

## The Stars in Our Hearts - A Critical Commentary on George Lucas' Star Wars

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# **The Stars in Our Hearts - A Critical Commentary on George Lucas' *Star Wars***

**By DENIS WOOD**

Whatever the differences separating commentators on *Star Wars*, whether they see the film as fun-fun-fun or neo-fascist propaganda, they are united on one point: both insist on the movie's simplistic moral vision and naive characterizations. Whether it is because of the film's unusually gripping story and breathtakingly rapid pace, or because it fails to display those stigmata so appealing to the pseudo-intellectuals dominant in international film criticism—or both—is difficult to say, but the fact is that neither camp has been able to get its blast shields up long enough to see, much less understand the movie. *Star Wars* is a subtle meditation on what it means to be alive in a world pervaded by moral and physical death, and a discriminating exploration of man's relations with his technologic extensions. It is also an exquisitely crafted artifact of breathless vitality and élan.

## **I. A Question of Technology**

The film's characters reveal themselves and relate to each other in a web of meanings established by the positions they occupy along its two fundamental themes. There is nothing simple about these positions and no easy parallelism between the themes. Those affirming the most positive values are not necessarily antitechnologists, nor are the antitechnologists necessarily moral. More critically, glib names like "technologist" and antitechnologist", at least as these refer to man's mechanical extensions of himself—to his machines and other artifacts—are entirely out of place. The film, and all its characters, accepts the profoundly technologic character of human life, at least as it has been lived on earth since before the last Ice Age. All the film's peoples use some technologic extensions of themselves:

the Sandpeople, least technologically sophisticated, manufacture their gaderffii sticks, breathe through metal sandfilters and weave cloth; the Jawas use energy guns, dwell in sandcrawlers and live by selling scavenged machines; Uncle Owen, the hardscrabble moisture farmer, exploits a range of technology to make life possible. The water needed to grow his crops is extracted from the atmosphere by machines which are tended by droids. Aunt Beru's kitchen is a small computer center and Luke's garage is stocked with droid maintenance gear, a skyhopper and a land-speeder. Kenobi may have little use for blasters, but his lightsaber is a marvel of technologic miniaturization; and his mastery of technology is such that he can interpret the computer schematics of a space station he's never seen before and put the knowledge to work. Vader is even more dependent. Not only is his very body a feat of technology, but he also wields a lightsaber and depends on his scanner and targeting computer in the climactic battle. As for the other Imperials, technology is their beginning, end and all. They place their entire trust in their blasters, their Starfleet and their space station. Machine maintenance is so normal they think nothing of having to deal with a faulty transmitter in a storm trooper, or of acquiescing to C-3PO's request to take R2-D2 to maintenance. When they have nothing else to do, they chat about new gadgets, like the storm troopers who overlook Kenobi at the tractor beam.

