hate is swelling in you now. Take your Jedi weapon. Use it. I am unarmed. Strike me down with it. Give in to your anger. With each passing moment you make yourself more my servant.

The Emperor continues to torment Luke, basking in his suffering: “Good. I can feel your anger. I am defenseless. Take your weapon! Strike me down with all your hatred and your journey toward the Dark Side will be complete.” When Luke is fighting Vader, the Emperor is pleased. He congratulates Luke for using his aggressive feelings and letting the hate flow through him: “You, like your father, are now *mine*.”

So in contrast to the logic of the Light Side, the logic of the Dark Side is this: (1) Anger leads to hatred. (2) Hatred leads to aggression aimed at the mastery of others. (3) Mastery of others is true power. (4) True power is irresistibly desirable. When Luke slashes off Vader’s right hand with his lightsaber, the Emperor applauds Luke: “Your hate has made you powerful.” But Luke refuses to kill Vader, as the Emperor wishes: “You’ve failed, Your Highness. I am a Jedi, like my father before me.” If mastery of others and enslavement to evil fails, then the Dark

Force speak at cross-purposes, neither understanding the motivations of the other. In the end the Light Side prevails because they have better *people* in their ranks, not because the Light Side is superior in *power* to the Dark Side. The vision of the empire which Vader and the Emperor champion, while neither desirable nor good, is not inherently unworkable.

logic demands destruction: “If you will not be turned, you will be destroyed.”

Consequently, the Emperor is a propagator of terror, hatred, and cruelty. He gloats and takes pleasure in the distress of others. The ancient Stoics were quite familiar with tyrants like Cambyses of Persia, Hippias of Athens (both sixth century B.C.E.), and Gaius Caligula (first century C.E.). These tyrants, along with the evil Emperor Palpatine, can be usefully contrasted with the Stoic Marcus Aurelius (121–180 C.E.), who ruled the Roman empire from 161 to 180 C.E. The benevolence and rectitude of the Emperor Marcus is plain in his *Meditations*. The Stoic does not seek to exploit others. Rather, the Stoic aims at emotional self-sufficiency and cultivating his own mental discipline. This means that the Stoic sage has succeeded in mastering himself by having mastered his desires and having eliminated vice from his character.

Luke is therefore urging Stoic wisdom upon Vader when he tells him to let go of his hate. Unfortunately, hatred has had such a viselike hold on Vader for so long that he tells Luke: “It is too late for me, son.¹⁰ The Emperor will show you the true nature of the Force. He is your master now.” For servants of the Dark Side, the true nature of the Force is servitude to evil, enslavement to hate. Like virtues, vices tend to control one’s behavior. Vader has used fear and hatred to achieve his ends for so long that now the superior hatred and aggression of the Emperor use him. That is how Vader’s mastery of the Dark Side is at the same time servitude to it.

The reality behind the monkish appearance of the Emperor is the soul of a monster afflicted by vice. On the other hand, the Emperor’s hatred follows a cool logic of its own. His cruelty is calmly calculated, not haphazard. The Emperor shows an icy rationality and self-possession that is a shallow reflection of the Stoic’s passionlessness. His is an arrogant¹¹ rationality which

¹⁰ Vader’s admission underscores the Stoic idea that it takes a lifelong commitment to stand a chance to become good. Vader has grown too old to reverse his evil course, apparently.

¹¹ When Obi-Wan expresses his concern that the talented Anakin Skywalker is becoming arrogant, Yoda concurs: “Yes, yes, a flaw more and more common among Jedi. Too sure of themselves they are, even the older, more experienced ones.”

seeks to dominate, exploit, and enslave people through careful planning and use of the Dark Side of the Force. As Luke warns him, "Your overconfidence is your weakness." According to Stoicism, however, the Emperor's cleverness, devotion, and self-possession are not virtues. As a tyrant, the Emperor's goal is to master things and people that are in fact beyond his control rather than to master himself by becoming virtuous. Since the Emperor fails to understand what is really good, namely virtue, and what is really bad, namely vice, he lacks Stoic wisdom. Since he lacks wisdom, he lacks all the virtues, and so he is full of vice. Since he has no desire to gain wisdom, his mind is fundamentally flawed and his vice is incurable. As a consequence, when Vader throws him into the reactor shaft, he appears to die suffering.¹²

"Control, Control, You Must Learn Control"

Yoda and the other Jedi use discipline, commitment, and training to control themselves, thereby harnessing the power of the Force. Vader and the Emperor, on the other hand, stoke their anger and hatred to empower themselves with the Dark Side of the Force. They feed, rather than overcome, the negative emotions within themselves. They seek to control not themselves, but others, in an ultimately doomed attempt to fill the cold, black void behind the mask or the hood with the false satisfaction that arises from domination and oppression of others. A Stoic could never be seduced by the Dark Side, but might well feel at home among the calm, self-disciplined, virtuous Jedi. But a Stoic indulges in none of the supernaturalism or mysticism expressed in some aspects of the Force in *Star Wars*. The wisdom of Yoda and the vices of the Emperor are illuminated nicely by the plain light of natural reason provided by the Stoic philosophy.¹³

¹² Note that Obi-Wan and Yoda do not die suffering.

¹³ I thank Gregory S. Bucher, Susan T. Bart, and Scott Rubarth for their excellent, generous comments on this paper. I also thank the editors and the series editor for their suggestions.