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Batman Should Let the Joker Live

Should Batman kill the Joker? This question seems meaningless. However, it may refine our thinking when we consider ethic issues in the real world. When Mark D. White and Robert Arp reflect on the American issues with terror and torture in their essay “Should Batman Kill the Joker?” (2008), they indicate that Pop culture provides a chance to think philosophically about issues that parallel the real world (546) to explain why they use this analogy. Using pop culture figures results in a vivid and attractive analysis of ethics, because it can catch readers’ attention and provide an accessible way for them to interpret these abstract issues, which is helpful. While White and Arp argue that there are good reasons for both killing and not killing Joker (547), I would argue that Batman is morally and ethically right to let the Joker live, because by doing this can Joker receive relatively impartial judgement, being respected, and Batman can avoid becoming an unethical murderer.

However, from the perspective of Utilitarianism which derives from the work of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, someone may argue that Batman could save countless innocent lives by ending Joker’s miserable existence once and for all (White and Arp 546), which seems morally and ethically right because this act leads to a reasonable result where citizens are protected from the Joker. Nevertheless, from the perspective of Deontology

which is based on the writings of Immanuel Kant, I would argue that this act is not morally and ethically right, because it only focuses on the result, “based on comparing the many lives saved against the one life lost” (White and Arp 546), regardless of the act of murder itself. Once Batman kills the Joker without permission from the law, he himself will become an unethical murderer, the same as Joker. Thus, we need permission from the law, which means that “if the Joker is to be punished, it should be through official procedures, not vigilante justice” (White and Arp 546), corresponding to Kantian opinion that while the Joker is evil, he is still a human being who deserves of at least a minimal level of respect and humanity (White and Arp 546). From this perspective, it is morally and ethically right that Batman helps policemen arrest the Joker to put him into legal procedure instead of killing him, because this act ensures that Batman will not become a murderer and that Joker can receive relatively impartial judgement reflecting the will of citizens.

When it comes to application of philosophy to pop culture, while someone may argue that taking Batman’s adventures as a serious guide to moral and ethical behavior is silly or frivolous, I would argue that this act is useful in terms of its practicability, because it provides an accessible way for readers to interpret these difficult topics by using vivid and attractive examples, consistent to White and Arp’s view that “translating the core issue to another venue, such as Batman and the Joker, helps us focus on the key aspects of the problem, that can only help refine our thinking” (547). In a word, Batman is morally and ethically right to let the Joker live, because this act can prevent Batman from becoming a murderer and provide Joker with respect and humanity, showing what justice truly is.

Works Cited

White, Mark D., and Arp Robert. "Should Batman Kill the Joker?." *The Norton Sampler*. 8th ed., edited by Moller Marilyn, and Mullaney Elizabeth, W. W. Norton & Company, 2008, pp. 525-527