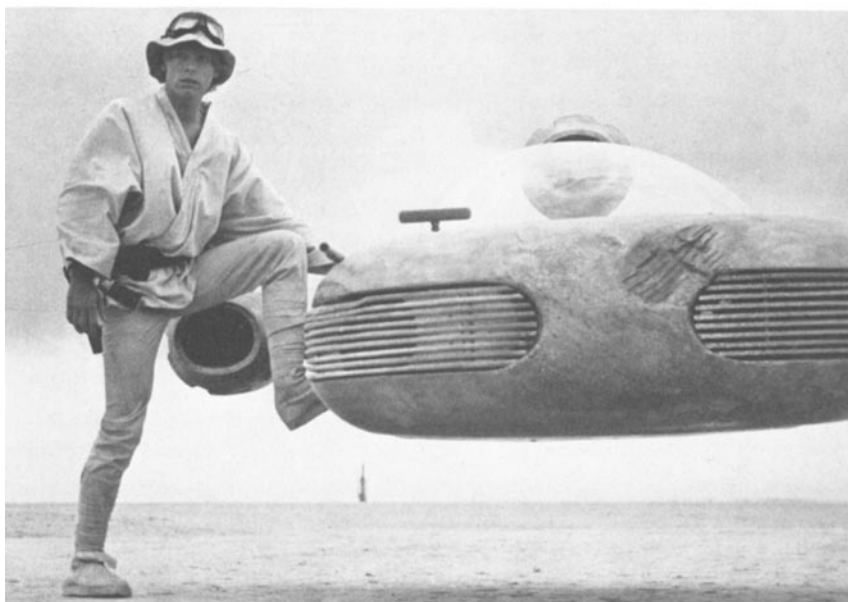
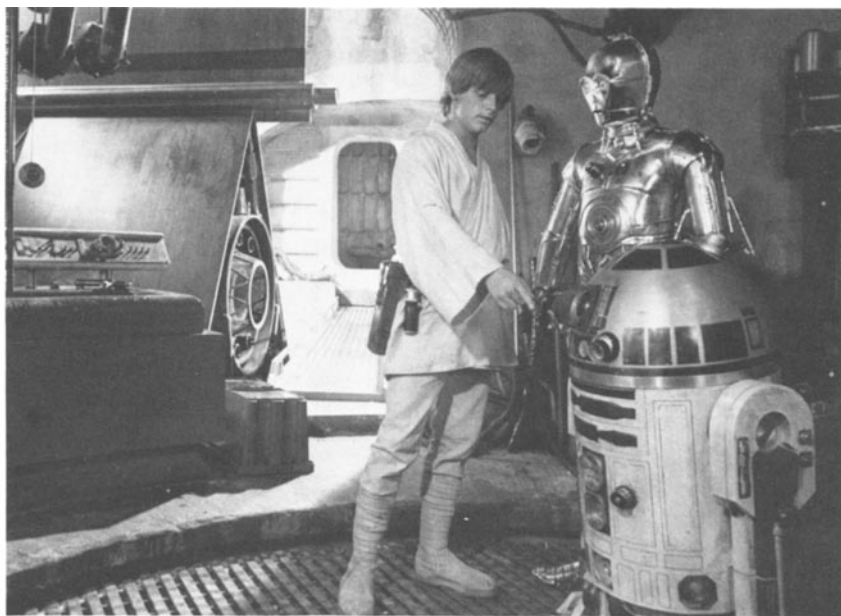
A simple-minded movie-maker would exploit this range of technologic dependencies to make a simple-minded point: either that technology corrupts, or that it saves. Lucas chooses to be more realistic and more interesting. The Sandpeople are as willing to kill Luke as the storm troopers and for as little reason: their primitiveness has conferred on them no superior qualities of mind or spirit. But neither have any such qualities been conferred on the Imperials by their sophistication. Nor does Lucas permit us the luxury of a middle road: Uncle Owen, lying between the Sandpeople and the Imperials, is a grasping, covetous, petty capitalist who exploits his nephew like a droid in the attempt to impose his will on the small part of the universe marginally under his control. Finally, in the essentially equivalent Vader-Kenobi pair, we can see what little role technologic involvement *per se* plays in the shaping of attitudes toward life and its living.

Lucas' uncompromising acceptance of technology as a nearly defining human characteristic is established even more emphatically by his *mise en scene* than by his characters. From the opening shot of

of the fighting spacecraft to the concluding explosion of the Death Star, the camera unflinchingly reveals the reality of galactic technology, but never dwells on it, glorifies it or wallows in it. We are plunged into it without explanation, as if into the mundanities of *Magnum Force* or *Death Wish*. As these films dispense with explanations of kitchen sinks or internal combustion engines – technology we accept as readily as breathing – so *Star Wars* explains nothing, less than these other films which lavish attention on the nature, size and power of the handgun. Consider the scene in which Luke first searches for R2-D2. He brings a pair of what look like binoculars to his eyes which we look through with him. In addition to a central display unlike any we've seen, the screen is ringed with lights, gauges and alphanumerices like an automatic SLR gone mad. These mean something to Luke, but not to us. They never mean anything to us; we have to accept them as Luke does, ordinary, taken-for-granted facts of life. They acquire for us the meanings they have for the kid on Tatooine, and none other. Were this a James Bond thriller we'd have been whisked off to the lab for ten minutes of tedious explanation, but in *Star Wars* neither the camera nor the characters—except for the Imperials—pays any attention to technology for its own sake. Neither the camera nor Han Solo explains much about travel in hyperspace, though both present it as matter of fact; neither the camera nor Kenobi explains the operation of a lightsaber, though both present it as a deadly reality; neither the camera nor the characters explains the nature of holographic chess, though the camera displays it and the characters play it. Whenever the technology *does* move toward center stage, it reveals something about a character, not itself. The movie does not blink at the technology of its galaxy, but it is not concerned with it. Accepting technology as a fact of galactic existence, it does not take a stand for or against it. *Star Wars* is not *about* technology at all, but people and their relations to it.

