

Practical Application Example

Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope (1977)

James W. Stoutenborough

Theme 1: Idealism vs. Realism

Idealists

- Luke Skywalker – Luke holds an idealized view of virtually everything. He cannot wait to join the fight against the Empire. Even when the odds are long, he holds out hope that he will be able to save his Aunt and Uncle, find the missing R2-D2, save the Princess, and that Han will do the right thing in the end.
- Princess Leia Organa – Leia, though a bit more cynical, has great faith in the ability of the Rebellion to win out against all odds. When confronted with a horrible choice, she believes that if she would reveal the location of the Rebel base, Grand Moff Tarkin would keep his word by not destroying Alderaan. Her shock that Tarkin would go back on his word illustrates her idealism. Also, she hopes that by identifying a planet that is not the primary Rebel base, it will be enough to convince the Empire that it was.
- Ben Obi-Wan Kenobi – While some might believe Obi-Wan to be a realist, he possesses a number of qualities that reveal that he is an idealist at heart. If Obi-Wan was a true realist, he never would have attempted to train Luke. He never would come out of seclusion to help the Rebellion. He never would have sacrificed himself at the hand of Darth Vader.
- Darth Vader – It may surprise some to see Vader in a list of idealists. However, throughout Episode IV, Vader expresses numerous idealist positions. He has absolute faith in the Force, and idealistic perspective given how easily the Jedi were destroyed. He believes his techniques for extracting the location of the Rebel base would work in the end, even if he needed more time. He has the utmost confidence in his own abilities, as he tells his fighter escorts that he is to be the one who shoots down the Rebel fighters. This overconfidence in his own abilities can only exist if he is an idealist.

Realists

- Han Solo – Han is to realism what Luke is to idealism. Han has been there, done that. He has a very cynical view of the world, and his entire existence is at the edges of society. As a smuggler, he interacts with some of the seediest characters in the galaxy, which reinforces his need for self-preservation and his willingness to do just about anything if the price is right. Operating within this environment ensures Han is a realist.
- C-3PO – C-3PO is arguably the most negative character in the movie. Everything is doom and gloom for C-3PO. C-3PO constantly complains that death is imminent, and that the odds are incredibly low that the group would be successful.

Theme 2: Utopias, Theories, and Ideologies

Ideologies

- The Force can be argued to be an ideology. In the years following the fall of the Jedi, it appears as though a substantial proportion of the galaxy believes that it is a hoax. Han outright calls it “a lot of simple tricks and nonsense.” However, for adherents of this ideology, the Force is virtually all powerful. For instance, Vader states, “The ability to

destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the Force.” Toward the end of the movie, Luke turns off his targeting computer to rely solely on the Force. Clearly, to adherents, the Force is a powerful motivator. As with any good ideology, Obi-Wan states, “The Force can have a strong influence on the weak-minded.” Similarly, Obi-Wan argues that “Vader was seduced by the dark side of the Force.”

Utopias

- Obi-Wan outlines his version of a Utopia when he tells Luke of the times when the Jedi kept order in the galaxy. He describes this as, “For over a thousand generations, the Jedi Knights were the guardians of peace and justice in the old Republic...before the dark times...before the Empire.”
- The Empire has its own version of utopia, though it is considerably darker. They want to rule the galaxy and be all-powerful. They want everyone to live in fear of the dark side.
- The Rebellion’s version of utopia is a peaceful, democratic society similar to the one in place prior to the rise of the Empire.

Theme 3: Anarchy, Security, and Group Dynamics

Group Dynamics

- The whole idea of the Rebellion is for planets to join together to fight against the tyranny of the Empire.
- Luke, Leia, Han, Chewy, and Obi-Wan all learn that they need to work together to achieve their collective goals. Although they are not always on the same side, nobody would be successful without the assistance of the others. They overcome adversity as a group, but only once they learn to work together.

