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### The Tragedy of Power in *The Godfather* and *Star Wars*

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In *The Godfather*, Part I, the young Michael Corleone arrives at his sister's wedding a hero of the republic, having enlisted in the Marines against his father's wishes that he serve the family. He serves with such distinction that he returns as a captain. In *Star Wars: Episode II, Attack of the Clones*, the young Anakin Skywalker is a hero of the Galactic Republic, having served as a Jedi Knight apprentice on various planets with such distinction that the Jedi Council gives him an independent assignment to protect a senator. In the course of their separate tragic cycles, Michael and Anakin turn from servants of their separate republics to active agents of those republics' subversion. One is led by a shadowy chimera of representatives of criminal enterprises, which he fights but which consume him and his family and lead him into greater acts of crime and corruption. The other is led by a phantom Sith Lord who arranges for him to feel the suffering of his family members one by one, until he is led to acts of fear and revenge that destroy his soul.

The *Godfather* film series is often regarded as among the greatest set of films ever made, in that uniquely American genre, the gangster film. The *Star Wars* films are among the most profitable films of all time, an impressive achievement considering that they are purportedly about events happening to an unknown republic from long ago and far away. But each series takes up profound issues—perhaps the most profound issues for citizens of the richest and most powerful republic in the history of humanity: What is the use that is to be made of power? Who is served by that power? What authority does it grant the holder?<sup>1</sup> What is one's duty to others beyond one's self or one's family? I propose to examine this theme briefly in American narratives, noting the historical background of this theme in American history and narrative. I touch on the mythology of the rise to wealth and power, and of the peril this rise entails, as told in the films about Michael Corleone in the *Godfather* trilogy and about Anakin Skywalker in the *Star Wars* saga. I particularly seek to clarify these

themes as they arise in the later films in the series, which have generally received less critical attention, though I treat each film series as a set. These films are characteristic examples of the American epic of success and failure—and they are epic in Milton's sense, as moral narratives, doctrinal and exemplary to a nation. Their purpose is tragic in Aristotle's sense, in that these protagonists are noble figures drawn into a violation of the moral order through miscalculation and pride. Their fate is intended to evoke pity and introspection regarding their flaws, which we can in turn perceive in ourselves. Unlike Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* or Horatio Alger Jr.'s *Ragged Dick*, which teach the rewards of virtue, these narratives teach us the consequences of vice.<sup>2</sup> In one narrative, the tragic hero destroys himself through his attempt to control events and to overcome evil with evil. In the other, the tragic hero's control kills all he loves, so that he lives bound in a spell of self-hatred, a fisher-king ruling over an empire of desolation until his child asks the questions that break the spell.

### THE PROTESTANT EPIC AND AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

The myth of the American success story is rooted in Protestant Christianity. This religious-based myth persists to this day, though its persistence is often presumed to be faded, notably on the authority of Max Weber. Weber argues in *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that the Calvinist Protestant theme of God's elect receiving by material signs indications of God's favor, most particularly wealth, led to habits of disciplined capital accumulation that created the modern capitalist world. However, by the late nineteenth century, Weber says, religious fervor had declined to such an extent that, although the discipline of capital accumulation remained, the spirit that had informed it at the beginning of the Protestant era had evaporated: "In the field of its highest development, in the United States, the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which often actually give it the character of sport."<sup>3</sup>

No one familiar with the paganesque extremes of the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century could have denied Weber's insight then. No one who has read of the literal sport of Liar's Poker<sup>4</sup> or of the various escapades and extravagances of wealthy corporate officers today, such as the now-notorious Roman Empire-themed birthday party former Tyco chief executive officer and president L. Dennis Kozlowski threw for his wife, could deny Weber's insight remains true today.<sup>5</sup> However, though Weber argues that the spirit of capitalism is largely divorced from religion and that some capitalists were indifferent to or hostile to religion, I find the converse is more true than Weber suggests. Protestantism continues to inform the American success story and influences the understanding of the purpose of success. Success, in fact, is not seen as such, unless it is also seen as a material expression of virtue; just as in our own age with Kozlowski, Jay Gould and John D. Rockefeller in their age were regarded as great villains, not great models. That Kozlowski's party was a scandal underscores the degree to which he violated the implicit myth of virtue.

Weber argues that the spiritual authority implied by the self-discipline and duty toward work expressed in Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* had largely been lost by Franklin's time. In Weber's own era, he says, at the end of the Gilded Age, discipline and denial had become an iron cage of materialism without spirit. However, this argument raises the question as to why Franklin's *Autobiography* was a moral narrative that has specifically religious iterations of duty to one's calling,<sup>6</sup> to help others, and to help the community.<sup>7</sup> It neglects that Franklin's place in the literature of young people was partially displaced by Horatio Alger Jr., whose Ragged Dicks or Luke Larkins were modernized versions of Franklin's story, emphasizing the same themes of moral virtue, charity, and community service—explicitly with the Calvinist moral that God crowned these marks of virtue with wealth and power. Most notably, it neglects Andrew Carnegie's profoundly influential "Gospel" of Wealth, in which he argues that God wills the concentration of wealth so that His chosen instruments could use their gifts of organization and discretion to disburse it for the greatest good to humanity:

The laws of accumulation will be left free; the laws of distribution free. Individualism will continue, but the millionaire will be but a trustee for the poor; intrusted for a season with a great part of the increased wealth of the community, but administering it for the community far better than it could or would have done for itself. . . . [M]en may die sharers in great business enterprises from which their capital cannot be or has not been withdrawn, and is left chiefly at death for public uses, yet the man who dies leaving behind many millions of available wealth, which was his to administer during life, will pass away "unwept, unhonored, and unsung," no matter to what uses he leaves the dross which he cannot take with him. Of such as these the public verdict will then be: "The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced."

Such, in my opinion, is the true Gospel concerning Wealth, obedience to which is destined some day to solve the problem of the Rich and the Poor, and to bring "Peace on earth, among men Good-Will."<sup>7</sup>

To put it another way, in Carnegie's influential vision, the capitalist is nothing less than an agent bringing into realization the Postmillennial Kingdom described by mainstream Protestant denominations, in which "evil in all its many forms eventually will be reduced to negligible proportions, that Christian principles will be the rule, not the exception, and that Christ will return to a truly Christianized world."<sup>8</sup>

This is the applied Christian charity that John Winthrop spoke of in 1630 aboard the *Arabella*, in transit to the Massachusetts Bay Colony:

Observe again that the Scripture gives no caution to restrain any from being over liberal this way; but all men to the liberal and cheerful practice hereof by the sweeter promises; as to instance one for many (Isaiah 58:6-9) "Is not this the fast I have chosen to loose the bonds of wickedness, to take off the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke . . . to deal thy bread to the hungry and to bring the poor that wander into thy house, when thou seest the naked to cover them . . . and then shall thy light brake forth as the morning and thy health shall grow speedily, thy righteousness shall go

before God, and the glory of the Lord shalt embrace thee; then thou shall call and the Lord shall answer thee," etc. . . . On the contrary most heavy curses are laid upon such as are straightened towards the Lord and his people (Judg. 5:23), "Curse ye Meroshe . . . because they came not to help the Lord." He who shutteth his ears from hearing the cry of the poor, he shall cry and shall not be heard." (Matt. 25) "Go ye cursed into everlasting fire," etc. "I was hungry and ye fed me not." (2 Cor. 9:6) "He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly."<sup>9</sup>