On this basis everyone can be divided into two groups: those in thrall to their technology and those who are not. The Sandpeople are not in thrall to their technology, a point made by both camera and characters. The Sandpeople's understanding of the Jundland wastes allows them to live intimately with it. We see them out under the sun, their relations with Tatooine and each other only minimally mediated by their technologic extensions. This is not the Jawa's case: their life is maximally mediated by machines. They live in the bowels

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*The immature Luke Skywalker. Above: Luke condescends to his newly acquired robots. Below: Luke climbs into his landspeeder.*

of a huge tractor filled with junked equipment. Their only access to the world is a row of tiny navigation ports. Generally we see them near their machine, but when they are about, it is dark outside. Both groups are cowardly, but the frightened Sandpeople merge into the desert while the Jawas clamber into their crawler, where they are sitting ducks for the Imperials who wipe out the whole colony of Jawas, but only a handful of Sandpeople. Unlike the Sandpeople, the Jawas are prisoners of the very technology they created to serve them.

The differences between the Imperials and all others parallel the differences between the Jawas and the Sandpeople. Like the Jawas, the Imperials are enslaved by their own slave technology; and live in their space station, like the Jawas in their crawler, cut off from the rest of life. The Imperials have no other homes, no planetary allegiances or roots: they are adrift in a world of their own manufacture and when it is destroyed, so are they, just like the Jawas. Governor Tarkin epitomizes the Imperials. Never seen outside the station, he is seen in only two rooms in it, both as dim and isolated as the inside of the Jawa tractor. The giant window that seems to provide a link with the rest of the universe is revealed to be a video screen under Tarkin's control. Tarkin's sallow complexion is appropriate: the technologic brilliance of his station casts too sickly a light to infuse his face with life. Uncle Owen's face is the other side of the universe. He not only works outdoors, but in the light of two suns. Unlike Tarkin, Owen has not allowed the technology he exploits to cut him off from the rest of the world. While Tarkin talks over his com-link, Owen is conversing face-to-face with Jawas, his wife and his nephew. Owen is not likeable, but he is not destroyed by his machines. Those in thrall to their machines die in them; those who aren't don't.

As the only Imperial to survive the film, Vader is crucial in this regard. Although allied to those who extinguish life in order to surmount it, Vader does not share their technologic dependencies, despite his own physical reliance on machines. Of the high command, only Vader is seen off the space station or in action: taking Leia's ship, battling Kenobi, piloting a fighter. Vader makes his position explicit: when the Death Star commander declares the station the ultimate power and begs to use it, Vader remonstrates with: "Don't be too proud of this technological terror you've constructed. The

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power to destroy a planet is nothing compared with the power of the force." Vader repeatedly manifests his contempt for the technology-bound Imperials. During the attack on the station it is Vader, not the station itself, that almost saves the day. When an official warns Tarkin of his peril, he brushes him off with his trust in his machine; but when Vader is informed that the turbolasers can't hit the rebel fighters, he goes out to fight them man to man. Though Vader survives the death of the Death Star, it is only his own reliance on technology—his scanner and targeting computer—that allows Han Solo to knock him into the next picture. Jousting with the technocrats, even while throttling the Death Star's commander, Vader has our sympathy. Although evil, it is an evil we can see in ourselves, inherent in the very possibility of life, and this distances him from technocrats who have forsworn life for machines. Vader manages to assume something of the stature of Milton's Satan, good soured by its refusal to face its limits, its death; a fallen angel, tragically but not pathetically flawed.

