

Film Title: *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*

Director: Richard Marquand

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Principal Players: Luke Skywalker, Yoda, Obi-Wan Kenobi

Genre: science fiction

Exact Segment: Chapter 14, 39:31 to Chapter 15, 47:27

Exact Segment Length: 6:56

Exact Segment Start: Chapter 14, 39:31

Exact Segment End: Luke and Obi-Wan are conversing. Obi-Wan says, "You were our only hope."

Synopsis: A young man (Luke) is first told by aging Jedi Knight Obi-Wan Kenobi that Luke's father was murdered by the individual (Darth Vader) generally regarded as one of the two most evil men in the galaxy; but Vader tells Luke that he (Vader) is Luke's father. Obi-Wan defends his statement by telling Luke that what he said was true "from a certain point of view."

Keywords: truth telling, lying, right to know, utilitarianism, duty, compassion

Setting the Stage: "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away . . ." a Rebel Alliance struggles against the evil Galactic Empire, and young Luke Skywalker finds himself pulled into the struggle. In *Star Wars: A New Hope*, Luke learns from former Jedi Knight Obi-Wan Kenobi that his deceased father (Anakin Skywalker) was a Jedi Knight. Luke asks how his father died, and Obi-Wan tells him that when the evil Empire overthrew the Republic, a young Jedi named Darth Vader was seduced by the dark side of the Force, betrayed the Jedi and murdered his father. When Luke first faces Vader in *Star Wars: The Empire*

Strikes Back, however, Vader tells him that he (Vader) is Luke's father. In Return of the Jedi, Luke returns to Degobah to complete his training as a Jedi Knight with Jedi Master Yoda. He finds Yoda nearing death, and Luke asks him if it is true that Vader is his father.

Description of Events in Segment: Yoda confirms that Vader is Luke's father just before he dies. Obi-Wan appears and Luke asks him why he didn't tell Luke the truth about Vader. Obi-Wan explains that what he told Luke was true "from a certain point of view" - "Your father was seduced by the dark side of the Force. He ceased to be Anakin Skywalker and became Darth Vader. When that happened, the good man who was your father was destroyed. So what I told you was true-from a certain point of view."

Ethical Concepts and Issues Illustrated: This clip presents a combination of issues-something not unusual in ethical dilemmas.

First, is Obi-Wan's original statement to Luke a "lie"? The Jedi's original explanation for how Luke's father died was: "A young Jedi named Darth Vader, who was a pupil of mine until he turned to evil, helped the Empire hunt down and destroy the Jedi knights. He betrayed and murdered your father." On the surface this appears to be a clear falsehood, but Obi-Wan subsequently defends the statement by telling Luke that it is true "from a certain point of view." The Jedi Knight believes that once someone goes over to the Dark side of the Force, he or she essentially becomes a different person. Anakin Skywalker was a free, idealistic champion of justice. Darth Vader is the obedient servant of the evil Emperor. Does Obi-Wan's interpretation defend him from the charge of lying to Luke, is it a transparent rationalization, or does it fall somewhere in between?

Second, does Obi-Wan do anything "wrong" by the way he answers Luke's question? Presumably, Obi-Wan phrases things as he does to enlist Luke's opposition to the Empire. If Obi-Wan had told Luke that he was the son of one of the most evil men in the galaxy, it's reasonable to think that Luke might have either been so traumatized by the news that he would want to stay as far away as possible from the galactic conflict, or at least that he would feel so conflicted that he would refuse to help Obi-Wan. Because Obi-Wan has reason to think that Luke is the key to defeating the Empire (at the end of the clip, he tells Luke, "You were our only hope"), the Jedi knight may think that the ends (restoring freedom and justice to the galaxy) justify the means (lying to Luke). Obi-Wan might offer a classic utilitarian defense for his original statement to Luke. The ethical character of the action proceeds from its consequences, and it's reasonable to think that

far more good than harm will come from his lack of candor. After all, only one person (Luke) might be hurt by the lie, but millions of lives could be saved.