A comparison of Winthrop with Carnegie and Boettner shows more continuity than discontinuity. Indeed, it is precisely this vision of the United States as a nation acting deliberately in service to bring about a postmillennial world that constitutes a great deal of the unspoken belief behind the idea of American exceptionalism: that exceptional mission is as a nation united from immigrants of all lands, in service of a cause greater than nationalism. In Woodrow Wilson's speeches advocating the ratification of the League of Nations, he often spoke of that transnational cause: "There is one thing that the American people always rise to and extend their hand to, and that is the truth of justice and of liberty and of peace. We have accepted that truth, and we are going to be led by it, and it is going to lead us, and through us, the world, out into pastures of quietness and peace such as the world never dreamed of before."<sup>10</sup>

Lorraine Boettner notes of the United States at the time of her writing (1958) that the aid given by the United States was a mark of how far advanced the Postmillennial Kingdom was approaching:

Today the world at large is on a far higher plane. Christian principles are the accepted standards in many nations even though they are not consistently practiced. Slavery and polygamy have practically disappeared. The status of women and children has been improved immeasurably. Social and economic conditions in almost all nations have reached a new high plateau. A spirit of cooperation is much more manifest among the nations. . . . [T]he United States . . . since the end of World War II has given to other nations more than sixty billion dollars for these purposes. . . . This huge amount of goods and services has been given freely by this enlightened and predominantly Protestant nation to nations of other races and religions, with no expectation that it ever will be paid back, an effective expression unselfishness and international good will.<sup>11</sup>

This is very much in accord with John Winthrop's observation that each person and each community is bound to one another with ligaments of love and duty. It is in accord with Franklin's project to form a "United Party for Virtue."<sup>12</sup> Carnegie's ideal is continued to this day by people such as Charles Feeney, who made and gave away more than 99 percent of his entire fortune in secret.<sup>13</sup> Warren Buffett writes of his pledging 99 percent of his fortune to charity that he "couldn't be happier" and that his "extraordinary good fortune" called on him, after meeting his family's needs, to "distribute the rest to society, for its needs."<sup>14</sup>

But even if one accepts the Gospel of Wealth premise, that power and wealth is both a sign of favor and a trust, what is missing from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century models of virtue is their alternative: What happens to the man or woman



of power and wealth who sees him- or herself as morally justified and regards wealth and power as a right, not a trust? What happens when power is used in the service of personal ambitions, and wealth for the benefit of family and friends alone? By extension, what happens to the society that sees itself as morally justified, and becomes blind to the idea, as John Donne says, that “No man is an island entire of itself; every man / is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”<sup>15</sup> What happens to the society whose leaders with wealth and power lack compassion and do not cast their bread on the waters, as Solomon advised, so as to see it return after many days in the form of a more virtuous world<sup>16</sup> but take it from others and eat it all themselves? And ultimately, to what judgment do such people and such societies come?

Andrew Carnegie’s friend and fellow anti-imperialist Mark Twain presents a hint of this with his War Prayer, written in 1905 during the Moro Rebellion in the Philippines, a Vietnam-like war against predominantly Muslim insurgents who had fought against the Spanish Empire when Spain controlled the Philippines and who were intermittently at war with the United States. A mysterious stranger comes to a church whose congregants, sincere and well-meaning people, have prayed for their children to be God’s instruments of justice, and he explains to them what they have prayed for:

O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with little children to wander unfriended the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sports of the sun flames of summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it—for our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen.<sup>17</sup>

Here is the opposite of Christian charity: These well-meaning people, on the basis of moral entitlement, as a chosen elite, pray to be instruments of vengeance: They pray to divide and destroy, not to heal the world but to become, as one might put it in *Star Wars* terms, lords of the dark side of the Force.

I have written elsewhere about what I regard as the dominant cognitive metaphor of national identity for the United States, which I call “The United States is Israel.”<sup>18</sup> In accordance with this cognitive metaphor, the United States is a chosen nation; God is on our side. But in accord with that metaphor’s source domain, as with ancient Israel, people in the United States individually, and the United States as a whole, are rewarded—or punished—for their actions, in proportion to which they serve to advance the Millennium Kingdom or to retard it. As Winthrop famously

said, "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world."<sup>19</sup>

### THE RISE AND FALL: VIRTUE, AUTHORITY, AND CORRUPTION

The American myth of rising is based on the pursuit of hard work and cheerfulness in the face of adversity. Very commonly, the American hero child is an orphan or half-orphan. By making the hero alienated from or without a family—something Benjamin Franklin himself highlights in his *Autobiography*—the hero's rise is shown to be the result, not from the influence of family, but from personal merit. These heroes are born with an innate grace that leads them intuitively to success. This success myth is derived, as Weber notes, from the Calvinist Protestant ethic theme of material signs following one's elect status, as described through the speeches and writings of such ministers as Phillips Brooks, Henry Ward Beecher, and Russell Conwell.<sup>20</sup> These virtues lead to the acquisition of wealth and power—and indeed, wealth and power are the material nimbus of such virtue.

Typically, narratives in the United States that express the themes of the Protestant ethic are narratives of a rise or of a false hero whose innate failures lead to a fall. What is particularly interesting about the narratives of the Skywalker family in George Lucas's *Star Wars* films and the Corleone family in Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* films is that these are narratives of rises *and* falls; like the family of King David from the Bible or the family of Sophocles's Oedipus the king, we see a complete tragic cycle.

In Vito Corleone, as portrayed in *The Godfather, Part II*, we see a figure very much like Benjamin Franklin's portrait of himself as the runaway apprentice, arriving in Philadelphia with two bread rolls under his arms, or Alger's Ragged Dick, a penniless child alone in the streets of New York. Vito arrives to the United States on a ship, a young boy fleeing Italy to escape the Mafia "family" in his hometown that had killed his father, brother, and mother. His rise from an Ellis Island orphan to the don of his syndicate begins because he is disciplined, friendly, forgiving in the face of adversity, and sympathetic to others because they are Italian and have suffered adversity, as he has. But this is in accordance with the Protestant myth of success of the United States. As with Alger's Luke Larkin in *Struggling Upward*, Vito accepts a package from a stranger, who asks him to hold it for him, and he does so faithfully, without asking questions. A local "Black Hand" boss, Don Fanucci, requires a job for a family member and forces the family of Vito's friend, Genco Abbandando, to fire Vito from his job, so that Don Fanucci's family member can have it. Vito accepts this disaster graciously, saying, "You've always been good to me, ever since I came here. You looked after me like a father. I thank you. And I won't forget it." Ragged

Dick, Alger writes, “was above doing anything mean or dishonorable. He would not steal, or cheat, or impose upon younger boys, but was frank and straight-forward, manly and self-reliant. His nature was a noble one, and had saved him from all mean faults.” Like Ragged Dick, Vito finds friends who help him because of his virtue.<sup>20</sup>

Where Vito begins to differ from Alger’s Dick is that Vito’s friends, whom he helps and who help him to rise, are criminals—with the virtue, we are told, of defending Italians against a society in which Italians are made to suffer. “If he’s Italian—why does he bother other Italians? Vito asks his friend Genco about Fanucci. Vito’s empathy is for fellow immigrants, the weak who suffer from the powerful, outside or inside of the Italian community. His world is one of brutal gangs and ethnic hatreds, such as Alger obliquely describes in *Ragged Dick*, a world that he recalls to the undertaker Bonasera in *The Godfather*, Part I:

You found paradise in America, had a good trade, made a good living. The police protected you; and there were courts of law. And you didn’t need a friend of me. But now you come to me and you say—“Don Corleone give me justice.” . . . By chance if an honest man such as yourself should make enemies, then they would become my enemies. And then they would fear you. . . . Some day, and that day may never come, I’ll call upon you to do a service for me. <sup>21</sup>

In Ragged Dick’s world, the Five Points gang leader, Micky Maguire, is the neighborhood oppressor of weaker boys, such as Dick’s “tutor” Henry Fosdick, whom he houses and feeds, and from whom he learns how to read. Similarly, Vito takes in an orphan boy of German-Irish heritage from the streets, Tom Hagen, and raises him as a son—in return for which Tom Hagen goes to law school and becomes his family’s lawyer. In Vito’s world—somewhat ironically, given its implied Protestant ethic story of rising through virtue, a world seemingly made up predominantly of Catholic Irish and Italians and Jews—Vito, like Ragged Dick, is the protector of the weaker Italians who come to him: from ethnic oppression, from bullies in the immigrant community, and from the indifference and corruption of a society we hear of more than see, a society hostile to immigrants in general, and Italian immigrants in particular.