Power & Authority

- Within what we see of the Empire, there appears to be an authority struggle between Vader and Tarkin. Tarkin believes that the Force is over-rated, and rests his authority in the technical superiority of the Death Star. Vader, on the other hand, believes that his authority rests in the power of the Force. Both appear to report directly to the Emperor, who is clearly the single source of power within the Empire.
- Within the Rebellion, this power and authority dynamic isn’t as clear. As a Princess, Leia is afforded some authority and power, but she is not the one calling all of the shots. The group dynamics between Han, Luke, and Leia create an environment where authority and power are shared at various times, as the events dictate. The others, recognizing this authority whenever it suits them, follow along.
- There is a clear hierarchy between Han and Chewy, with Han holding the authority and power in that relationship.

Theme 4: Controlling the Behavior of Individuals

Maintaining Power/Legitimacy

- Perhaps a side effect of his overwhelming faith in the Force, Vader has little tolerance for the failures of those below him or any perceived threats to his power/authority. As noted above, the exception is Tarkin, though it is clear Vader dislikes him. Vader maintains power through fear. By strangling a subordinate who failed by using the Force, Vader maintains an environment of fear.
- Leia's legitimacy is instilled through her title, Princess. As opposed to Vader, she does not rule with a heavy hand, and is more than willing to follow the advice of others. Part of this is related to her not needing to prove her authority, as her position has a long history of legitimacy. Furthermore, she leads by example. She did not have to be the person risking everything to transport the plans for the Death Star, but she did. This risk would likely reinforce her legitimacy as an authoritative figure within the Rebellion.

Use of Panopticon

- While in the control room, there is little reason for Vader to announce, “Obi-Wan is here. The Force is with him.” Vader’s following statement further illustrates the uselessness of this observation. “Escape is not his plan. I must face him, alone.” If escape is not his plan, then announcing that he was there was not needed. The only logical explanation for this was to engender the fear associated with panopticon. Vader is reminding everyone in the room that he can see what is happening, through the Force, even when it is not visibly in front of him.

Intra-Group Conflict

- As noted above, there is a power struggle of sorts between Vader and Tarkin over who should ultimately make decisions throughout the movie. Because both report directly to the Emperor and it’s Tarkin’s Death Star, even though Vader was sent to oversee its completion, Vader does not usurp Tarkin’s control, even as the two bicker over the best approaches to achieving their goals. This creates substantial tension between the two.
- Throughout, Han and Luke criticize each other, as does Leia upon her arrival. This constant sniping at each other helps to lower the tension within the group and adds levity to tense situations. This allows the group to grow stronger.

Theme 5: Rational Choice and the Need for Regulations

Rational Actors

- Han’s whole existence is focused on his self-enrichment throughout the majority of the movie. He is motivated by money and doing whatever he can to protect himself, which is ultimately at the heart of the debate over whether Han shot Greedo first during the cantina scene.
- Jabba the Hutt (Jabba was not in the original release of the movie, but was added during the digital remastered versions) is a gangster to whom Han owes a lot of money. Jabba could have Han killed when they meet face to face, but chooses to allow Han to live because Han informs Jabba that he is about to make a run that would allow Han to pay

Jabba back. As a rational actor, Jabba realizes that Han is worth more alive than dead, as dead men can't pay up.

Tragedy of the Commons

- When the Death Star destroyed the planet Alderaan, Obi-Wan sadly remarked, “I felt a great disturbance in the Force, as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced. I fear something terrible has happened.” As Obi-Wan describes it, “The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It’s an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together.” If the Force binds the galaxy together through the collective energy field created by all living things, destroying an entire planet of living things represents the destruction of that common pool resource, otherwise known as the Force.