If Vader wins our qualified sympathy for his disaffection with machines, Kenobi earns our unqualified respect for the affection with which he treats the droids. Kenobi's first words, gentle and kind, are those he addresses to R2-D2: "Hello there. Come here, my little friend. There's nothing to be afraid of." Equally solicitous of C-3PO, he works with the droids as equals. Unlike the prison warden who calls the distinctly organic Wookiee "*that thing*", Kenobi calls R2-D2 a friend and refers to him with the masculine pronoun. Unlike the bartender who, in refusing to serve the droids, distinguishes between organics and mechanicals, Kenobi distinguishes between the living and the dead — even if some of these are living dead. It is a position shared by Lucas who endows the droids with more characteristics of the living than many of his humans. We never, for instance, see the eyes of Vader or the storm troopers, but cannot escape the eyes of C-3PO and R2-D2. If the droids are programmed they are not as programmed as the storm troopers: after all, R2-D2 tricks his owners time and again; on their own, the droids, both on Tatooine and the Death Star, are independent, in control of their fates and those of others. The storm troopers, however, are programmable both by their own masters and at will by Kenobi. In Don Siegel's metaphor of the pod (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*), the Imperials are pods, the droids are not. Kenobi's respect for the

genuinely living translates into a respect for whatever it is that makes them alive. It is this livingfulness he trusts and that Vader would subvert.

The central and pivotal character, Luke Skywalker, grows from a position surprisingly close to Vader's and the Imperials' to one identical with Kenobi's, a development played out in his relations with his surrounding technology. We are introduced to him as a nice person: he reacts with easy willingness to his aunt's summons and as he looks down at her is seen as responsive, graceful, personable and technologically unmediated. Compared to his aunt and uncle — with their rigid gestures and closed faces — Luke is free and open. Compared to the Sandpeople, Jawas, storm troopers, even Owen and Beru, he is undressed, naked to the universe. But he is soon shown also to be a mewling adolescent with disdain for chores and droids. Requested to ready the droids, he whines. Dealing with the droids he is abrupt and brusque and his voice is nasal and disgusted. Accepting C-3PO's advice to buy R2-D2, he rejects his conversational overtures. Still, he *is* nice. He has them call him Luke and he mellows once he learns of their association with the rebellion, though his irritation at R2-D2's escape still translates into a crude snap of the head to C-3PO as they turn in for the night. Though he is like Vader in his attitude toward the droids, he is like the other Imperials with his infatuation for other machines. He lavishes affection on his skyhopper and land-speeder. He misplaces his trust in his rifle in his encounter with the Sandpeople. His search for R2-D2 is entirely mediated by his binoculars and his speeder's scanner. Lucas has explored this theme before: *American Graffiti* also dealt with adolescents and their machines, and in a way, what happens to Luke from this point on is what could have happened to anyone of the kids in *American Graffiti* lucky enough to have found an R2-D2 and strong enough to have taken control of his life.

Luke's maturation begins when he waves off C-3PO's threats of destruction to R2-D2 after his recovery in the Jundland wastes. Luke's expression is transfigured as he contemplates the little droid's devotion to a former master, and the thought is uppermost in his mind at his meeting with Kenobi. In response to Kenobi's what brings-you-out-this-far, Luke says, "This little droid. He claims to be searching for his former master, but I've never seen such devotion in a droid." It's not a question, but an assertion of the life-like quali-





*The assumed omnipresence of technology.*

ties of the droid. In making it, Luke begins the passage from Vader's and the Imperials' conceptions of life and its possibilities to Kenobi's. Even as he makes the assertion his expression relaxes, his face opens up and the nasal irritation vanishes from his voice. The Imperials perish because, distinguishing between organics and mechanicals, they place their trust in the latter; Luke survives because, increasingly learning to distinguish between the truly living and the utterly dead, he places his trust in the former. Not a question of appearance and reality, it is the vital matter of caring more about how a person or thing behaves than who or what it is. Kenobi is as little crazy as the droid is dead. Han Solo is as little a mercenary as his ship is a piece of junk. The storm troopers at Mos Eisley are as little a threat as the Death Star is impregnable. Its turbolasers are as little effective as Luke's targeting computer is useful. In *Star Wars* there is an embracing of life, not a turning away from technology: Luke's independence of his targeting computer is offset by his dependence on R2-D2. Luke turns against neither reason nor technology but

weds both to a deep trust in those emotional, those affective, qualities that lead toward rather than away from life. It is a marriage Paul Goodman well understood:

Emotions do not necessarily hinder knowing. They may help it by brightening the figure against the background and by leading to relevant exploring . . . They say something about the environment in relation to the self: that it contains an obstacle, that it threatens physical safety or moral dignity, that it suits one's appetite, maybe that it has an empty spot and one will have to resign oneself to living without . . . Normally, feeling, knowing and action go together and reinforce one another, so that a language free to express and arouse feeling should indicate a people intelligent for their practical happiness, whereas an affectless language should indicate a stupid culture. (*Speaking and Language: In Defense of Poetry*, Random House, 1971, 146-47)