If Vito’s version of this story of the protector rings hollow in the face of murder, corruption, and theft, it doesn’t ring hollow to *him*; unlike the undertaker Bonasera, Vito does not believe in “America” but rather in the family of blood and the extended family of friends bound by duty and obligation. That this is close enough to the feelings of much of the audience became clear to Francis Coppola only after the movie was released, when much of the criticism about the movie, and some of the praise, focused on Vito, and the Michael that emerges at the end of the film: These observers saw Coppola’s gangster morality tale of failure as a story of strong leadership. Coppola’s antiheroes were ennobled, defending themselves and their family from corrupt police and less sympathetic villains. Some critics suggested that *The Godfather* was a realistic portrayal of the Mafia in America and saw the film as expressing a sense of moral justice. This narrative failure partly inspired Coppola to develop a sequel.<sup>22</sup>

In *The Godfather*, though Vito seems never to question his own rectitude, Michael regards his father as a tyrant. Michael believes in an American republic of disinterested law and justice, and of a moral order in the world. And so if Vito is pathetic, because he is unconsciously monstrous, Michael is tragic: He knows he has been possessed by evil, and yet he cannot find a way to escape from it. *The Godfather* begins with Michael having rejecting his father and family, owning little, accepting no help, and earning real honor in defense of his country in World War II against the authoritarian dictatorships of Europe—fighting for strangers, as his family speaks dismissively of those outside of it. By the end of the film, however, through a progress worthy of C. S. Lewis's imagined demon Screwtape, Michael is led step by step into perdition, always with the best of intentions. First he pretends to be a killer to protect his father in the hospital. Then he becomes an actual killer of a corrupt police captain and the gangster who tried to kill his father. Ultimately, he inhabits the evil of his father's life: He becomes the man who stands in church and becomes the godfather of his nephew, piously saying that he rejects Satan and all of his works, even as evil and murder is being carried out by his orders, through the authoritarian syndicate he rules, served by the family he owns. "We produce this sense of ownership," Screwtape advises his nephew, the junior tempter devil:

not only by pride, but by confusion. We teach them not to notice the different senses of the possessive pronoun—the finely graded differences that run from "my boots" through "my dog," "my servant," "my wife," "my father," "my master," and "my country," to "my God." They can be taught to reduce all these senses to that of "my boots," the "my" of ownership. . . . And all the time the joke is that the word "mine" in its fully possessive sense cannot be uttered by a human being about anything.<sup>23</sup>

In taking over his father's position, Michael takes over his father's role of ownership, his position of authority, and passes from being a figure who is subject to the authority of church or state to become an antithetical authority, a paterfamilias in the Ancient Roman sense, holding the power of life and death.

When Michael casts off the authority of the republic, he turns for guidance to his father, and to what he refers to in the films as the "Corleone" virtue of canniness. The films refer obliquely to the Roman Empire as an inspiration for the "family," and it is the four cardinal virtues of Ancient Rome—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, but above all prudence—that Vito and Michael follow. But these virtues mask the fact that the authority they exercise is tyrannical, established and maintained through coercion and backed by violence. *The Godfather, Part II* begins with a match cut between Michael, as Don Corleone, holding his hand out to have his ring kissed by one of his gang, and a generation earlier, Vito's mother kissing the ring of Don Ciccio, the neighborhood Mafia boss of the Italian village of Corleone, who has just had her husband and her other son killed. Vito's mother begs Don Ciccio to spare the life of her last son, Vito. "He's weak—he can't hurt anyone," she says. "He's all I have left." "When he is a man, he will come for revenge," Don Ciccio says implacably. "No." The match cut tells us that Michael has become like Don

Ciccio—he has become like the man who destroyed his father's family and blighted his father's views of the world.

Michael lives long enough, and is reflective enough, to understand that in becoming the mind behind a leviathan of criminal violence, he has turned into a monster—the kind of monster that consumes humans to perpetuate itself, the protector turned monster that Plato, in *The Republic*, decried as a wolf in human form.<sup>24</sup> In transforming from the Michael who serves others in a uniform, or is a free agent in open-collar shirts, to the man who owns his family and owns the lives of others, Michael adopts the dark three-piece-suit uniform of his father, and of his father's associates. As he adopts this new uniform, a door closes—literally, at the end of *The Godfather*—separating him from his wife and separating him from his family. In taking personal ownership of his father's "family" and becoming strong enough to defend his family from all threats, he loses his family—his personal family. He gains material power but loses all immaterial things of value. In *The Godfather, Part II*, with his marriage to his wife Kay falling apart, and just before he gives the order to have his own brother Fredo killed for colluding (in Fredo's semi-aware way) in Hyman Roth's attempt to have Michael killed, Michael asks his mother: "Tell me something, Ma. What did Papa think—deep in his heart? He was being strong—strong for his family. But by being strong for his family—could he—lose it?" She, like Vito, cannot comprehend the question. "But you can never lose your family," she says in confusion. How is that possible? How can one be too strong in defending the family? That the laws of the "family" that the Corleones create make it just to have his brother Fredo killed for his half-aware malice and weakness, just as it was just to have Connie's husband Carlo killed for setting up Michael's brother Sonny to be killed, may be true. However, in carrying out these acts of justice, one by one Michael alienates or kills his own family, whom the Mafia "family" was supposed to preserve. Michael is left alone with no family other than the "family" of subordinates whom he rules.

Anakin Skywalker has much less family to lose, but similarly, he is driven by the fear of the loss of the little family he has. Unlike Vito, whose mother Don Ciccio's men kill before the child Vito's eyes, Anakin's mother Shmi lives, though in bondage with him in the *Ben-Hur* world of the slave culture of Tatooine in *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* (Episode 1 in the six-film cycle). Where Vito's mother sacrifices her life to keep Vito alive, and Vito's struggle upward comes with effort, Anakin's mother yields her son from poverty to a destiny of glory. If Vito's *Ragged Dick* story is quintessentially the rags-to-riches American success story, the story of Anakin is of an apotheosis. He is a child of miraculous virgin birth, revealed to the wise as a numinous being whose destiny affects an entire galaxy. But like Vito, from his position of powerlessness, he too has a dream of freeing his world from the cruel authoritarian society that oppresses the weak, of bringing about a new order. "I had a dream I was a Jedi," he tells the Jedi Knight Qui-Gon who finds him and frees him because of his prodigal abundance of the Force. "I came back here and freed all the slaves . . . have you come to free us?" In the world of *Star Wars*, such power is beyond the Jedi;

Tatooine itself is at the edge of the Galactic Republic, beyond the reach of its power. And Shmi has told her son the lesson of Governor Winthrop, that the purpose of want and suffering is to enable others to help others, not because they are family, but because they are in need: “We have to help them, Mom,” Anakin says to Shmi, when Qui-Gon asks him to race in the Pod Race to obtain the parts they need. “You said that the biggest problem in the universe is no one helps each other.”

It is this forgotten lesson that is leading the Galactic Republic to fall apart. Who is served by the Galactic Republic? *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* begins with a Trade Federation that refuses to pay taxes to maintain the republic for the trade route shipping they conduct within the republic’s borders. They place a shipping embargo on the planet Naboo to starve the planet, and hold it hostage so that the republic will be forced to cut taxes. Senator Palpatine explains to the queen of Naboo what is happening, which is no less accurate for its being brought about through his hidden efforts—and it is worth quoting in full for its implications; however, I cannot do that.<sup>25</sup> To paraphrase, Senator Palpatine says that the republic’s senate has been corrupted by money, the chancellor has been made powerless through baseless attacks of scandal, the government is run by amoral bureaucrats, and the only hope for justice is to create a stronger executive with plenary powers to impose justice.

