Original Paper

Chemicals and Crazy People: The Evils of Batman's World

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Abstract

Batman, the creation of Bob Kane and Bill Finger, who first appeared in DC Comics as a comic book superhero in May 1939, is not a classic superhero in the sense that he possesses supernatural abilities. Instead, he relies on his intellect, training, tools and determination. The villains he faces are different from the classic binary of good vs. evil as well. This paper examines how evil is portrayed in Batman's world—evil as embodied by the villains he confronts and evils that result from hopes disappointed, opportunities denied and evil that does not even arise from evil intentions for personal gain, the evil of people who, as Alfred tells Batman, "just want to see the world burn".

Keywords

superhero, Batman, villain, Christopher Nolan, Frank Miller, millennials

1. Introduction

Batman creator Bob Kane was only 23 when Batman debuted. Kane was influenced by noir films and pulp fiction in creating his iconic hero (Ross, 2018). Batman's appearance was based on a number of sources from popular culture of the 1930s, including the lead character from a 1930 silent film entitled *The Bat Whispers* and a 1934 pulp character, the Bat, a hooded crime fighter who paralyzed villains with a gas gun. Another bat character, the Black Bat, a district attorney scarred in an acid attack, appeared in pulp fiction almost simultaneously in his own cape and black mask and co-existed with Batman until the early 1950s (Morrison, 2011).

Batman was a controversial figure whose brooding, violent nature contrasted with the sunny optimism of Superman, who had been introduced the year before.

"With his dark visage and troubled history, he stood in stark contrast to Superman, who ushered in the golden age of comics a year before Batman's first appearance. This initial version of Batman had no

qualms about using guns or killing his enemies; he embraced his position as a violent vigilante in search of vengeance. Although, at the request of publishers, Batman's writers developed a 'no-kill' policy within a year of the character's creation, Batman still saves the day while being extremely violent" (Ross, 2015).

This article examines the character of Batman, how his villains reflect society's ills, and why he is a favorite of Millennials.

According to Abad-Santos (2015), Batman was a particular target for Dr. Frederic Wertham, who began a crusade against comics in 1948 culminating in Senate hearings on the threat comics posed (in Wertham's opinion) to children.

"Wertham's crowning achievement against comic books came in 1954. He published his book *The Seduction of the Innocent*. Seduction also featured bad research. It made hard-to-substantiate claims, suggesting Wonder Woman was a lesbian, Batman and Robin were gay, and comic books were leading children into danger. Wertham's comic book witch-hunt coincided with McCarthyism in the US, adding fuel to the fire" (Abad-Santos, 2015).

The government never acted beyond the hearings, but comic book publishers decided to self-regulate by creating the Comics Code Authority, which included the following prohibitions:

- A crackdown on "sexy" images; no nude images.

- Criminals should always be bad and never triumph over good. Comics should make it clear that they should not be imitated. Authority figures (cops, government officials, organizations) should be respected.

- A ban on torture.

- Werewolves, zombies, vampires, and ghouls couldn't be used.

- Entreaties against slang and "vulgar" language.

- An order to respect the sanctity of the family (i.e., no divorce or gay people).

- A ban on comics dealing in racial and religious prejudice (Abad-Santos, 2015).

Batman was written to be friendlier, brighter and more heterosexual, and a love interest was introduced for him. These changes were reflected in the Batman TV series starring Adam West, but this is not the Dark Knight of Christopher Nolan's films or Frank Miller's graphic novels.

Batman's villainous opponents were, if anything, even less original than Batman in the beginning (Morrison, 2011). First introduced in 1940, the Joker's appearance was taken from Conrad Veidt's 1928 silent film *The Man Who Laughs*. Two Face, his features half-erased by an acid attack, epitomized the warring personalities depicted in a movie poster for *Dr. Jeckyll & Mr. Hyde*.

Over time, Batman's villains have taught us about what happens when members of a society are marginalized. Batman's complicated response to them (stopping them, but not killing them) has much to teach us about the dichotomous nature of good and evil. How does one resist evil without becoming

evil? What evils of the 21st century do Batman's rogues gallery represent? What does Batman have to teach us about recognizing and defeating everyday evil? These are the questions this research will explore.

Batman has enjoyed great success in TV and film, although not always with as much dignity as the character has enjoyed in the comics and in Christopher Nolan's film portrayals. In the 1940s, as discussed by Morrison (2011), there were two Batman movies. In one, the Batmobile had a little trailer behind it. In the other, Batman and Robin would change into their superhero uniforms in the backseat of the Batmobile, which was a somewhat ratty convertible. In the 1960s, Adam West starred as Batman on TV in a program format that combined TV with the comics stylistically by displaying words such as "Ka Pow" and "Zowie" during fight scenes. Batman was an animated character in the 1993 TV program, *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*.

