**Reflection Essay – Episode II - Stoicism**

*What are the main features of Stoicism? How are the Jedi like Stoics? What is real power for a Stoic? What is Anakin’s misconception about power? How would a Stoic Anakin have behaved differently in Episode II?*

Stoicism is a philosophy that is centered on the idea that most of the world is outside of our control. And that the way to happiness is only by understanding the difference between what is under your control and what is not. Epictetus, a famous ancient Greek stoic philosopher and one of the philosophies founding fathers, wrote a small book called the Enchiridion which explains this idea expertly it its opening lines.

“Some things are up to us and some are not up to us. Our opinions are up to us, and our impulses, desires, aversions—in short, whatever is our own doing. Our bodies are not up to us, nor are our possessions, our reputations, or our public offices, or, that is, whatever is not our own doing.” (The Handbook, section 1)

This first quotation explains the distinction between these two kinds of things; the next quotation explains what our relationship to them should be.

“So remember, if you think that things naturally enslaved are free or that things not your own are your own, you will be thwarted, miserable, and upset, and will blame both gods and men. But if you think that only what is yours is yours, and that what is not your own is, just as it is, not your own, then no one will ever coerce you… you will not accuse anyone, you will not do a single thing unwillingly… and no one will harm you, because you will not be harmed at all.” (The Handbook, section 1)

So, to summarize Epictetus, if you try to control things you can’t control, then you will end up frustrated and miserable. Your effort should be spent controlling the things you *can control*, this will bring you happiness. One popular adage that people have used to describe stoicism is ‘I can’t control what happens to me, I can only control my reaction.’ This is a very powerful idea that is the root stoicism.

The Jedi are like stoics in that they try to be very aware of what is and what is not in their control. Taking advantage of only what they can control. One famous scene from Episode IV shows this idea. When Luke is getting ready to go to his friend’s aid after seeing a vision that they were in danger in cloud city, both Yoda and Obi-Wan assure him that it is a trap and that there is nothing that he can do to save them. They say that Luke should stay and *do what he can* which is to finish his training as a Jedi so that he can confront Darth Vader and win the battle for which his friends gave their lives. The Jedi also try to control their emotions and thoughts toward external harm for the sake of avoiding suffering. For example, the Jedi’s view of death is one that is so self-focused and inward that both Yoda and Obi-Wan face their demises with joy. They understand that *death is a part of life and you can’t control it*. So, instead of being upset about death, refusing to accept it and doing everything in their power to stop it as young Anakin did, they simply understand that they can’t control death, but they can control *how they react to it*. This causes the Jedi to be incredibly accepting of death and fate, even when it means the loss of someone close to them.

Anyone who understands stoicism can relate it to Episode II in one simple and incredibly obvious way, Anakin is most likely the worst Stoic to ever live. He is *constantly* trying to control everything, from the actions of others to the inevitable death of the people that he loves. His whole MO (major outlook) is that if he obtains enough power, he can control everything that he doesn’t like about the world and that way he doesn’t have to accept that somethings are out of his control. This is clearly a very Sith motif, and it is this mindset that leads Anakin to become Darth Vader. This is also what makes Anakin such a bad stoic. For a stoic, true power comes not from the ability to control the *external* world, but the ability to control the *internal* world. The ability to control something as rampant and raw as you’re fleeting and primal emotions, this is true power in the stoics eyes. If the stoics could give young Anakin once piece of advice it would be to simply ‘let it go.’ Anakin needs to accept that he can’t control everything, and through this understanding make peace with the constant terrors of the natural world. I actually believe that the stoics would encourage Anakin to learn and recite the Serenity Prayer, which is used by Alcoholics Anonymous as a tool to remove addiction from one’s life. It reads “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change what I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” If Anakin followed this advice, he might find himself to be living like a stoic, at peace with himself and the world.