Third, this clip allows for exploration of the question of what Obi-Wan's duty to Luke is.

- When Luke first asks Obi-Wan how his father died, does the Jedi have a simple and straightforward duty to tell the truth to Luke, no matter what the consequences?
- Does Luke have a fundamental right to know the identity of his father, such that Obi-Wan has a duty to respect it?
- Some might argue that because of the nature of what Obi-Wan would be telling Luke (the equivalent of "your father was Hitler"), Obi-Wan has a duty to spare Luke any unnecessary pain. Because only a handful of people knew the truth, it's not unreasonable to think that the secret could be kept from Luke his whole life. Does Obi-Wan have a duty to protect Luke from needless suffering? That is, when honesty and compassion clash, which is preferable?

This clip can thus lead to a discussion of whether we're obligated to tell the truth when it will produce more harm than good.

- Is it wrong for a physician to lie to a terminally ill patient when the truth will only cause more suffering?
- If one partner in a relationship cheats without the other finding out, but then resolves to be faithful, won't confessing to the infidelity and telling the truth lead only to needless suffering for the innocent partner?

In the clip, Obi-Wan tells Luke: "You're going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view." This comment can be a springboard for a discussion of "truth" and the role of "point of view" or "perspective" in how we perceive things. Is Obi-Wan's comment accurate?

Additional Comments: Yoda can be difficult to understand, so you might want to turn on the captions.

If you want to view the two clips from *Star Wars: A New Hope* and *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* that set the stage for Obi-Wan's "certain point of view" explanation, see:

1. A New Hope, Chapter 14, 32:33-34:51. Luke learns from former Jedi Knight Obi-Wan Kenobi that his deceased father (Anakin Skywalker) was a Jedi Knight. Luke asks how his father died, and Obi-Wan tells him that when the evil Empire overthrew the Republic, a young Jedi named Darth Vader was seduced by the dark side of the Force, betrayed the Jedi and murdered his father.
2. Empire Strikes Back, Chapter 46, 109:16-111:53. Luke travels to Cloud City because he senses that his friends are in danger. There he engages in a light saber duel with Darth Vader, who, with the Emperor, hopes to turn Luke to the dark side of the Force. At the end of the duel, Vader tells Luke that he (Vader) is Luke's father.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Is Obi-Wan's statement to Luke a "lie"? According to the Jedi Knight, it is true "in a certain sense." That is, we might say that it is metaphorically true. Nonetheless, when Luke first asked Obi-Wan how his father died, the Jedi Knight could have told Luke the whole story. But he chose to give Luke, at best, a less complete version of the truth. If you tell anything less than "the whole truth," are you "lying"? Consider the following scenario: A husband runs into his ex-girlfriend named Alexandra, and the two of them have lunch at a sports bar. When his wife asks him how his day went, he mentions offhandedly that he ran into an old college friend named Alex, and that they went to lunch, drank beer and watched the game. The husband's account of lunch is literally true, but his wife probably wouldn't consider it to be "the whole truth." Is he lying?
2. Does Luke have a right to know who his father is? That is, does he have a right to a full and complete answer to his question?
3. By telling Luke that Vader killed his father, Obi-Wan is able to convince Luke to "learn the ways of the Force." Obi-Wan has been keeping an eye on Luke since taking him to Tatooine as a baby, and he believes that Luke is the Republic's last hope at overcoming Vader and the Emperor. If Obi-Wan had told Luke the truth, Luke might have felt too conflicted to start training as a Jedi. So Obi-Wan's explanation to Luke was probably motivated by the idea that it would produce more good-bringing peace and justice back to the galaxy than telling the truth would. Is this an acceptable defense? One of the criticisms of utilitarianism is that it can defend virtually anything in the name of the "greater good." Through much of the history of the United States, the idea of "national security" (and its variants) have been used in the same way. How good a

defense is pursuing the “greater good” or “national security” for actions that would traditionally be considered “wrong”-lies, manipulation, invasion of privacy, torture, murder, etc.? Are there any actions that are “wrong” no matter how good the consequences they produce?

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