Chapter 4
Reconsidering "Evil" Through the *Star Wars* Films

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ABSTRACT

Discussing the endless war between the good and the evil, the Star Wars series has expressed various discourses about evil from 1977 to 2019. These films, which have ingrained themselves in the history of cinema as 'narratives of evil', have been watched intently by an audience of different nationalities and age groups for a timespan of over 40 years. This currently ongoing interest has allowed the series to continue its narrative with new films. The dialectic relationship that cinema, which has a potential to produce ideas through images, establishes with its watchers as an opportunity that allows for the exploration of the human attitude and behavior towards evil, it necessitates the reconsideration of evil through Star Wars films.

INTRODUCTION

Classical narrative cinema makes use of the nature of evil to set in motion its central elements of conflict, curiosity and catharsis. While the watchers who relate to the protagonist side themselves with the good, the screen is filled with images of evil and the struggle to get rid of these images. The images that make up evil can sometimes originate from exterior factors. Sometimes, however, they originate from within, meaning the hero himself, and present a much more complicated existence. Using classical narrative models, the *Star Wars* series[1] exhibits this chaos through the development of characters like *Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader* and *Ben Solo/Kylo Ren,* and presenting the audience with various ideas regarding evil through the cinematographic images that the series produces.

Lars Svendsen, describing evil in his book *Philosophy of Evil* as "a holdover from a mythical, Christian worldview whose time had already passed" (2010, p. 9) thinks that cinema should be left out of the conversation while philosophically questioning the meaning of evil in this time and age. Svendsen, while regarding the representations of excessive evil present in films, remarks that evil, as an aesthetic

object, has gained a different meaning that is separate from reality (2010, pp. 9-10). The aesthetization of evil signals the replacement of its nature, is portrayed as boring, bleak, and common, with an imaginary charm. This charm, which is achieved through cinema, eliminates the feeling of terror that is caused by evil seen in daily lives and legitimizes its existence.

Every phenomenon that is associated with evil like pain, death, poverty, torture, exile, are all facts that cannot be fully comprehended unless a person experiences them. This distance between facts and experience is even further in cinema. Emotions, due to being the natural and secure mutual denominators between cinema and reality, are easier to grasp for the audience than ideas. Regarding evil, however, ideas as well as emotions, as long as they are not connected to real experiences, do not turn into permanent impressions. Because of this reason, the film's effect is isolated even in the case of a deeper approach. Thus, the aesthetic essence of art that can be used to evoke emotions without hurting people, is first seen to prompt self-defense and escapist mechanisms when it comes to evil. When it comes to the presentation of ideas and emotions however, not only should aesthetics be influential, but also ethical categories. Cinema has qualities like raising awareness about the details that are lost in daily lives and unearthing phenomenon that are not seen by the watchers because they are ordinary or obstructed by an ideology. Hence, only taking the aesthetics into consideration and excluding cinema from the philosophical activities regarding evil will result in ignoring its potential in creating discourse on ethical categories.

There are generally three options regarding the subject of evil when it comes to fictional films. Including evil under no circumstances and ignoring it, taking the approach of mythology and confining it to a cycle of defeat, or creating a deep aesthetic representation and trying to reach its true meaning. The practice of cinema that is described as 'popular' or 'mainstream' and utilizing classical narrative molds choose the second option and is thus found to be superficial. Recently, however, new approaches which claim that through the similarities between cinema and philosophy, including the films produced for the mainstream, films idiocratically create notions[2], claim that through analyzing the visual and auditory imagery found in films, different illations can be made. This approach regarding the re-readability of the representations of evil that appear in popular films and the opportunities that are provided by the cinema in the identification and the resistance towards evil make up the basic motivations for this study.

BACKGROUND: EVIL AS AN ABSTRACT AND CONCRETE CONCEPT

In classical and modern thought, there are many notions about the existence, source, psychological, anthropological, and ideological reasons of evil. Hence, classifications regarding the subject of evil generates a wide notional richness. While these generalizations that attempt to make evilness comprehensible are expressed as a scientific necessity, recently, comments regarding evil possessing an autonomous meaning, hence each action needing to be evaluated in its own right through observable tangible equivalents, have been gaining importance.

In classical thought the notion of evil and natural disasters like earthquakes (Neiman, 2002, pp. 240-250) are described through moral actions of humans that are in line with mythological and theological discourses associated with the creation of the world and humanity. In this frame of understanding, evil is associated with "world's imperfection" (metaphysical evil), "suffering" (physical/natural evil) and "sin" (moral evil) (Svendsen, 2010, p. 83). In the earlier periods, theological approaches to evil are seen to be more prominent. Manichaeism, which describes good and evil as the two ends of a spectrum, is one of these doctrines. Manichaeism, which predicts a dualist world order, describes evil as the good's opposi-

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