In *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones*, Count Dooku, who is leading the revolt against the republic, also cries out more in sorrow than anger that the republic is too corrupt to be saved. To paraphrase, Dooku says that the forms of democratic government are simply an illusion, the government is run by amoral bureaucrats, and there is no true free government worthy of the name.<sup>26</sup>

In a corrupt republic of hypocrisy and horror, the innocent are dying, the shamelessly greedy control power for their own ends, and no one has the will or the power to do the hard tasks needed to obtain justice—except for their would-be protector, Count Dooku. Similarly, the United States portrayed in the galaxy in which Vito and Michael live is a place where the police are in the service of one criminal syndicate or another, and where some yearn for a strong authoritarian power to seize control. This is the kind of world that brings the undertaker Bonasera to plea for Vito’s help. This is the kind of world that Vito and Michael—and that Palpatine, Dooku, and Anakin—each seeks to master, to bring into balance. It is the better part of virtue to seize power, they say, to become a strong protector, to control evil, and to impose the order that is needed. And this desire for the power to obtain justice is a false virtue to which Anakin, as the tragic hero, is fatally drawn. To paraphrase, Anakin tells Padmé that someone wise and powerful needs to force all the politicians and people to find the best answer to their problems.<sup>27</sup>

The desire for justice, balance, and order is a common theme to the *Star Wars* and the *Godfather* films: Everyone is trying to discover the authority by which “balance” and “order” can be brought to the universe. But who is wise enough? Who is that authority? How can that authority be manifested?

Finding wisdom and a just authority is Michael’s challenge in *Godfather III*. Michael writes to his children that “the only wealth in this world is children, more than

all the money and power on Earth. You are my treasure.” He asks them to attend the ceremony where Archbishop Gilday, as the pope looks on, makes Michael a *commendatore* (knight commander) of the (fictional) Papal Order of Saint Sebastian—the saint, suggestively, whom the Emperor Diocletian ordered to be bound to a stake and shot with arrows. Michael is a target because he has used violence to establish his authority, and the power of violence underlies the wealth and power he controls. He seeks to transform that authority of violence to an authority of virtue, seeking absolution from the Church for the sins by which his wealth was obtained, to make the authority granted by that wealth legitimate. He seeks to give away his criminal “family” in favor of recovering his real family and to give the power his money provides to the Church, to direct for good, as his means of finding “a new period of harmony in our lives.”

However, Michael’s charity is more apparent than real. The induction into the Papal Order is a quid pro quo arrangement, in the manner of the “family” of crime; after the induction, Michael, as director of the newly formed Vito Corleone Foundation, gives Archbishop Gilday a check for \$100 million “for the poor in Sicily in the name of Vito Corleone.” Michael makes his daughter Mary the chair of the Vito Corleone Foundation, and deposits another \$100 million in the Vatican Bank. This is the first of a series of self-interested exchanges of obligations: Michael also provides money for the Vatican Bank’s board of director’s swimming pool and agrees to help sponsor a judge; Archbishop Gilday agrees to sponsor Michael’s godson, his brother Tom Hagan’s son Andrew, a priest, to a position at the Vatican. This pattern continues even with Kay, to seek the “harmony” he wants to find with his children. When Kay asks that Michael let his son Anthony make his own choice of a career, as an opera singer rather than a lawyer, Michael agrees—though only with the quid pro quo that Kay will no longer shut him out of her life and the lives of her children. Seamlessly, we pass from these exchanges of business “favors” and a divorced parent’s coerced bargain to the settlement of crime family business. Michael’s chosen “family” successor, Joey Zaza, arrives to ask his own favor of Don Michael. As with *The Godfather*, where Johnny Fontaine sings in the background at his daughter’s wedding while Don Vito settles Corleone business, he sings again as Don Michael gives and accepts favors. The true and false families are inextricably linked together by crime, corruption, and the authority of ownership.

In the scenes that follow, Archbishop Gilday informs Michael that as head of the Vatican Bank, he has lost \$769 million to bank fraud carried out by friends, something that Michael already knows. In accordance with his attorney Harrison’s comment earlier that they “control a lot of money with very little,” Michael offers to solve the archbishop’s problem: He will deposit \$600 million, with the implied promise that this money is a gift; in the public announcement later, only the \$200 million already deposited for the Vito Corleone Foundation is mentioned. In return for saving the archbishop from disgrace and the Vatican Bank from failure with this gift, Michael requires that the Vatican support the takeover by his corporation, the Corleone Group, of Immobiliare, a holding company that owns \$6 billion in real estate investments around the world.

Is this mixture of virtuous charity, “family” business, and Michael’s family a form of balance and harmony? Michael’s children, Mary and Anthony, see the shadows underlying the apparently legitimate intentions of virtue and do not like it. She interrogates her father as to the true reasons for his donations. Michael, as is his practice, swears to his innocent intentions.<sup>28</sup> But as Archbishop Gilday has already told us, there *are* two other purposes: legitimate wealth and power. If Michael’s plan succeeds, he will become “one of the richest men in the world. Your whole past history, and the history of your family, will be washed away.”

Michael’s plan runs into two problems. The first is from the past, in a message from Don Altobello: His old “family” members on the Mafia Commission “want to share your deal on Immobiliare. To be a family again. It can purify their money.” They too want access to this new lever of power. The “family” does not want to be left behind so that Michael and his true family can be free. The second problem is that others seeking to have the sins of their money washed away have beaten him to this game with the Vatican Bank. He finds at the Vatican Bank board meeting that his favor with the pope lasts only as long as the pope is alive, and the pope is dying, unable to ratify Michael’s bargain with Archbishop Gilday. Michael must make new bargains with the existing directors to obtain the control he sought by investing in an insolvent bank. Unless he can make these new bargains and be able to gain control of Immobiliare, he will have given \$600 million and deposited \$200 million more in a bank on the brink of failure, risking all of it, and obtaining nothing for it.

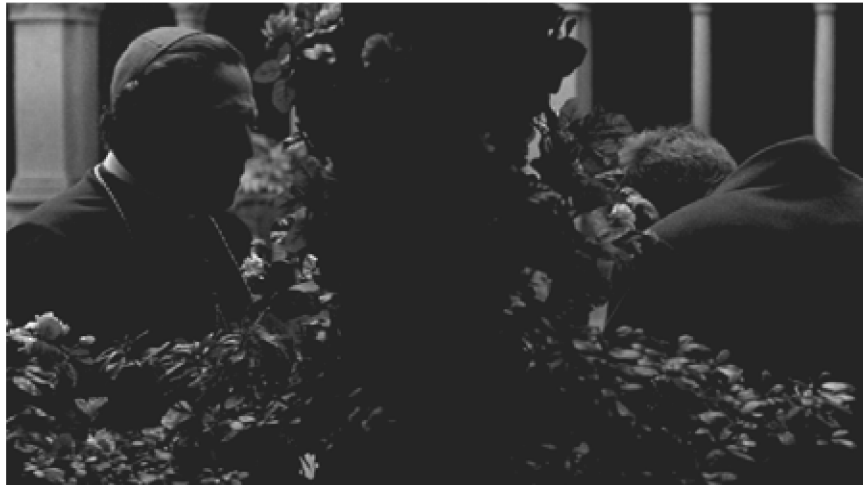
The problems of his “family” and of the legal world of corporations become much worse when almost all the commission, the heads of the old “family” who have ties of favors owed to him, are killed in an assault by Joey Zaza, whom Michael thought he controlled. “Joe Zaza, would never pull something like this without backing. He’s just muscle, he’s an enforcer, he’s nothing. . . . Our true enemy has not yet shown his face.” In the shock of this threat of a phantom menace, he falls into a diabetic stroke. While he is incapacitated, Michael’s sister Connie orders Michael’s nephew, Vincent Mancini, to kill Joey Zaza—thus making Michael again head of the “family,” much to his fury. Michael’s response to them is revealing: He tells Connie and Vincent that killing Zaza “was the wrong decision. *I* command this family, right or wrong! It was not what I *wanted*!” In addition, Michael’s daughter has fallen in love with his nephew Vincent. The only member of his crime “family” he can trust is suddenly involved with the daughter whom he cannot command. Michael fears Vincent will pull his daughter into the world of vice, from which he has spent his life trying to escape. In his weakness, the one hope he finds is in Kay, who unexpectedly visits him to thank him for not trying to control their son. In fulfillment of their quid pro quo, she brings with her their children to see him, yet it is the first moment that we see between them more than the “family” arrangement—there is a hint of family reconciliation. “This is the first time I’ve seen you look so helpless,” Kay tells him. “Not so bad, really. I feel I’m getting wiser now,” he says. “When I’m dead, I’m gonna be real smart.”