Since the 1980s, Warner Bros. has produced seven feature-length films featuring Batman and his rogues gallery, including *The Dark Knight Rises*, released in Summer 2012. The character of Batman has been played by Michael Keaton (1989, 1992), Val Kilmer (1995), George Clooney (1997), and Christian Bale (2005, 2008, 2012). Batman's villains have been portrayed by such Oscar winners as Jack Nicholson and Heath Ledger, as well as Jim Carrey, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Tommy Lee Jones, Uma Thurman, Michelle Pfeiffer, Halle Berry, Liam Neeson, Aaron Eckhart, Danny DeVito, Anne Hathaway and Billy Dee Williams.

Batman is the fourth highest-grossing film series of all time with $1.4 billion in earnings. *The Dark Knight*, released in 2008, still holds the distinction of having the largest grossing opening weekend of all time, earning $158 million (Patton, 2008). It was nominated for eight Academy awards and garnered two: Best Sound Editing and Best Supporting Actor for Heath Ledger, who played the Joker. Ledger, who died before the film's release, received the award posthumously.

2. Batman vs. Superman

Comparisons of Batman to Superman are legion among comic book fans and instructive in understanding the complex character of Batman. While both characters are orphans, *Batman vs. Superman*, a website hosted by the University of Maryland University College noted these obvious differences:

- Batman is a billionaire; Superman is a middle class farm boy.
- Batman succeeds with the use of gadgets and electronics; Superman has super powers.
- Batman believes in using force first and asking questions later; Superman questions first.
- Batman has no steady relationships; Superman has Lois Lane.

However, the contrast between the two most popular comic book characters of all time goes deeper than that. Grayson (2000) described how Superman was created during a dark period of America's

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history to give America hope. First appearing in 1938, one year before Batman, Superman was created to radiate decency, integrity and optimism, a hero of the heartland.

Optimism is in short supply in Batman's world of chemicals and crazy people. Morrison (2011) says Superman would have seemed pompous and preposterous in Gotham, but Batman owned his twilight territory of the high-tech, the super-rich, the fetishistic and demented. Batman's villains personified various psychiatric disorders ranging from kleptomania (Catwoman) to schizophrenia (Two Face), and Batman had issues of his own.

"Superman made a kind of sense in a hopeful, science fiction way: a do-gooding orphan from another world who decided to use his special powers to help the people of his adopted world achieves greatness. The decision of the rich, but otherwise powerless, Bruce Wayne to fight crime dressed as a bat took a bit more swallowing" (Morrison, 2011, p. 24).

Batman differed from Superman in his approach to being a superhero as well, and the difference is perhaps what makes him more realistic and relatable to his fans. Fingeroth (2004) asserted that classic superheroes have no axes to grind, no agendas to put forth and pursue. They are not active agents of change. Instead, they react to what the villain is doing. "Once they cross that line, the mission is different. Then, they are not there to protect, but to reform. And that can be a slippery slope indeed" (Fingeroth, 2004, p. 162).

Batman's goal was to reform Gotham. As a result, he became a vigilante, whose use of force stopped only at deliberately taking a life. "Superman's brand of essentially optimistic problem-solving found its cynical counterpart in Batman's obsessive, impossible quest to punch crime into extinction, one bastard at a time" (Morrison, 2011, p. 26).

Batman's vigilantism ultimately does not work and cannot produce real safety and freedom, because, as Commissioner Gordon points out in *Batman Begins*, the criminal element responds to it by escalating the violence. "We start carrying semi-automatics, they buy automatics. We start wearing Kevlar; they buy armor-piercing rounds" (Jim Gordon *in Batman Begins*).

A large part of what makes Batman such a complex character is that rather than solving Gotham's problems, Batman instead recreates the conditions for their reproduction by beating but not killing his opponents. As Ross (2018) argues,

"Why doesn't Batman stop the cycle of beating up the bad guys and allowing them to escape? Maybe it's because Batman doesn't want the cycle to end. It would be ludicrous to say that that the world's greatest detective doesn't notice that all of his enemies keep escaping and it's ridiculous to think that he's just oblivious at the ultimate futility of his actions. A much more plausible reason is that Bruce Wayne has never recovered from the night that his parents were murdered, and being Batman allows him to live out the fantasy of being able to save them. Batman needs to have challenging opponents to take down. He needs the presence of a constant threat posed by major villains to Gotham, and by never

actually eliminating them he ensures that there will also be someone plotting destruction. If Gotham City were truly cleaned up, the fantasy would die, and Batman does want that. So he perpetuates a deeply flawed system, the citizens of Gotham pay the price, and the spoiled rich kid gets to dress up and play superhero every night" (Ross, 2018).