Goodman's argument illuminates Luke's development. As Luke becomes increasingly discriminating, his language gains endlessly in emotional strength and quality. Never again does he attempt the unnatural flatness of his debate with Uncle Owen ("I think those droids are going to work out fine. . .") but moves logically to expressions of assured emotional power. The wrenching emotionalism of his disbelieving "NO!" at Kenobi's death is paralleled by the cool assurance of his, "No, it's not impossible. I used to bulls-eye womp-rats in my T-16 back home. They're not much bigger than two meters." Reason informs him of the probabilities of failure of the attack on the Death Star, but his emotions speak only of its necessary success. He has, at this point, become nearly whole, capable of embracing reason *and* emotion. It remains only for Red Leader to give Luke back his awakened eyes when he wants to rely on his scanner ("Take up your visual scanning.") and for the inner voice that is Kenobi's legacy to confirm him in his reliance on his own aliveness ("Trust yourself, Luke.").

It is the lack of these very qualities that dictates the Imperials' impotence. The storm troopers' voices are devoid of emotion. The deaths of their comrades bring forth no cries of pain. The only impossibility denied by Tarkin is that the galaxy will be difficult to manage without the Senate. (The starfleet commander and the rebel pilot, Wedge, both shout out, "But that's impossible," the commander to register shock at the magnitude of Imperial repression, Wedge to

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express disbelief in the possibility of doing anything about it. The quantity of such pointed parallels throughout the film is staggering.) Lacking emotional intelligence, the Imperials perish because they cannot distinguish the living from the dead, the supportive from the destructive, the technology that serves from that that enslaves. By the film's end, Luke can.

### II. A Question of Technocracy

Luke's rejection of his targeting computer is not a rejection of technology, and certainly not of science. He is, after all, encased in a speeding fighter completely dependent on the technologic infrastructure of the rebel base. The unleashing of his proton torpedoes does, however, signal his rejection of a philosophy based on a technological view of life. It is the essence of technology to employ things that are not part of us as extensions of our wills. A hammer in our hands becomes an extension of our intentions at the same time that it extends the domain of our intentionality. The deepest question posed by *Star Wars* is the extent to which an organism or organization can exploit others as technologic extensions of its own system of intentions. Thorough technocrats recognize no limits: everything can be legitimately employed as extensions of their own will. The Imperials are in this sense, as well as that previously used, unredeemably technocrats, complete fascists. To achieve their ends, or, technocratically, to solve their problems, the Imperials can use, and use up, anything. They do: they have nearly extinguished the Jedi and murdered Luke's father. They seize a consular ship, kidnap and torture a senator, destroy a planet to secure her cooperation, determine to kill her and end up using her in a subtler way. They wipe out a colony of Jawas, kill a number of Sandpeople, murder Owen and Beru, and prompt Kenobi's death. They attempt the destruction of a moon and the rebel alliance. They are presented with other stigmata of technocratic organizations: rigidity, uniformity, discipline, anonymity and hierarchic structure. Their tight unsmiling faces sit on rigidly upright bodies. In their gray uniforms it is difficult to tell the commanders apart. It is impossible to tell the storm troopers apart: with their hidden faces and identical voices they are as similar as cogs on a gearwheel. They are, for instance, of identical height, a fact accentuated by the disparity in height between Han and Luke.

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This is emphasized by the camera angle used when the two of them, in uniform, enter the elevator with Chewbacca, and by Leia's question to Luke when he enters her cell: "Aren't you a little short for a storm trooper?" "Oh, the uniform," Luke says, removing his helmet, thereby distancing himself completely from the behavior of a trooper. The fascist behavior of the Imperials is wholly prefigured in the seizure of Leia's ship: the blasting open of the door, the armored troopers entering through the gunsmoke, the horror that is Vader throttling the ship's captain and his, "See to it personally, Commander, there'll be no one to stop us this time." (It's illuminating that the rebels never blast open a door. On the occasion they try to, in the garbage chute, they fail; and the door is ultimately opened because of a communications link between Luke and the droids.)