To discover the true identity of his phantom menace and to work toward the reconciliation of his family by attending his son Anthony’s first public opera per-



formance, Michael travels to Sicily. There he is haunted by the memory of his first wife, Apollonia, the innocent girl who died by a bomb set for him, the fate he fears for Mary, if she should wed Vincent. Don Tommasino, the old Sicilian Mafia don who was crippled in helping Vito Corleone kill Don Ciccio in *Godfather II*, informs Michael that Lucchesi, the Immobiliare director leading the opposition to Michael's control, is also connected to Archbishop Gilday and to the Mafia world: The source of his crime "family" problem and legitimate business world problem are suddenly the same. "Italian politics have had these kinds of men for centuries," he says: "They're the true Mafia." And so Michael's quest to transform his power from an authority of evil to an authority of virtue leads to a dead end. As he observes to his sister later, "Connie, all my life I kept trying to go up in society, where everything higher up was legal, straight. But the higher I go, the crooked it becomes."

In this moment of crisis in Michael's quest, when he is least powerful, he finds a moment of grace, a moment in which he can shed his burden of false authority. Don Tommasino has advised him to go to Cardinal Lamberto, "A wise and good man, very influential," who is someone definitely representative of the true Church, not part of the world of corrupt obligations and favors. Perhaps if Michael goes to this good cardinal and tells him of the corruption of the bank, a way might be opened for the Vatican to do something where Michael cannot. When Michael tells his story of corruption at the Vatican Bank, he suffers a diabetic attack. "When I'm under stress, sometimes this happens," Michael explains. "The mind suffers, and the body cries out," Cardinal Lamberto replies and then, much to Michael's surprise, offers to take Michael's Confession—an offer made without coercion that he finds he



Cardinal Lamberto (Raf Vallone) offers God's compassion to Michael Corleone (Al Pacino), the demiurge of a different family. It is one of the few moments when Michael is able to lay down his burden of power.

cannot refuse. And so Michael confesses his guilt, above all to the sin of killing his own brother. In the terms of Catholicism, Michael finds the external authority he has been seeking—though as Cardinal Lamberto tells him, and as Michael acknowledges, Michael refuses to take authority over his own actions by truly repenting of his violence.

In Michael's attempt to explain his confession to his sister Connie, we see the degree to which the false authority of violence has corrupted his family. In *The Godfather*, after Michael ordered Connie's husband Carlo killed even as he was being made godfather to Connie and Carlo's son, Connie was the avenging conscience, crying out with the authority of the innocent at his crime against her and her son, echoing Vito's mother. In *The Godfather II*, Connie feared Michael and fought against his efforts to control her life. However, by the end of the film she tells Michael that she understands, he was being strong for the family—and pleads with the authority of her compassion for him, as a *quid pro quo*, for him to forgive and take back Fredo. In *Godfather III*, Connie has become the denying spirit of Michael, excusing his actions by the argument of necessity as she hands him the insulin that keeps his body from crying out, as Cardinal Lamberto so sympathetically phrases it:

*MICHAEL*: I made confession, Connie. I confessed my sins.

*CONNIE*: Why, Michael? That's not like you. You don't have to confess your sins to a stranger.

*MICHAEL*: It was the man. A good man. A true priest. He changed things.

*CONNIE*: (after a pause, and a long look at Michael) Michael, you know, sometimes I think of poor Fredo—drowned. It was *God's* will. It was a terrible accident. But it's finished. (Michael sighs.) Michael, I love you! I'll always help you!

Where Kay found herself drawn to Michael's weakness, Connie is frightened by it. If Kay, Anthony, and Mary know that Michael ordered Fredo killed, then of course Connie does too—something that she proves by immediately citing the sin she knows Michael must have confessed, of Fredo's death. But she shifts the blame from Michael, stopping him from confessing to her and seeking her forgiveness: It was God's will that this evil had to happen, not Michael's—as it is God's will that she keeps pushing Michael back into the soul-destroying crimes in which she too is now a participant. God is to blame for the evil that Michael, and now she herself, carries out to impose their will on the world, destroying the world around them and themselves in order to save it. And so the moment of introspection ends in silent plea for denial, and for Michael to continue to deny personal authority and culpability for his crimes.

As with Connie, Michael confesses his sins to Kay and asks her for her forgiveness. After a day together alone in the Sicilian countryside, where they see a pantomime for children where a father kills his daughter "for honor," Michael has the conversation with Kay that Connie denied him. To paraphrase, he asks Kay to forgive him of all his sins committed against her and against their marriage.<sup>29</sup>

Michael's reconciliation with Kay is interrupted by the news of Don Tommasino's death at the hands of Altobello's assassin. As he does so often, Michael steps through a doorway, separating him from Kay. She watches in dismay as Don Tommasino's bodyguard Calo demands of Michael: "Command me. I will avenge him!" Michael, the *commendatore*, owns the fealty of his "family," and power continues to accrete to him. But we see also in this scene again that power divides him from Kay, seemingly without his being able to help himself. Michael is really the slave of the power relations that he has entered into. In choosing to become the head of the authoritarian order of violence, to wield its power, he is trapped by his obligations to the order, living as a divided person, in two worlds.

If Michael is unable to set aside the authority he has created for himself in the "family" he rules, he still seeks redemption and reconciliation of his divided life. He still intends to use the "family" power to protect his true family. Michael has two strategic goals: First, keep Mary out of the "family," to preserve her innocence. Second, find a way to free his money from the control of criminals, so that he can recover his power and use it to buy his way to innocence. But in both plans, he seeks to *control* the outcome himself, to *master* the world. First, as he tried to do with Anthony, Michael orders Mary to obey his commands: Stay away from Vincent, he orders, because it is too dangerous for her to be near him. But he sees that he cannot order her. So he next turns to the man he can order, Vincent, and devises a clever plan to advance both his goals: Sell your soul to Altobello. Go to him, to confirm his connections to the Vatican Bank and Lucchesi. Tell him that you want to run away with my daughter, and you want Altobello's help, Michael says to Vincent. Tell Altobello you cannot be part of the legitimate world, and you will work for Altobello. The genius of Michael's plan is that all that he asks Vincent to tell Altobello is true, and it ensures absolutely that Altobello and Don Lucchesi will not target Mary. On the contrary, their interests will be to protect Mary's life, to preserve their "friendship" with Vincent. So, whether Vincent betrays Michael or follows his orders and obtains the information Michael needs to free his money, Mary will not be a target.