Even Batman realizes he is not the ultimate solution to Gotham's problems, because he himself is not pure, tainted as he is by anger and guilt over his parents' murders and driven to violence. He thus tries to promote Harvey Dent as Gotham's white knight and even assumes the guilt for Harvey's crimes as Two Face at the end of *The Dark Knight*, so Gotham can still believe in the power of good. Batman thus becomes a more fully developed character than Superman, one with what Heidegger called "the authentic conscience", because he could be honest with himself about what he is and what he is not and take full responsibility for the direction, meaning and purpose of his life (Howard, 2008). In short, Batman knows that though he wants to be a hero, he wants to be good, often he is not. But neither does he give in to the blind rage and vengeance that drives many of his villains.

3. Batman and Millennials

Batman's imperfections actually keep him relevant, at least to Milliennial audiences. According to Carson Clark (2013), Millennials tend to find Superman's perfection and invincibility boring and Batman's grit and hard work to gain his skills admirable. "One of the latent traits I've observed among my generation is an eagerness to achieve something", said Clark "Challenge inspires us" (Clark, 2013). Clark also noted that Millennials prefer a worldview that is more nuanced and ambiguous than "Truth, Justice and the American Way". "Complexity intrigues us", said Clark (2013).

This preference for the morally ambiguous Batman may come from growing up in a post-9/11 world. According to Galey (2016), terrorist attacks, recessions, wars and natural disasters "shook Americans to their core, dashing their belief that 'Life is good' and replacing it with the mantra 'Life is hard', pushing people toward the anti-hero mindset". The wild success of shows like *Dexter, House of Cards, Breaking Bad, Game of Thrones* and *Empire* prove that Americans, and especially Millennials, want a protagonist that is not the "good guy". We want to follow a criminal trying to get by, a serial killer who kills killers, or power hungry backstabbers clawing their way to the top, not some average Joe proving that love conquers all. We want imperfect heroes, heroes that live in a world of realism, where everything is not sunshine and rainbows and where decisions are hard (Galey, 2016).

4. Batman's Villains

Batman has battled some bizarre characters in his day, some cunning, some crazy and one that may be truly evil. One of the first characters he encounters in *Batman Begins* is an adversary from his comic book adventures, R'as al Ghul. With a name that literally translates to "the Demon's head", R'as al

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Ghul leads a vigilante organization known as the League of Shadows. R'as al Ghul actually attempts to recruit Bruce Wayne into the organization and trains him, but Bruce ultimately rejects the League's plans for the destruction of Gotham. R'as al Ghul sees himself as doing good (but then nobody ever really sees themselves as a bad guy) and Bruce as weak for not being willing to do what is necessary to root out evil (Darius, 2005). Though he foils R'as al Ghul's plan to destroy Gotham, Batman (Bruce) may be viewed as affirming his approach to ridding the world of evil when he lets the train his own father built to unite Gotham get destroyed while preserving the might of Wayne Enterprises.

"In saving the tower, yet crashing the train, Batman …places more faith in political force and sound economic management (in regaining control of his father's company) than he does in the utopian space of the train, represented by the well-meaning, but weak-willed social liberalism of Thomas Wayne…Though, by the end of *Batman Begins*, Batman/Bruce commits himself to restoring his family's name through rebuilding Wayne Manor, philosophically he aligns himself with his other father, R'as al Ghul. While Batman values justice and liberty, he bypasses the law by unilaterally enforcing both at the point of a gun" (Birkenstein et al., 2010, p. 133).

Penguin is another of Batman's disfigured foes with a grudge against society. Born Oswald Cobblepot, he was a disfigured child callously thrown into the sewers of Gotham by his unfeeling parents. Penguin wants to avenge himself on Gotham's wealthy and show them what it is to be disregarded as a member of humanity (Hooyman, 2003).