*Luke persuades Han Solo to help save Princess Leia.*

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Once again Luke is pivotal, this time in the film's inquiry into alternatives to fascism. Not only is Luke the character who most personally confronts the effects of fascism, but he is pulled between the poles of its alternatives, anarchism in the person of Han and representative democracy in the person of Leia. In the end, he does not choose and so remains free of dogma, not ripped in two, but whole and together. If his earlier burden was to distinguish the truly living from the ultimately dead, here it is to determine the limits to which he can make anything an extension of his own will. His movement away from fascism is paralleled by his increasing assumption of responsibility for his own being in the world. Technocrats, after all, never fail: only their extensions do. The first step in Luke's odyssey comes, again, with his change in attitude toward the droids. In the beginning Luke not only treats the droids with the contempt of an organic for a mechanical, but exploits them to provide excuses and shed responsibility: he uses the need for power converters to try and get the afternoon off; he uses the need to ready the droids to make his abrupt exit from the dining room palatable to his aunt; although it is Luke who removed R2-D2's restraining bolt, he foists the blame on the droid itself; and of course it is C-3PO who steers the landspeeder the next morning. But once Luke admits his fascination with the little droid's devotion, a behavior Luke values, he can no longer use the droids this way. Despite threats to his own safety, Luke rescues C-3PO. When the droid says, "I'm doomed," Luke says, "No, you're not. What kind of talk is that?" (In the book the point is further dramatized: Luke refuses to reattach C-3PO's restraining bolt after fixing his arm.) From now on, Luke ceases using the droids, and works with them. He doesn't order the droids from the bar, but explains why it would be best for them to leave. (In the book, again, the point is stronger: Luke realizes "this wasn't the time or place to force the issue of 'droid rights.'") He starts dealing directly with R2, as when R2 discovers Leia on the Death Star. Despite Kenobi's request, Luke leaves the droids on their own without even a suggestion as to their course of action. He refuses another R2 unit during his fighter's prep, saying, "Not on your life. That little droid and I have been through a lot together." More than a recognition of their qualities of life, these actions comprise a growing refusal on Luke's part to construe, or use, the droids as if they were mere extensions of himself.

His development is not circumscribed by the droids. In the beginning Luke *uses* all sorts of things. He uses the distance to Alderaan as a palliative for not following Kenobi, and tries to use Han ("He can stay and watch them. . .") when he wants to follow Kenobi. (Kenobi rejects both attempts.) When he wants to rescue Leia, he exploits Han's interest in money, just as the Imperials would. It is a measure of his maturity that his later appeal to Han to join the rebel assault is relatively straight-forward: if he plays on anything it is Han's best instincts. His only immediate reward for his refusal to coerce Han is bitter disappointment. Leia speaks for Luke as well as herself when she says: "He has to follow his own path. No one else can choose it for him." Luke's ultimate reward for this utter renunciation of the technocratic, the fascist way, is his life, for, left to make the decision on his own, Han joins the battle saving Luke and the day.

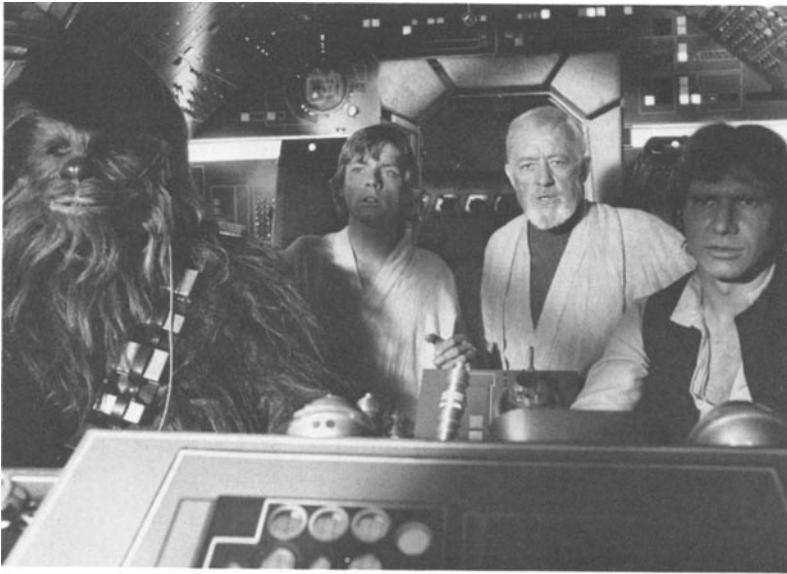
The growth in Luke's ability to not use others is the obverse of his growth from his early egocentricity. His mewling self-interest is dissipated under the influence of Leia's open plea for help, R2-D2's devotion to others, Kenobi's open appeal for help, and Kenobi's refusal to coerce him into helping. There are *others* in the world and *other ways of being*. His initial refusal to join Kenobi is the first sign of this maturation, for despite his desire to leave the farm he empathically refuses to do so. Here his selfishness ("I can't get involved.") is diluted by his growing awareness of others ("I've got work to do. I've got to get home."). To suggest as Fox does (*Film Comment*, July-August, 1977) that Owen and Beru's death is merely convenient is to miss both the new nature of his relationship to them and the logic of the story. Owen and Beru are killed by the identical net of circumstances that led Luke to Kenobi in the first place: one without the other is inconceivable. But it was this very meeting that exposed their true natures for the first time. Not only not mother and father, they have denied him his past (just as they would erase R2's memory — and what is the loss of memory but a form of genocide?), kept him in servitude despite their belief that he is no farmer, and lied to him about Obi-Wan (probably dead) and Ben (just a crazy old man) Kenobi. Despite the fact that Kenobi offers him a truer father and release from the farm, Luke insists: "Alderaan. I'm not going to Alderaan." That their deaths free him to follow Kenobi is true — though history has been reshaping all their lives ever since