Meanwhile, beyond his planning, Michael's good priest, the wise Cardinal Lamberto, has just been elected Pope John Paul I—and the new pope immediately orders an investigation into the Vatican Bank. But Michael ignores the pope's investigation. He does not control it.

In obedience to Michael's orders, Vincent confirms to Michael that Lucchesi is the phantom mind that has opposed Michael's will, and Lucchesi has targeted Michael for assassination. Michael does not think of trying to contact the pope or anyone else, because his is the only authority he recognizes. His only thought is that he cannot avoid a Mafia war, and he must respond in kind to the person who has targeted him. But he is too frail physically to lead the fight, so he turns over all his power in the "family" to Vincent—on the condition that he give up Mary: "Give up my daughter. That's the price you pay, for the life you choose." By using Vincent to control his enemies, and by his control now over Vincent, even as he turns over his power, he has devised a foolproof plan, he assumes, to ensure that Mary is absolutely

safe from what he has told Kay are the “horrors of this world.” For a final time, Michael surrenders to the spirit of rancor. “I *tried*, Vincent. I tried to keep everything from coming to this. But it’s not possible. Not in this world.” And so, denying his guilt, he releases Vincent—as Connie looks on, satisfied—to carry out his part of the murders of all the “family” enemies. “Vincent knows what to do. Come on outside,” she tells Michael. “Take a rest and—and don’t think about it.” It is God’s will, she implies again, not his. And so this time it is Michael himself who, just as the Corleone family is almost out of the crime business, pulls it back in, installing a new family member as don to rule the evil empire he wanted to dismantle—and ignoring the implications of the new authority in the Vatican.

As Michael finds the papacy to be another place of politics and corruption, so Anakin increasingly finds Jedi Master Obi-wan Kenobi and the Jedi Council to be “political” and weak, compared to the control he seeks—which in his case is the power over life and death. In *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones*, he dreams of his mother Shmi’s pain in captivity to the Tuskan Raiders and flies to his home planet of Tatooine to save her life. He traces her life, finds she has been freed, finds her husband and his stepbrother, and finds the Tuskan Raider camp where she is held. Shmi awakens to see her adult son, now a Jedi, and dies saying, “Now I am complete,” a hint to the wise, perhaps. But in his fury, Anakin kills the entire village of Tuskan Raiders—man, woman, and child—an event evocative of the My Lai massacre or, in the context of Twain’s war prayer, the Moro Massacre of 1906, of which Twain wrote, “They were mere naked savages, and yet there is a sort of pathos about it when that word children falls under your eye, for it always brings before us our perfectest symbol of innocence and helplessness; and by help of its deathless eloquence color, creed and nationality vanish away and we see only that they are children—merely children.”<sup>30</sup> On Coruscant, Yoda, in meditation with the Force, trying to feel the direction of the Dark Side, hears Qui-Gon, the Jedi who found Anakin, cry out, “No, Anakin! No! Don’t! No!” Mace Windu, the Jedi leader, is watching Yoda as he meditates and sees him react. He asks Yoda what he feels. “Pain. Suffering. Death, I feel . . . Young Skywalker is in pain. Terrible pain.” On Tatooine, when Padmé says that there are things no one can fix, and Anakin is not all-powerful, he says, “I should be! Someday, I will be. I will be the most powerful Jedi ever! I promise you, I will learn to stop people from dying.”

In *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin again dreams, this time of Padmé’s death. Like Michael with Cardinal Lamberto, Anakin is given a chance to confess his fears. To paraphrase, he tells Yoda of his premonitions of losing control of the fates of those whom he loves but finds the advice—to release his desire for control—difficult to accept.<sup>31</sup> In *The Godfather III*, Michael could let his son Anthony go, but it is his daughter Mary’s love he fears to lose, his last tie to innocence and trust. Anakin cannot free himself from fear for Padmé. That fear leads him to the temptation Chancellor Palpatine/Sith Lord Darth Sidious proposes to him, that even if Padmé dies, as in his dream, he can gain the power from the Sith to restore the dead to life, like Darth Plagueis the Wise. And so, in the end, though he reveals to the Jedi Council that



**Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) reacts to the specter of Sith Lord Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid) extracting fealty from his new disciple, Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen). Out of their shared fear of death and diminishment of their will, the Sith lords separate themselves from life and become destroyers of worlds.**

Palpatine is the Sith Lord, he helps Palpatine/Darth Sidious kill Mace Windu, head of the Jedi Council, because Anakin needs Darth Sidious alive, to continue the path to the wisdom he needs to give him the power to keep Padmé alive. In his dearth of knowledge, he becomes a slave to a new authority, and becomes Darth Vader.

To keep Padmé alive, Anakin/Darth Vader helps Palpatine/Darth Sidious destroy the republic, in the name of saving it, by killing the Jedi. When the Jedi are no longer a threat, Darth also kills the leaders of the various banking guild, trade guild, and other commercial guild organizations whose selfish opposition to taxation and regulation Darth Sidious used to cripple the ability of the republic to function. As his use for them is finished, their desire for anarchy is disharmonious to the expression of his singular will: "Now, Lord Vader, now go and bring peace to the empire," Darth Sidious orders. As Vader destroys the separatists, Palpatine/Darth Sidious announces the new order: "To ensure our security and continuing stability, the republic will be reorganized into the first Galactic Empire," Palpatine/Darth Sidious announces to the Senate, "for a safe and secure society, which I assure you will last for ten thousand years. An empire that will continue to be ruled by this august body, and a sovereign ruler chosen for life." This is not the millennium but rather its opposite: instead

of a righteous world order enabling individuals to be themselves, we are instead seeing the installation of a tyrannical order, established through violence, with no law other than that of absolute rule of the emperor, in which all are made equal by oppression. Darth Sidious speaks more truly when he cries out “Absolute power!” as he kills the Jedi Council leader Mace Windu. The only threat to that absolute rule is Darth Vader/Anakin, whose intentions are still to be the protector of his family, and whom the emperor rules only because Anakin needs the emperor’s knowledge to save Padmé.

Padmé flees Coruscant to find Anakin/Vader, not realizing Obi-wan Kenobi is aboard her ship. Anakin/Vader offers her his new empire—he can overthrow the emperor, and they can rule in accordance with their will. However, when he sees Kenobi, Vader thinks Padmé has betrayed him. In his anger, Vader makes it clear that he sees her as his property, an extension of his will, and uses the force to choke her into unconsciousness for her defiance—indeed, in some manner apparently depriving her of her will to have a separate existence, as though her will to live is crushed. She lives just long enough to bear and name twin children, though Vader does not learn of that until later. “You have allowed this Dark Lord to twist your mind until now . . . you have become the very thing you swore to destroy.” So in seeking the Sith’s power of rancor to save Padmé from death, Anakin/Darth is mastered by rancor and causes her death. Similarly, Michael’s effort to keep Mary from Vincent leads her to come up to him to demand of him why he has ordered Vincent to keep away from her. “Dad? Why are you—you don’t have to do this to me, please!” she pleads—and is hit by a bullet aimed at Michael in his persona as Don Corleone. For both Anakin and Michael, power is without value to protect against death. In serving only their own will, they are in opposition to life. Both are trapped in a world in which they are commanders, walking among the ruled, with no peers left with whom they can live.

Michael’s story ends with Mary’s death. We have seen him divided between the different rooms of his Mafia life and his family life – and the door that closes between them. We now see him scream, silently, and then his voice breaks out, as though his body is literally torn asunder from itself, and the parts do not coordinate with one another. Vader, when Darth Sidious tells him of Padmé’s death, has awoken from near death, with movements and imagery deliberately evoking *Frankenstein* (1931). Turned into a monster, he literally tears apart the room around him in his agony. Neither seems to have ties to life, except for the mechanical process of continuing—in a nearly entirely mechanical existence, in Vader’s case. Michael, it seems, is deserted by Kay, by Anthony, by Vincent, even by Connie, whom we do not see near him at his death. Similarly, Darth Vader seems to continue, rather than to live, when we see him in *Star Wars: A New Hope*. Like Amfortas in the Grail myth, wounded by his own spear, Vader lives in suffering and in denial of the shame of his actions. We only see him express a feeling beyond irritation when he encounters Kenobi.

