**Midterm Section 1: Questions - - - Question 1**

*What are some of the most important elements of Taoism that appear in Star Wars? What is the Taoist practice of wu-wei and where do we see examples of it in Star Wars?*

The single most important element of Daoism in Star Wars is the idea of what Qui-Gon Jin continually calls “The Living Force.” The Force is the essence of all life and the universe. In episode IV Obi-Wan describes the force to young Luke Skylarked in the following. “It Surrounds us, penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together.” This is extremely close to the Taoist model of the Tao, an all-encompassing entity that is the fabric of reality and connects all within it. The following is an excerpt from the Tao Te Ching. “Infinite. Eternally Present. It [The Tao] is the mother of the Universe. … It flows through all things, inside and outside, and returns to the origins of all things.” Long story short, for all intents and purposes the Tao and the Force are the same thing.

Taoists have an idea known as wu-wei, which literally means ‘doing not doing.’ ‘Doing not doing’ means to stop thinking and do, it is the action of doing something so fully and purely that the distinction between the action itself and the agent is blurred. You are the action, the action is you. This is very close to one of the other most common ideas seen in the Star Wars saga, the idea of letting go and using the force. Nearly every Jedi master that is training someone in any of the star wars movies talks about letting go of your conscious mind and relying on the force (as Obi-Wan puts it). In episode I Qui-Gon instructs young Anakin Skywalker “Remember, concentrate on the moment. Feel. Don't think. Trust your instincts. May the Force be with you.” Those attempting to master the Taoist teaching of wu-wei would benefit greatly by following Master Qui-Gon’s advice; at the core, many Jedi teachings are Taoist teachings.

**Question 2**

*What is the Buddhist teaching of Duhka? What is the relationship between attachment and Duhka? Illustrate this theory using an example drawn from one of the Star Wars films.*

The Buddhist teaching of Dukkha is one that expresses that all of life is just pain and suffering. The Dukkha is the natural course of life, that in one’s life you will experience nothing but pain, but through the right training, you can achieve happiness inside of a world of suffering. If Dukkha is the problem that all life is pain, then ridding yourself of personal attachment is the answer. It is only through becoming completely detached from his personal attachments that one can find true peace inside the teaching of dukkha and achieve the ultimate state of peace and happiness known as *Nirvana*. This relates to star wars with the Jedi’s philosophy on personal attachments, which is very Buddhist in nature. The Jedi teach that personal attachments fog the mind and the heart, and cloud ones vision and connection with the force. It is in Episode V when Luke is getting ready to leave Dagobah to go save Han and Leia in cloud city that Obi wan and Yoda tell him that he must sacrifice His friends if he really honors what they fight for. He needs to detach himself from his friends and let them go; this is the only way that Luke can complete his training and be one with the force, by letting go of earthly attachments.

This idea against personal attachment is found throughout the star wars universe. In fact, it is seen in the movies and in the extended universe of star wars that the Jedi actually *refuse* to train young people if they have reached a certain age. Once ‘younglings’ develop emotional attachment and begin to love they aren’t allowed to become Jedi, because Jedi are meant to forgo personal attachment. It is for this reason that Yoda originally refused to train Luke exclaiming “He is too old. Yes, too old to begin the training.” It is also the reason that the Jedi council originally refused to train Luke’s father Anakin in episode I. The following is an excerpt from the script of The Phantom Menace. It is the scene where the Jedi council is evaluating young Anakin to see if he is fit to train to become a Jedi:

Ki-Adi-Mundi: Your thoughts dwell on your mother.

Anakin: I miss her.

Yoda: Afraid to lose her I think, hmm?

Anakin: What has that got to do with anything?

Yoda: Everything! Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering. I sense much fear in you.

In this quotation it is easy to see why the Jedi try not to have personal attachments, and it is very similar to the Buddhist idea of attachment. If you are attached to this world than you can never achieve Nirvana and find peace, the same way that if you are attached to your friends you can never finish your training as a Jedi and become one with the force, as master Yoda puts it.

**Question 3**

*What is Plato’s theory of the soul as discussed in class and as seen in the Phaedo? What, in particular, does Plato say about the proper relationship between the soul and the body? Where do we see Plato’s theory of the Soul in Episodes IV-VI?*

Plato’s theory of the soul is that the soul is Immortal and *more real* than its lesser part, the body. In the Phaedo, Plato discusses the soul’s immortality and his theory of forms. Plato believes that the permanent thing is more real than the impermanent thing, which is why he considers the living soul to be immortal and more real than the temporary body we live in. Plato believes that the creator of the universe wanted to mimic the perfection he found in the Forms, but couldn’t do it because he had to make the world out of matter, which is crude, imperfect, and flawed. This body holds us back from our true selves, which is our soul; this body keeps us tethered to this earth with worldly and selfish thoughts and desires. Yoda expresses this idea inside of star wars when he says to Luke, “Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter.” Yoda believes that he too, is an immortal soul trapped by an immortal body. Both he and Obi-Wan believe this to be true, which is why they are both so accepting of their deaths. “If you strike me down, I will become more powerful than ever.” These were Obi-Wan’s last words before accepting his death at the hands of Darth Vader. I also believe that the fact that both of these Master Jedi disappear after they die is the director’s attempt to reflect this idea outwardly.