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Leia programmed R2-D2—but it is not true that they freed him from making a difficult decision. He'd already made that: to stay on the farm.

Luke reaches out to others with increasing frequency—the real message of Kenobi's advice to “stretch out with your feelings.” He saves Leia, not as a symbol of resistance—for Luke has only glimmering of the larger battle—but someone in peril. When Han asks who she is, the best Luke can do is: “She's the one in the message. They're her droids.” At Kenobi's death, Luke loses himself completely, blindly attacking whatever it was that killed Kenobi. Only later does he find himself, in narcissistic mourning for his own, not Kenobi's, loss. As he reaches out, he grows in self-esteem, in self-trust. Trusting others and admitting their trust in him, he comes to see himself as a person of potential. This is as much the reality behind his rejection of the targeting computer as anything else. The voice whispering in his ear may have Kenobi's timbre, but it is Luke speaking to himself: “Trust me,” says the voice and it is Luke appealing to himself to manifest the potential he has come to see in himself, a potential energized by others through his concerns for them. The film's themes come together in Luke: as he becomes able to discriminate the dead from the living, he moves from a self-centered to other-centered world, embracing the affective domain as he rejects fascism. (The film's editing is supportive during the most critical phase of his maturation. We cut from Kenobi's, “You must do what you feel is right, of course,” to the Imperials' discussion of how to deprive others of precisely this opportunity, and then back to see what this means in the slaughter of the Jawas, the skeletons of Owen and Beru and the torture of Leia. Only then does Luke announce his determination to join Kenobi. It's a filmic affirmation of Luke's decision.)

The charges that the film is fascist or neo-Nazi propaganda are empty, as ridiculous as Norman O. Brown's and John Cage's insistence that the syntax of language is equatable with the militarization of life (John Cage, *M. Weslevan*, 1973, v). Order is as much a reality of existence as technology is a reality of the human species. The body's cells are necessarily subordinate to the whole: when they cease being so, we die of cancer. While no analogy can be made between the body and a society—which is not a body—the point is that all principles of hierarchic subordination are not deadly: some



*Above: Han Solo, Ben Kenobi, Luke and Chewbacca awed as they see the Death Star for the first time. Below: Princess Leia comforts Luke after the disappearance of Ben Kenobi.*



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result in life, ecologically—not mystically—whole. The problem in living is to distinguish the one from the other. In this metaphor, Kenobi represents life, Vader cancer: *Star Wars* is emphatic in its stand for life. (Nor is the movie racist. Not only is the anthropoid Wookiee as vitally heroic as the droids and humans, but, Lubow to the contrary (*Film Comment*, July-August, 1977) there is no hint in the film that Luke “is justifiably sickened by the jabbering Jawas.” His initial interactions with them are neutral and when, outside the cantina, he shoos one away, it is as if shoos away a child. He has, after all, just seen them slaughtered. It is C-3PO who can’t abide them, and yet we watch him carrying one tenderly to the funeral pyre.)