## REDEMPTION: THE AUTHORITY OF COMPASSION

Anakin is lost, as is Michael, but Anakin comes alive again as a person in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*. Vader offers Luke the power to protect those whom he loves and the power to restore moral order.<sup>32</sup> Luke turns away from this offer, which is similar to the one that the emperor made to Vader in *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*, with the exception that it is missing the explicit promise to save a particularly loved person. It is even more similar to the offer Vader makes to Padmé: “Love won’t save you, Padmé. Only my new powers can do that. . . . I have brought peace to the republic. I am more powerful than the chancellor. I can overthrow him, and together you and I can rule the galaxy!” But hidden overtly in the lines is an evocation of the person Luke has been preoccupied with in both *Star Wars: A New Hope* and *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*: His missing and mysterious father, who is now revealed to him: Vader is Luke’s father—and Vader can be saved. Though Vader is the one punishing Luke with the Force, he is also the one trapped by having killed all that he loved. That Vader evokes the family relationship rather than the acquisition of absolute power is an oblique acknowledgment of his own recovery of a family to save; indeed, his attempt to turn Luke is a form of attempting to save him: Like Corleone, Vader believes love cannot save—only power saves. And like Corleone, Vader is tempted less by power for itself than by the potential for power to protect family.

In the first film cycle (episodes 1, 2, and 3), which we might call the Tragedy of Anakin Skywalker, Anakin is not just the grail king but the grail itself—the vessel of divinity, through which the Force is to be made particularly to bear on the galaxy. Through this grail, the Sith will be overthrown, and balance will be restored. But because Anakin attempts to use the Force to shape the world in accordance with his will, as Michael persists in doing, he is lured into becoming exactly the force of darkness he so deeply fears, becoming the agent that deprives Padmé of life and destroying the republic he wished to save. For what Darth Sidious lacks the power to do, Darth Sidious in control of the grail can. In the second film cycle (episodes 4, 5, and 6), which we might call the Apotheosis of the Jedi, as foreshadowed by Qui-Gon’s dialogue with Yoda at the end of *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*, we see the emergent power of the Jedi to use compassion not just to become one with all life but to preserve an eternal consciousness within the Force. We see this discovery of immortality first with Qui-Gon, who calls out to Anakin, and then speaks to Yoda, then Obi-wan Kenobi, then Yoda. Finally, on seeing his son do the exact opposite of what he himself had done when he struck off Mace Windu’s hand, disarming him and then watched frozen as Darth Sidious killed him, Darth Vader gives up the search for eternal life in the body, which he so signally failed to achieve for both Padmé and himself. By sacrificing his body, he frees his soul. In doing so, Vader is transformed back to Anakin; like Oedipus in Sophocles’s *Oedipus at Colonus*, the divine monster horribly out of balance with the divine world becomes an instrument of divine justice, called to rise into immortal life as his service is complete.

The final battle with the emperor echoes the battle of Palpatine and Anakin with Count Dooku, and repeats the battle of Palpatine/Darth Sidious with Mace Windu. However, the fears that confused Anakin in his youth are gone. Anakin feared to defy the Jedi Master and feared the evil of the Sith Lord he saw revealed before him in the man who seemed to be a mentor and friend. But Anakin feared even more losing the knowledge and power of the Sith way of protecting Padmé. In his fear, Anakin could not see how he was being manipulated, was active and passive at the wrong times, and so was lost. Now, he is in the Count Dooku position of being presented as the instrument of another's temptation and sees in Luke's suffering his own past suffering. Unlike Anakin, who killed Dooku without seeing in Dooku a man with fears and a longing for a just authority much like his own, Luke, after cutting off Vader's metal hand holding his light saber and looking at his own metal hand in recognition, sees the man inside the shell of a monster. He refuses to kill Vader when Vader is in his power. Luke finds a moral courage to let go of control, rather than try to own justice, and to exchange righteous anger for compassion. Luke sees in the enemy fears and suffering and longing like his own, rather than only seeing these things as his property. He finds he can no longer be satisfied with a victory that destroys the other person, because he is destroying himself as well. And so he lets go of his purely selfish identity and identifies himself with his enemy, breaking the spell by stating that it is not his will that matters or his body that must be saved, but justice and life itself. His words and action release Anakin from bondage, and together they are able to defeat the emperor.

Jung and von Franz write of the grail (or fisher) king that he is a figure of Adam-in-man, an *anthropos*, in Gnostic terms; on the one hand, he is a Christian man "who has been wounded by a dark adversary, while on the other he has become this dark opponent and now appears demonic himself."<sup>33</sup> This conflict of a soul out of balance with body, and individual out of balance with all humanity, "personifies the principle of Christian consciousness confronted with the problem of *physis* [nature] and of evil. It is as if the dark aspect of divinity had attacked him in order to awaken him to a more conscious religious attitude. But he cannot himself solve the problem within the structure of the outlook he personifies. He therefore has to await a successor who shall free him."<sup>34</sup> It is this failure of insight and will to separate spiritual desire from the body—fundamentally a failure to become that which is imminent within himself—that makes the fisher-king the agent of his own torment and a victim in need of redemption:

I am an infirm and weak old man, surnamed the dragon; therefore am I shut up in a cave, that I may be ransomed by the kingly crown. . . . A fiery sword inflicts great torments upon me; death makes weak my flesh and bones. . . . My soul and my spirit depart; a terrible poison, I am likened to. I lie, that out of Three may come One. O soul and spirit, leave me not, that I may see again the light of day, and the hero of peace whom the whole world shall behold may arise from me.<sup>35</sup>

Michael Corleone dies without finding release, but Anakin/Vader dies, as Anakin's mother Shmi died, with a less expressive but more personal expression of the release



from physical and spiritual bondage. The emperor, in dying, destroys Vader—but Vader was always the shell imprisoning Anakin, an idea Lucas hints at by Anakin's removing the Vader mask at the end. "I can't leave you here," Luke tells him. "I've got to save you." But Anakin replies, "You already have. You were right about me. Tell your sister you were right." In accepting death, he is freed to live eternally, in the Force, and through his children.

Anakin, who began the *Star Wars* series imbued with the implied authority of life, in the form of the Midichorian levels with which he is born, becomes first a Jedi Knight and then a Sith Lord as he seeks the authority to impose order and justice on the galaxy. But by reducing the freedom of others in the name of order, and raising the emperor to end wars and confusion, he reduces the galaxy and himself to servitude. This is also true with Michael Corleone, who begins the series with his father's "Corleone" mind and with a desire to protect his family and live in a world of justice and law. Though he finds himself drawn into his father's world of crime, a world he knows is evil, he spends the entire series seeking to obtain for himself a moral authority and power. In their way, both Michael and Anakin illustrate the limits of a classical model of authority. Power guided by the four virtues of rule as the Ancient Rome—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, the virtues of a paterfamilias or of a philosopher-king—are not enough in themselves to grant a moral authority to make decisions for others. An absolute monarch is still absolute, even if that king has the will to be just, as Michael and Vito try to be, and as at least Anakin and Count Dooku aspire to be.<sup>36</sup> The Michael who could see his father's failures clearly cannot quite keep in focus his own failures. That is the failure that Luke overcomes.