This brings us to Plato’s tripartite division of the soul. Plato breaks up the soul into three parts; Reason, Spirit/Will Power, and Appetite. He describes the soul’s three parts as a Charioteer being drawn by two horses. There is a Strong horse, which represents the will and spirit, and its purpose is to achieve goals that you set with reason. There is also a Wild horse; the wild horse represents appetite, desire, and bodily needs, and its goal is to obtain pleasure. These two horses are constantly struggling against one another. The strong horse pulling the weak horse along saying “Go! Go! Go!” and the wild horse saying “Let’s take a break, let’s stop and rest.” Reason causes these two horses to work together. Reason is the charioteer in this analogy, and its goal is to set goals and use judgement. Reason makes the decisions of ‘now we are going to listen to the strong horse and run for a while’ and ‘okay wild horse, let’s take a break.’ We see this division of the soul in Anakin in Episode III. Anakin is so focused on his wild horse of Power and saving Padme, that all of his sense of reason and right and wrong get thrown out the window. His appetite drives him all the way to the point that he loses reason all together, and ends up killing the one woman he wanted nothing more than to protect just because his wild horse got angry.

**Section 2 – Short Essays – Paragraph 1**

*What is the Buddhist theory of evil? What is the source of evil in Buddhism and why does it exist? Offer one example from Star Wars to illustrate this theory.*

The Buddhist theory of evil is that evil is non-existent. There are good actions and bad actions, which are defined by the results that they produce, this is known as Karma. Karma is the idea put crassly that ‘what goes around comes around.’ This following excerpt from What the Buddha Taught better explains Karma: “Ever volitional action produces its effects or results. If a good action produces good effects and a bad action bad effects, it is not justice… but this in virtue of its own nature, its own law.” Good actions cause good things to happen, and bad actions cause harmful things to happen. Therefore, there is no good or evil people, just people that are creating Karma for themselves, and that Karma determines the person’s actions and circumstances in turn. This idea, paired with Duhka, causes Buddhists to be very accepting and tolerant of others actions. If you have bad Karma then it is almost like a bad Aura that can affect your actions to cause more bad Karma and also causes bad things to happen.

An example of this idea found in star wars is in both Episodes III and VI when both Anakin and later his son Luke are being goaded by Darth Sidious into killing Count Douku and Darth Vader, respectively. They say that this dark deed of Killing another person out of anger is the final step to the dark side. This is similar to the idea of Karma in that it seems that a dark act produces some sort of a dark aura or a dark side of the force that in turn affects the source of action. The action ultimately affects the agent, which comes back to affect future actions.

**Paragraph 2**

*What is Augustine’s theory of evil? What is the source of evil according to Augustine and why does it exist? Offer a new example from Star Wars to illustrate this theory.*

According to Augustine, Evil is just a privation of the good. Evil is the result when you drift far away from God’s perfection and goodness. The further you drift and are separated from God, the more evil you become. An example from Star Wars about this idea of evil being a privation of good is the idea that in order to avoid the dark side you have to use the light side of the force. If you are not using the light side of the force, then you must be using the dark side of the force, for anything that is not closer to the light side of the force must be the dark side of the force. A Specific example of this is when Yoda and Obi-Wan both speak of removing personal attachments in Episode II, they think that because Anakin has attachments, and attachments aren’t the Jedi way, that Anakin must be drawing on the dark side of the force.

**Paragraph 3**

*Offer your own comparative evaluation of these two theories. Which theory better describes evil and why? Offer a third example from Star Wars to support your argument.*

Although I believe that both ideas are flawed and personally subscribe to neither, I believe that the Buddhist idea of evil is better than St Augustine’s idea. This is because St Augustine’s theory of evil is flawed in the sense that I believe that there are actions that are neutral, and are neither evil nor good in nature. The problem with Augustines model is that *every action* falls somewhere on the good evil spectrum. But just because something isn’t the light side of the force doesn’t mean that it is necessarily the dark side of the force. What about the force creatures that we meet in Star Wars Rebels known as the Bendu? They use the force but in a way that is neither good nor evil. When a lion rips apart a gazelle, is that good or evil? My opinion is that it is neither.

Another problem with the idea of Augustine’s theory of evil is that in my opinion it is extremely narrow minded and rigid. If you believe in one thing alone to be good, than *any other idea that differs from that is evil*. This can cause a very narrow minded and flawed approach to understanding others and the world. An example of this sort of narrow mindedness is in Episode II when Obi-Wan is searching for the planet Kamino in the library’s records. He speaks with a librarian woman and asks where he can find Kamino. The woman that is also a *Master Jedi* says that since the planet doesn’t exist in the records, it doesn’t exist at all. When Obi-Wan asks if the records may be incomplete the woman simply restates “If it doesn’t exist in the records, it doesn’t exist at all” and walks away, refusing to consider Obi-Wan’s claims, which turned out to be 100% accurate. This is the mindset that exists in some Jedi that can be caused when you subscribe to Augustinian evil. The Buddhist idea has problems as well, but it at least is more understanding and open to the ideas of others, which on a personal level I believe to be incredibly important.

**EXTRA CREDIT**

* C3PO speaks the language of Bacchi
* Luke said “I have a bad feeling about this.” In Episode V (I realize now I was thinking of Episode VI when they were on their way to Endor, in Ep V its Leia)
* Yoda said that Luke must **Confront** Lord Vader to complete his training and become a Jedi.

P.S. – I am so sorry for the length of the Essay Questions. I didn’t realize you had only wanted 4-6 sentences until I was basically done with the questions. You know me, I’m long winded to begin with and I figured that in this case more was more. I hope that you at least enjoyed reading what I have written. Thank you Terry.