Selina Kyle, a.k.a. Cat Woman, is a repressed, inept secretary who is pushed out of a window by the selfish, greedy millionaire for whom she works. Reborn as Cat Woman, she starts making her own decisions and taking what she wants. A feminine counterpoint to Batman, she is both villain and superhero, as she tries to foil the plans of her evil boss against Gotham while also assisting Penguin in capturing Batman. She and Batman have been described as "a dysfunctional Romeo and Juliet" (Hooyman, 2003). Cat Woman might be more aptly termed an anti-hero. She initially helps Bane in his revolution against the rich and powerful, but comes to regret the human cost of anarchy. When she picks up a broken family photo in a destroyed apartment, she says, "This was someone's home", to which her friend replies, "Now, it's everyone's home" (Selena Kyle in *The Dark Knight Rises*).

Berninger, Ecke & Haberkorn (2010) believed that the villain Mr. Freeze was an expression of Cold War America's anxieties about the role Nazi scientists had played in the war and were continuing to play as émigrés to the United States after the war. Like many of Batman's other villains and Batman himself, Mr. Freeze had a traumatic childhood, with his parents sending him away to a strict boarding school where he felt detached from humanity. A cryogenics expert, he was involved in an industrial accident while trying to save his beloved wife Nora from a disease.

"Apart from his German name, Mr. Freeze's character configuration alludes to another tradition of stereotype: 'the wheelchair-bound madman'. This special variation of the mad scientist is marked by

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his dehumanized body, which is 'abnormal', in constant need of technical support…and in the depiction of Mr. Freeze, this deformation is the most powerful marker of his Otherness. Although his body may be marked by as a distinct Other, Mr. Freeze is rather de- and not sub-humanized. ...This becomes evident in *Batman & Robin*, when Arnold Schwarzenegger's vivid impersonation of Victor Fries makes him rather superhuman an Ubermensch, literally more white-skinned and blue-eyed than any other character" (Berninger et al., 2010).

The Riddler (a.k.a. Edward Nigma or E Nigma) was a flamboyant narcissist who committed his crimes to flaunt his intellectual superiority. He was not one of Batman's psychopathic murderers, but rather a clever, neurotic criminal son of an abusive father who called him a moron.

Two Face (a.k.a. Harvey Dent) is one of Batman's oldest villains, having appeared as early as 1942. Based on the pulp fiction character the Black Bat, Harvey Dent is the clean-cut district attorney of Gotham, who goes insane when a criminal disfigures half of his face with acid during a trial. He then adopts the Two Face persona who decides whether to kill based on the result of a coin flip. Two Face's villainy has been attributed by various writers to schizophrenia, bipolar or multiple personality disorder. As Harvey Dent, he reminds viewers (and readers) that WE are the answer to Gotham's problems, as good "men" who refuse to let evil triumph. Dent's potential to inspire Gothamites to clean up Gotham once and for all is what the Joker hopes to destroy in *The Dark Knight*.

Bane leads a populist revolution brought on by what he calls "necessary evil" and violence. He wants to overthrow the elite and promises to return governance to everyday people. However, in The Dark Knight Rises, Bane is eventually revealed to be little more than a front for a crook named Roland Daggett, a board member of Wayne Enterprises who wants to steal it from Bruce Wayne. Bane's economic populism a ruse used to stoke the most gullible of Gotham into supporting not a reform of power. Bane is another villain whose childhood was marked by deprivation and abuse. He was born inside a prison and forced to serve time for his father's revolutionary crimes. He was also used as a test subject for a super steroid known as Venom, which was injected directly into his brain, giving him vast physical strength, but also an addiction to the drug.

The Joker is by far Batman's most complex villain. He defies the easy description of a normal person twisted by personal tragedy, like Harvey Dent. In fact, the back story of how he became a inhumanly brutal psychopath changes with the audience. One widely cited back story depicts him as originally being an engineer at a chemical plant who quits his job to become a standup comedian, only to fail miserably. Desperate to support his pregnant wife, he agrees to help two criminals break into the plant. His wife dies in a household accident prior to the crime, but he is forced to go through with it. During the commission of the crime, he is surprised by Batman and leaps over a rail to escape, plummeting into a vat of chemicals (Information about Joker, 2012).

In The Dark Knight, the Joker tells two different stories about how he was disfigured. In one, he is

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disfigured by a drunken, brutal father who cuts his mouth saying, "Why so serious, son?" In another story, it is his crazy wife who hurts him while advising him to have more fun.