But perhaps we find the ultimate lesson in these narratives in the contrasts between these narratives' tragic heroes and the relatively tangential wise mentors they reject, Qui-Gon and Cardinal Lamberto/Pope John Paul (a fictionalized Cardinal Lamberto/Pope John Paul I). Both Qui-Gon and Cardinal Lamberto obtain precisely the goal that the tragic heroes seek to obtain by force. They achieve their authority, not because of their attempts to impose their will on others but because of their compassion for the suffering of others, which gives them an identity with the community as a whole—or indeed, all life, in Qui-Gon's case. Cardinal Lamberto becomes a true *commendatore* of the Church, through his wisdom and virtue, not by bribery. Qui-Gon achieves the ability to conquer death that Anakin seeks to save Padmé. Unlike the tyranny of the Dons Corleone, or of the Sith Lords, achieved through care and held in suffering, the authority these individuals attain is akin to the loving-kindness compassion of Buddhism, from which the Jedi religious themes seem to be derived and which is consistent with the three theological virtues of Paul—"faith, hope, and charity; but the greatest of these is charity."<sup>37</sup> Tyrannical power can be obtained through coercion and violence, but it cannot endure except through more coercion and violence. Both those who rule and those who are ruled in a tyrannical system are imprisoned by it and lose all they seek to gain. We see the failure of individual will in Michael Corleone and Darth Vader in their efforts to impose on the world an authority that cannot be forced upon others but must be granted.

Power and wealth ultimately do not provide an authority by which the social order can be regulated, let alone family. In our age of the crisis of the traditional orders of hierarchy and religion, the authority of acting out of compassion endures; indeed, it is the one authority that is part of all traditions and transcends all parochialism or partiality. And so the question these films pose is the question of the grail: Who is served by power? The fisher-king serves himself and is lost. The fool-hero, out of compassion, serves all humanity—and by doing so saves all.

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## NOTES

1. The question of our modern crisis of valid authority is a profound one, and I will take the opportunity to note that I have profited from the insights developed by Hannah Arendt in her essay "What Is Authority," in Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977). My general thinking about the narrative questions also is inspired by Northrop Frye and in relation to *Star Wars* in particular, by Jung and von Franz's *The Grail Legend*.
2. Both Franklin and Alger are quite explicit about this moral example in their books. In his "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion" section of the *Autobiography*, which outlines a rather Methodist plan of seeking "moral perfection," Franklin says he drafted this method to be "serviceable to people in all religions." Franklin admits failure in the plan but ascribes to the pursuit of it the success of his life (Franklin, *Autobiography*, 98–107).
3. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1958.
4. Lewis (*Liar's Poker*, 1989) describes the title game and other kinds of "sport."
5. See, for example, Sorkin, "This Tyco Videotape Has Been Edited for Content."
6. See, for example, near the beginning of Franklin's continuation of the biography in 1784 his comment on his father's quoting Proverbs 22:29, "Seest thou a man diligent in his calling, he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men," and noting that he had literally stood before five kings and dined with one (Franklin, *Autobiography*, 95).
7. Carnegie, "The Gospel of Wealth."
8. Boettner, *The Millennium*, 14.
9. Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity."
10. Wilson, "Address at Pueblo, Colorado, September 25, 1919," 222.
11. Boettner, *The Millennium*, 38–39.
12. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 112.
13. Sorkin, "This Tyco Videotape Has Been Edited for Content."
14. The Giving Pledge, "Warren Buffett."
15. John Donne, Meditation XVII. I will note in passing that there are indeed the negative versions too in the morality plays that predate Franklin's book, in the nineteenth-century Prince Duncan and Randolph Duncan in Alger's *Struggling Upward*, and of course in the moral narrative that lives on most vigorously into our own age, Charles Dickens's Scrooge in

“A Christmas Carol,” so I exaggerate a bit. But it is the particular pattern of our age of cynicism that the positive hero is more easily dismissed; so in our age, it is the negative example that is the one that speaks to our ears and eyes.

16. Ecclesiastes 11:1–2.

17. Twain, “The War Prayer,” 220.

18. By this I mean something more than just a metaphor. In the culture of the United States, the Israel written about in the Bible is the source domain narrative that is used to define and interpret the target domain narrative of the historical and contemporary United States. See, for example, George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More Than Cool Reason*. For the fuller development of United States as Israel cultural conceptual metaphor, see Williams, *The Eagle or the Cross: Rome, the Bible, and Cold War America*.

19. Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity.”

20. Kyle, *Evangelicalism: An Americanized Christianity*, 65–66.

21. Alger, *Ragged Dick and Struggling Upward*, 7.

22. This claim of realism and of Coppola’s disappointment that the moral of the first film was missed is summarized in Johnson, *Francis Ford Coppola*, 109–25.

23. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 98.

24. Plato, *The Republic*, book 8, 292.

25. It is worth quoting in full for its implications, but I cannot do that. Due to the general and not unjustified fear on the part of the publishing world that to quote more than a few lines of any screenplay is to violate Section 106 of the 1976 Copyright Act, as recently interpreted by attorneys at film studios, I am paraphrasing screenplay passages. I think several quotations from the screenplay in no way could harm the potential value to the copyright holder of further sales of their intellectual property. In fact, by providing critical insight to that property, I am giving, virtually free of charge, my intellectual property to the copyright holder in a form that can only increase interest in and enhance the value of their property. I yield to this threat, or rather the publisher does, but if you would like to know what I had wished to quote here, you can search for the screenplay of *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* on the Internet, and read the lines starting with “the Republic is not what it once was,” and ending with “There’s no time for that.” I follow a similar practice for other screenplay quotations that I would have preferred to use precisely so that you could see more readily the value in these somewhat underappreciated films. I do not provide further information about such sites, lest I be seen as inciting you, the reader, to commit acts of piracy. Perhaps you should listen and watch the films carefully as I did, but with the assistance of the hints I am offering you here.

If you find this burden upon your comprehension distressing, I share your pain, but I take some comfort in knowing that the value of the intellectual property I am giving to the copyright holder is accordingly reduced. I am less happy for Mr. Lucas and Mr. Coppola, who, I am sure, would be more sympathetic to my point of view. On the other hand, the value of what I can offer to them through my appreciation of their work is not only fiscally inconsequential but intellectually relatively trivial. It is my belief in the value of their work, after all, that has led me to write of it; and I believe that value will endure, even beyond the powers of the copyright holder.

26. “The Chancellor means well . . . even the pretext of democracy and freedom.”

27. “We need a system where . . . Someone wise.”

28. “Tony says that I’m a front . . . bring me closer to you.”

29. “I want you to forgive me . . . I always—I always will” (beginning and end of this interlude scene).

30. Twain, "Comments on the Moro Massacre."

31. "Premonitions . . . premonitions . . . Hmm . . . let go of everything you fear to lose."

32. "There is no escape. Don't make me . . . It's the only way."

33. Jung and von Franz, *The Grail Legend*, 210.

34. Jung and von Franz, *The Grail Legend*, 212.

35. Jung and von Franz, *The Grail Legend*, 212.

36. The Palpatine/emperor and Lucchesi characters are hardly given any human motivation at all, outside of the desire for absolute power. A Jungian psychology interpretation of both Anakin/Vader and Palpatine/Sidious might be that they both were possessed by archetypes: "Jung argued that such was the power of archetypal ideas that they could rapidly lead to a dangerous state of brutal megalomania as they fostered an inhuman lack of compassion or reflection," turning them into "mana personalities" (Lewin, *Jung on War, Politics and Nazi Germany: Exploring the Theory of Archetypes and the Collective Unconsciousness*, 199). Similarly, "The too-old, seemingly alive king stands for the unconsciousness of the world of the Father, the wounded King for the state of conflict of the Son condition. But Perceval is the man who serves wholeness, and . . . is destined therefore to redeem them both" from the imprisonment of their own mania.

37. 1 Cor. 13:13.