But if the film is determinedly anti-fascist it offers no pat alternatives: there is no simple way to steer clear of the fascist mesh. Han has his way, Leia hers, and both tug at Luke. Leia is a woman of laws, a Princess at home, a Senator in the Empire. Intolerant of oppression and coming from a planet without weapons, she insists on a framework of laws which must inevitably force people to follow paths not their own. The weakness of her system is emphasized by the ease with which Vader and Tarkin traduce it, as well as by Han’s heroic presence, also outside the law. Han works outside every system: his head is wanted by both Imperials and criminals. The opposite of Leia, he is a man without a system. Even as Luke is pulled between these poles, they themselves pull at each other. Han is bewildered by Leia, by the strength and arrogance her principles give her: “Either I’m beginning to like her, or I’m going to kill her.” When Leia tries to give Han orders, he tells her, “I take orders from only one person: me!” and later mutters, “No reward is worth this.” But, although the idea troubles him, he also wonders, “I don’t know. You think a princess and a guy like me. . .?” Leia is likewise confused. Overwhelmed by his bravery she is chagrined at his mercenariness, but ends up unable to praise or condemn. Under the sway of her general principles she does, however, mistake his core. Denouncing him to Luke, she concludes: “I don’t think he cares about anything, or anybody,” and so misses the point. Han cares, but *only* about people, including Leia: his solicitude for her in the garbage chute is no more fake than it is when he incites her admiration by giving chase to the storm troopers. It is his real affection for Luke that powers the emotion behind his “KID! LUKE!” when Luke

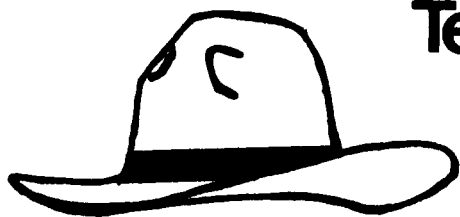
vanishes beneath the garbage, and which propels him into the climactic battle. While caring for people, Leia can't get around the absence of principles that would only pollute Han's relations with others, just as Han, hardly unprincipled, can't get inside her abstract notions of appropriate behavior. If Luke moves, during his development, from pole to pole, acting now out of abstract principle, now out of blind affection, in the end he subsumes them both, though not in equal degree. In Luke, they cease being mutually exclusive, but become variant and flexible forms of whatever it is—the force?—that separates the living from the dead. The proportions of the mix are given in the final battle: it is Leia of the law who stands and watches; Han the outlaw who saves Luke and the day; and Luke, the whole person, who actually fights the battle, dividing his energies between defending his fellows as people and attacking the Death Star out of principle. But not Luke alone: the victory belongs to them all, to Chewbacca and R2-D2, to the other pilots, and those on the rebel moon.

Standing on the stage at the end, Leia, Han and Luke constitute the nucleus of a set of possibilities that remain to be resolved. Although nothing has been determined, everything is changed. Her realm obliterated, Leia is no longer a princess; her senate dissolved, she is no longer a senator. The structure that gave substance to her beliefs has vanished, as truly destroyed by Han and Luke as by Tarkin and Vader. In embracing his acceptance by the rebel community, Han has forsworn his outlaw's status and its unmitigated freedom; the door to his past is also closed. And Luke, Luke has grown up. No longer the kid, he has become an adult, perhaps the most simply beautiful person in the room. But it is not a nucleus of three: Chewbacca stands there and R2-D2 and C-3PO and the crowd of people from throughout the galaxy who have helped make the moment possible. But it is a small crowd and a motley one and it is hidden in a cavern deep below the earth on a minor moon of a minor planet and the Starfleet is cruising in who knows what reaches of space and the Empire has not expired with the loss of a single battle station howsoever powerful. The contrast with a similar scene from Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* drives the point home: this is no fascist hegemony establishing its reign, tens of thousands of massed identities under the booming sky of home. This is a small group of uncertain future of many kinds of peoples under the ground of a

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far-off foreign place. They are happy and proud for the moment, but Vader is alive, not only in a speeding fighter, but in all their hearts: tomorrow is another day, the future is uncertain, and the fight to stay truly alive in every sense of the word goes on.

Denis Wood, a geographer, teaches environmental psychology at North Carolina State University's (Raleigh) School of Design. This is his first piece of film criticism.



## 1978 Texas Film Festival

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