**Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope – Reflection Essay - Taoism**

* What are some prominent Taoist themes in Episode IV? Be sure to use the Tao Te Ching in your answer.

Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope is riddled with Taoist themes and principles. The most obvious and greatest example of this is the relationship between the Tao and the Force. In Episode IV, Obi-Wan talks about the force on many accounts, and nearly all of his explanations of the force could be considered to be explanations of the Tao. When Obi-Wan first describes the force to Luke, he says “It surrounds us, penetrates us, it binds the galaxy together.” This is incredibly close to a definition of the Tao found in the following excerpt from section 25 of the Tao Te Ching (the source book of the Taoist philosophy).

“It [The Tao] is serene. Empty. Solitary. Unchanging. Infinite. Eternally Present. It is the mother of the Universe. For lack of a better name, I call it the Tao. It flows through all things, inside and outside, and returns to the origin of all things.” (Tao Te Ching, Stephen Mitchell, Section 25)

This definition of the Tao found in the Tao Te Ching is eerily close to the force. Both are described to be the underlying force (no pun intended) that unites all the different parts of the galaxy together. Section 6 of the Tao Te Ching gives us yet another definition. “It is always present with you. You can use it anyway you want.” (Section 6) This is once more strikingly similar to one of Obi-Wans descriptions of the force when he is teaching Luke how to defend himself with a lightsaber against bullets from a training droid on the millennium falcon. “A Jedi can feel the force flowing through him” Says Obi-Wan. Then, when Luke asks Obi-Wan “It [the Force] controls your actions?” Obi-Wan responds by saying “Sometimes, but it also obeys your commands.” This sort of relationship between the Jedi and the force is very close to the relationship found between us and the Tao, according to Taoism. A unique relationship where this all-encompassing force or energy somehow simultaneously watches over you and is in control but also listens to your commands and wishes. This is the Tao, and this is the Force.

Also, throughout Episode IV we see Obi-Wan express very Taoist character traits. He is constantly calm in every situation, and almost seems to know that everything will be okay. He constantly is saying things like, “It’ll be enough,” “It’s Fate,” and “In my experience there is no such thing as luck” This is very similar to the aforementioned Taoist attitude that the Tao is in ultimate control, and that in the end everything will work out as it should. The hermit Obi-Wan is also incredibly removed and almost emotionless throughout the film. It doesn’t matter if he is in a cantina cutting the arm off of a scoundrel, being chased by Stormtroopers, or fighting with a Sith-Lord on the Death Star, he seems to be completely in control of his emotions. Even at the point of his death Obi-Wan is incredibly in control of his emotions and seems to be at peace with the world around him. The Tao Te Ching describes “the Master”, one who fully embraces and understands Taoism, and its description of this Master sounds a lot like our Jedi-Master, Obi-Wan Kenobi. “The Master stays behind; that’s why she is ahead. She is detached from all things; that is why she is one from them. Because she has let go of herself; she is perfectly fulfilled.” (Section 7) Even at the point of his own death, Obi-Wan accepts his fate and gives his life *peacefully* over to the arms of the Force, speaking his last words to his former apprentice “If you strike me down I will become more powerful than you could possibly imagine.”

This sort of peace and trust in the Force is what Obi-Wan constantly encourages Luke to pursue. “Let go of your conscious self” Obi-Wan advises Luke, and ultimately it is because of Luke’s decision to follow Obi-Wan’s advice and to “let go” of his mind and worry and “act on instinct” that he is able to use the force to make the impossible shot, destroy the Death Star, and save the galaxy. The Tao and the Force are so similar, that one could replace every time “the force” is said in Star Wars Episode IV and replace it with “the Tao,” and one could watch the movie and receive a decent understanding of the Tao as it pertains to Taoism. Granted, some themes of the Tao and the Force are different. For example, in Taoism, there is no dark side or light side of the Tao, in fact, there is no such thing as evil or good at all, there is just the Tao. This is an idea that is clearly not represented in Episode IV. Nonetheless, the Tao and the Force are still so strikingly similar that I have no hesitation to say in parting, *May the Tao be with you.*