These various tales serve to defy those who would find logical, predictable explanations for the Joker's actions, when in fact, his crimes, as Batman puts it, "make sense to him alone". In *The Dark Knight*, Bruce comments that "criminals aren't complicated, Alfred. We just need to figure out what he's after" (*The Dark Knight*, 2008). In response, Alfred warns Batman (and us) that he does not fully understand this man that some men aren't after anything; they "just want to see the world burn". The Joker rejects the sort of easy categorization that would be applied to Gotham's other criminals when Batman says, "You're garbage who kills for money" and the Joker replies, "Don't talk like them. You're not, even if you'd like to be. To them, you're just a freak like me" (*The Dark Knight*, 2008).

The character is sometimes portrayed as having a heightened sense of self-awareness that other characters do not have. He demonstrates fourth wall awareness in one DC Comics episode by actually turning the page for the reader. In *The Dark Knight*, he describes himself in a chillingly honest interview with Batman as "not a monster… just ahead of the curve". It's as if he is laying claim to a sort of super-sanity, an understanding about human nature that only he possesses.

Of course, no analysis of the Joker's character would be complete without pointing out his obvious similarities to Batman. In *The Dark Knight*, he says to Batman, "I don't want to kill you. You complete me". Even before his arrival on the scene in Christopher Nolan's Batman film series, his similarity to Batman is noted by Jim Gordon in one of the final scenes of *Batman Begins*.

"Take this guy: armed robbery, double homicide. Got a taste for the theatrical, like you. Leaves a calling card (hands Batman a Joker playing card)" (*Batman Begins*, 2005).

According to Birkenstein et al. (2010), the Joker epitomizes the personal obsession, the madness, if you will, of Batman's crime-fighting career. He reminds us that "strength derived from traumatic experience can be turned towards evil as easily as good" (Birkenstein et al., 2010, p. 138).

Whether the Joker is morally responsible for the brutal crimes he commits is a matter debated in the book *Batman and Philosophy: The Dark Knight of the Soul*, edited by Mark D. White and Robert Arp. It is a debate echoed in our own modern—day debates over the insanity defense.

"The Joker hasn't just done criminal things, he's done unimaginably awful things, things of the utmost moral repugnance. But how much blame—moral blame—should we assign to him? … We ought to remind ourselves of the fact we began with: namely, that the Joker really isn't playing with a full deck and there is a strong sentiment among us, not universally shared but not uncommon, that genuinely insane people often aren't morally responsible for what they do, and therefore don't deserve moral blame for their misdeeds. Maybe then, the Joker shouldn't be held morally accountable for his actions" (Robichaud, 2008, p. 71).

In one of the most fascinating scenes in *The Dark Knight*, the Joker says to the injured Harvey Dent (before he adopts the Two Face persona):

"Do I really look like a guy with plan? You know what I am? I'm a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it. I just do things. The mob's got plans…they're schemers trying to control their little worlds. I'm not a schemer. I try to show the schemers how pathetic their attempts to control things really are" (*The Dark Knight*, 2008).

But is it really true to say that the Joker has no plan, that he's a psychopath who cannot understand the consequences of his actions? Or is it more accurate to view the Joker as more than a villain—in fact, the embodiment of evil in the true Judeo-Christian sense of the word? Is it possible that the Joker is a being who wants to claim Gotham's soul by destroying Gotham's faith in goodness to the point that it acquiesces to endless corruption and degradation? Consider this final exchange between Batman and the Joker in *The Dark Knight*:

(Batman): This city just showed you that it's full of people ready to believe in good.

(Joker): Till their spirit breaks completely. Till they get a look at the real Harvey Dent and all the heroic things he's done. You didn't think I'd risk losing the battle for Gotham's soul in a fist fight with you? No, you need an ace in the hole and mine's Harvey. I took Gotham's White Knight and I brought him down to our level. It wasn't hard. Madness, as you know, is like gravity. All it takes is a little push" (*The Dark Knight*, 2008).

5. The Evils We Confront in Batman

The classic binary of good vs. evil, superhero vs. arch villain may give the audience some sense of satisfaction in other superhero stories, but in Batman, there is a lingering sense of discomfort as we are subtly presented with evils perpetrated and tolerated by society that produces the monsters Batman fights. In the Penguin and Two Face, we confront society's love affair with beauty and perfection and rejection of disfigurement and difference. In Cat Woman, we witness the marginalization of women and in the Penguin, the Riddler and the Joker, we see the effects of abusing children. Bane suggests problems with how society treats its prisoners. The Joker also confronts us with society's willingness to sacrifice everyday citizens, whose lives might be considered expendable in society's plans:

"You know what I noticed? Nobody panics when things go according to plan, even if the plan is horrifying. If tomorrow I tell the press that like a gangbanger will get shot or a truckload of soldiers will get blown up, nobody panics because it's all part of the plan. But when I say that one little old mayor will die, then everyone loses their minds. Introduce a little anarchy. Upset the established order and everything becomes chaos. You know the thing about chaos? It's fair" (*The Dark Knight*, 2008).