Economic System

- Although not explicitly discussed in the movie, the desire of the Empire to control everything in the galaxy is reflective of the ideals of capitalism. Capitalism is a survival of the fittest economic system, where those who are inefficient or noncompetitive go out of business. The Empire takes this idea to the extreme by essentially conducting a hostile takeover of all of their competitors.
- Ironically, while the desire for domination reflects a capitalistic viewpoint, much of what the Empire does actually appears to abide by a fairly socialistic approach. The idea of equality within socialism is taken to its logical extreme by having all of the Stormtroopers dressed in identical uniforms that obscures any identifiable traits of the person in the uniform (there are other types of Empire soldiers who are similarly uniformed). As is frequently identified as a repercussion of socialism, the Stormtroopers do not appear to be particularly motivated to do their job. While they follow orders just well enough to not be killed, as a fighting unit the Stormtroopers are fairly inept, as is illustrated in their inability to hit Luke and Leia despite having a superior battle position while Luke and Leia were trapped on a small ledge with virtually no cover, or in how all the soldiers guarding the prison level were unable to kill three people, one of them a giant Wookie, even though the soldiers had superior cover and numbers.

Theme 6: Structure and Institutions

- Although they do not play a central role for the movie, political institutions and structures are discussed throughout the movie.
- At one point in the movie, there is a conversation between Tarkin and General Tagge. Tarkin reports, “The Imperial Senate will no longer be of any concern to us. I have just received word that the Emperor has dissolved the council permanently. The last remnants of the Old Republic have been swept away forever.” With this short report, we learn that the central government of the galaxy was likely an elected body (if these representatives were all appointed by the Emperor, there would be no need to dissolve). While it is not clear if this is a presidential or parliamentary system from this particular movie, we do learn that it is a parliamentary system with geographic representation (i.e. a certain

number of representatives per planet) in Episodes I-III, with the Emperor being elected from within the larger legislative body.

- By dissolving the council, the Emperor has created a dictatorship and a unitary system of government.
- Although not a focus of the story, there is an underground structure of a pseudo-government that has its own legitimacy. This pseudo-government is where Jabba resides. Everyone knows this structure exists, but nobody is doing much to try to stop it, particularly since the Empire is more preoccupied by the Rebellion. As Obi-Wan puts it, “Mos Eisley spaceport: You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy.”
- The Rebellion represents a sort of federal system. There are many sub-groups within the rebellion that are moderately coordinated. However, there appears to be a central body that is made up of the many sub-groups that attempts to coordinate the various groups. They respect the ideals of the Old Republic, and have attempted to maintain these structures during their fight with the Empire.

Theme 7: Institutions

Idealist Perspective on Institutions

- Luke holds the Rebellion as an ideal institution that is fighting the good fight. Luke cannot wait to join the Rebellion.

Executive

- In many ways, Darth Vader serves as the Head of State for the Emperor. He was sent to the Death Star by the Emperor to oversee its completion and testing. He represents the Empire wherever he is, and has a great deal of authority. In diplomatic situations, he represents the Empire, as is made clear in his interactions with Leia toward the beginning of the movie.

Theme 8: The Imperfections of Institutions

Realist Perspective on Institutions

- Han has very little faith in the Rebellion. He does not believe that it will win out in the end.
- Han has very little faith in the Empire as well. He is supremely confident that the Millennium Falcon will escape anything the Empire throws at them. He brags, “I’ve outrun Imperial starships. Not the local bulk cruisers mind you, I’m talking about the big Corellian ships now.” As a smuggler, Han knows how easy is to get around the Empire’s efforts to stop smuggling.

Institutions Gone Wrong

- The Empire cannot find two drones on a largely barren planet that is covered in sand, thus making it easy to track the two drones. They allowed an “empty” escape pod to get away. If they were competent, they would have not taken any chances. The

Stormtroopers were unable to capture or kill Luke, Leia, Han, or Chewbacca, despite grossly outnumbering them. They failed to find Luke, Han, Chewie, Obi-Wan, R2-D2, and C3PO when searching the Millennium Falcon. In short, despite their power, they are incredibly inept.

- The fact that there is a thriving underworld and that Jabba can move about freely on the planet is a clear indication that the Empire has failed to maintain control within the galaxy.
- The existence of a Rebellion reinforces the Empire's inability to effectively control the galaxy.