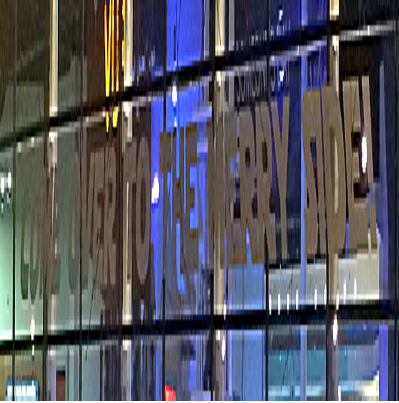




What's wrong with the force

Description

It's nearly Christmas, so it's time for stars, and movie releases timed for the Christmas season. But I've always had trouble with *Star Wars* and religion. Apparently the ubiquitous and omnipotent *force* has a good side and a dark side.

Yoda: Remember, a Jedi's strength flows from the Force. But beware. Anger, fear, aggression. The dark side are they.

Long before *Star Wars* that's what C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* described as religious **dualism**.

On the way to his unconventional apologetic for Christianity Lewis dismantled several common views about God. If you believe in God then you'll also accept the existence of good and evil. The existence of good and evil comes about because we live in a world that used to be good but now has gone wrong. For Lewis the Christian idea of this fall from goodness is more logically consistent than the view that there are two powers or spirits – the good one and the bad one – somehow in balance throughout the Universe. Lewis first tackled this dualistic god hypothesis in his radio broadcasts in the 1940s – before *Star Wars*.



A disturbance in the force

Connecting C.S. Lewis the intellectual with *Star Wars* is not so unusual. Lewis also wrote science fiction (*Out of the Silent Planet*) and fantasy stories (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) which are in turn allegories about Christian faith. There you get a confusing blend of pantheism, magic, animism, shamanism, parable, and depictions of good and evil carrying their own internal inconsistencies. So as a teller of fancy tales I don't think that Lewis has any particular rightness to claim over George Lucas.

But we live in an age even more secular than the 1940s, and some people grasp at the daftest ideas to fill the religious void, even under the guise of irony and secular liberal sangfroid. (Look the force up on [Wookipedia](#)). Here's Lewis's account of the problem with the eternal co-existence of the light and the dark force.

“Neither of them made the other, neither of them has any more right than the other to call itself God. Each presumably thinks it is good and thinks the other bad. One of them likes hatred and cruelty, the other likes love and mercy, and each backs its own view. Now what do we mean when we call one of them the Good Power and the other the Bad Power? Either we are merely saying that we happen to prefer the one to the other – like preferring beer to cider – or else we are saying that, whatever the two powers think about it, and whichever we humans, at the moment, happen to like, one of them is actually wrong, actually mistaken, in regarding itself as good” (44-45).

He continues that if you assert that one deity (force) is right and the other wrong, then you are appealing to something above either. That diminishes their claim (or that of the dualistic “force”) to omnipotence somewhat. Perhaps such a “meta-force” will one day reveal itself in a galaxy far far away.

Fantasy wars

Of course, the Star Wars stories are really about the “life force” channeled by mystics and elite fighters. I’m not sure I can go much further in critiquing such a quasi religious fantasy world, and it’s in the company of so many other worlds where there’s a ring that makes you invisible by a terrible power, a tree that connects all living things (but only on Pandora), a force that allows you to levitate if let it you will, and a friendly lion that doesn’t eat other animals.

The mystery is that most of us for most of the time can hold so many different warring metaphysical systems in mind as stories, and not confuse them with each other or the world we live in outside of those unlikely tales.

Notes

- The image above is the Omni cinema centre in Edinburgh just before Christmas.
- Search “CS Lewis” and “Star Wars” to see that I’m not the first to relate these two terms.
- The Yoda quote is from Star Wars: Episode VI “Return of the Jedi” (1983)

Reference

- Lewis, C.S. 1952. *Mere Christianity*. London: Fontana

Category

1. Nature

Tags

1. nature

Date Created

December 12, 2015

Author

rcoyne99