The Batman legend also hints at such simmering fears as terrorism, technology and using violence as a solution to problems. In *Batman Begins*, Bruce Wayne is trained at what is essentially a terrorist

training camp by R'as Al Ghul. Throughout the Batman canon are examples of the uses crazy people can make of technology, which in today's parlance is known as "weapons of mass destruction". In *Batman Begins*, the technology was actually developed by Wayne Enterprises before being hijacked by R'as al Ghul. Gordon notes the inevitable failure of violence to resolve problems when he points out that everything he and Batman do will provoke escalation of violence by the criminal element.

These are evils we sense, but don't really see. Heidt (2011) said "For those who wanted to hear it, Auschwitz offered a moral lesson about vigilance. Very few people are prepared to destroy their own lives for the sake of destroying others. But many people are prepared to play small parts in systems that lead to evils they do not want to foresee" (Heidt, 2011, p. 17).

Hannah Arendt, reporting on the trial of Adoph Eichmann, who sent millions to their deaths in concentration camps, called his form of evil "banal". She depicted Eichmann as a rather nondescript bureaucrat who bore no particular hatred of the Jews he condemned but who was primarily concerned with advancing his career. She was convinced that such evil could be overcome only if we acknowledge that it overwhelms us in ways that are minute. Great temptations, she believed, are easier to recognize and thus resist for resistance comes in heroic terms. Contemporary dangers begin with trivial and insidious steps.

Both Christopher Nolan's film Dark Knight and Frank Miller's graphic novel Dark Knight suggest a fear that democracy itself may be waning as a creative force in the world, thus allowing the creeping evil of totalitarianism to gain a foothold. According to Cortiel and Oehme (2015), "Miller's Dark Knight faces not only superhuman criminals, but also a society that fails to adequately respond to the risks that threaten its existence". In Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy, police, bureaucrats and corporate board members are "representatives of institutionalized failure, greed and injustice" (Grandinetti, 2015). He cites Ralph Cintron's discussion of the link between democracy and rhetoric in *Democracy and Its Limitations*:

"This resource constraint is a key component of the limitations of democracy as defined by Cintron. He writes that over time the reality of material life will force a severe readjustment of democratic rhetorics that will cause them to lose their original enthusiasm, become pale and gray, and finally dissipate into bureaucratic management whose main function will be to preserve hierarchy in the name of public order that will be translated as synonymous as public good" (Grandinetti, 2015).

This theme is explored in *The Dark Knight Rises*, which is set eight years after the previous film, in which Batman takes the blame for the murders caused district attorney Harvey Dent/Two Face. Bruce Wayne has become a reclusive shut-in, Batman has disappeared, and the death of Dent has been used to pass legislation giving the police force more power to imprison criminals. Police Commissioner Jim Gordon is struggling with the success of the Dent Act, and considers revealing it's based on a lie. Meanwhile, terrorist and new leader of the League of Shadows, Bane, has come to Gotham City in a

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plot to aid Wayne Enterprises board member Roland Daggett in his takeover of the company. Bane's false revolution is revealed to be not so much a call to improve the public sphere as a desire for one group to supplant another in power. Batman is able to restore democracy to Gotham with the help of the very public whom democracy is meant to serve, but one wonders if the Dark Knight is showing us yet another evil we not want to see—that democracy contains within it the seeds of its own destruction, which will be realized if we do not remain vigilant.

Martin Luther King stated in his "The Humanist Hope" sermon that "evil was beyond the responsibility of God as well as beyond the reach of man…evil was too deeply rooted in human character" (Branch, pp. 700-701). Arendt said, "The trouble with Eichmann was that there were, and still are, so many like him…that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal" (p. 174). Michael Gelvin (1997) noted, "We are fools to deny it…we are essentially good and bad always" (pp. 162-163).

Through Batman's legend, we see that like Gotham, we experience evil because we tolerate it if it isn't happening to us. We are forced to confront the notion that democracy must be defended against institutional failure. However, perhaps Batman's greatest contribution is helping us understand that we all battle evil in our private Gothams. In contrast, goodness is the acknowledgement, awareness and acceptance of good and evil in oneself and the consciousness of the inner struggle to balance one's own will with the needs and desires of others.

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