

The question of morality in “The Dark Knight”

It might be better if there is a chaotic street, a ransacked neighborhood, a lawless city, or a “freed” population. It is because of the law that people would have to be controlled by fear. It is because of the law that innocents suffer from injustice. “The Dark Knight” by Dennis O’Neil, adapted from Christopher Nolan’s “The Dark Knight” script, explores the philosophy of good, the order, versus evil, the mayhem, by embodying four different characters - Batman, Harvey Dent the attorney, Commissioner Gordon, and The Joker – as different interpretations to this conundrum. In society, not only chaos must be accompanied by order, but the boundary between them is very thin.

The complicated relationship between the characters emphasizes the thin boundary between good and evil. Harvey Dent and Batman shares the same idea that society must be ruled by order and crimes must be dealt with strictly; even so, the two characters have different methods to enact their plan. While Harvey is the “White Knight of Gotham” because he works as an attorney who deals with criminals using the court system, Batman is the “Dark Knight” because he destroys the criminals in the dark, literally. Dent used lawful approaches to condemn Maroni’s and Falcone’s men, cutting down the criminals in Gotham by up to at least 600 individuals all at once, a number that Batman could never reach by beating up criminals every night. Harvey also had similarities with Jim Gordon, the Commissioner, in terms of interpreting the idea of justice because they both believe that everyone deserves to be put on trial for their committed crimes; yet they differ in how they apply their ideology equally. While Gordon defends his fellow comrades willingly, sometimes blindly, Dent sees that all must not be trusted solely on their career and their displayed integrity. This opposing view in the same agreement

caused many arguments between them, which plays an important role in the defeat of the White Knight when Joker brought him down to the lowest.

The Commissioner is the embodiment of faith, he builds a strong relationship with his co-workers and his men, hoping to have them work with him whole heartedly. Faith plays an important role in how one interprets “moral.” Gordon believes completely in the good, because he thinks that this world, at least in Gotham, can be in the slumps for now but would emerge one day as a better place. This is a positive mindset, a “healthy” way of thinking which many people actually follow. But the down side to this point of view is that one can overlook the silent threats, the ones that can cut deeply into the soul and mind. In a confrontation with Harvey Dent, when Harvey told Jim to investigate his men for the next operation, Jim shouted back: “I know my men! These are good people, they can die for this city. You know nothing of my crew!” There is always a price for every action, good or bad. Gordon put too much hope in something that could have crushed him. Near the end of the book, Jim got to learn that his faith in his men betrayed him because two of his men destroyed half of Dent’s face and indirectly killed Dent’s fiancé, which drove Dent into almost killing Jim’s family in the name of justice.

Batman and Joker are often interpreted as opposite of each other because of their ideological beliefs deviate too much from each other; one represents good, the other embodies evil. But the origin of “good” and “evil” in them rooted from one source: madness. “Madness is just like gravity, all it takes is just a little push...” Although Bruce Wayne (Batman) overcame his parents’ death and used that vengeance in him to become Batman to protect Gotham, Joker would embrace the madness in his life. The author never gave a specific event but based on the way The Joker narrated his story, the readers can interpret that Joker emerged from painful experiences a broken, warped-minded man which reinforce him to believe that only if society get

used to pain would it stop knowing pain. His first action was to steal all the money in Gotham's bank then burn it. "I don't care about the money!"- said the Joker while setting the money into fire proves that Joker is not a criminal, but a man who dares to act to plant his beliefs to the society that disowned him. As a mastermind in schemes, Joker killed five people, and could have killed more, because Batman did not reveal his face. His action led the whole city into chaos. He knows what people are, he knows how they act, and therefore he knows how to manipulate them. "When the chips are down, these...civilized people they'll eat each other. And you, to them, you are just a freak. They only need you now, but when they don't, they cast you out." Joker is not a distance sociopath, he understands that people just behave well because they are forced to, but they have not shown their true colors yet. Similar to how he became such a man, Joker wants to push society to its limit so that people will no longer have to be controlled by the double standard. All he wants is a world with no hypocrites, and therefore he calls himself "the head of the current." He wants a revolution and wants Gotham to accept the truth.

The ace of the Joker is not himself, but the "hope of Gotham," Harvey Dent. The night that Joker killed Dent's fiancé and burned Dent's face, with the help of the Commissioner's men, broke Dent. The Clown told Dent about the police's involvement in the murder, convincing him that the system is broken, all driven by money, all is corrupted. Though he is against the Joker, Dent sees the logic, he sees that to crumble corruption, he must kill the ones who are corrupted. He had now stepped to the other side of the spectrum and became Two-face, from peace to war, from sane to insane. As a person who believes in what is fair, Two-face (Dent from here on out) was willing to kill Gordon's son to prove that he is fair because his men had taken all away from Two Face by killing the person he loved, and therefore he would do the same to the Commissioner. If this was revealed to the public, all hope would be lost because even a bright,

charismatic, and promising individual like Dent who had sworn to shield Gotham from atrocities can be broken into the atrocity, then the fate of its citizen will all defect into something bad, something chaotic. But there was one character who would not change no matter the situation.

Batman shares many bits of features and ideology with Two-face, Joker, and the Commissioner. He is the outcast, had a dark past, dares to sacrifice, and believes in justice. Batman is portrayed as the uncorruptible man who never breaks his moral code (no killing), a symbol for a perfect society where everyone knows their limit. The reason for Bruce Wayne to put on the mask is to let Gotham know that the powerful vigilante could be anyone therefore justice can be served by anyone. If he is seen as Batman, the threat and fear in the criminal's heart will fade away. Because of this, Batman is the target for the Joker. Joker knows that Batman had restored order to the city, yet he still enjoyed interrupting Batman to break the city into ruins. "AHH HAHA HA HA HA, Kill you? I don't wanna kill you! What can I do without you?" Evil and good must be together. This is a conflict which is hard to explain because ever since human stepped on this earth, all they wanted was happiness, yet there was always a dark looming shadow, a mischievous one which was always cast under bright the sun. Human desire happiness, but where does happiness come from? There cannot be an "absolute happiness" because it cannot be defined without "absolute sorrow," but since that is the case, happiness and sorrow are just each other's relative adjective. The same is for Batman and the Joker. If there was no chaos, there would be no Batman, but had there been no Batman to restore order, could Joker exist to create anarchy? No, because the one moment that madness had taken over them, it had driven them to different paths which ultimately converge them to one single point, and that is the reality of society.

In the end of the book, Batman had to push Two-face down a building to rescue Gordon's son, killing him. Finally, Batman broke his one code: never kill, the code that defined him as the Batman. But for the circumstance, killing Two-face was the only choice left, as he saw that Two-face's ideology did not fit to the current society anymore, right and wrong cannot be defined simply as black or white. Batman asked Gordon to blame him and to tell the public that Harvey was the true hero, "They must never know what he did." Batman knows how vulnerable society is when its hope gets blown away, like how The Dark Knight lost his ray of hope, Dent. The only way to save society from collapsing is to give it a false sense of reality. He further takes responsibility for the five deaths, making him a public enemy, a villain, the entity of evil, the chaos that people swear to hate for the rest of their lives.

Even though "The Dark Knight" is a super hero novel, it answers the question regarding the genealogy of morals and how easy it is to cross the line. It emphasizes that human is vulnerable to chaotic situations. The complexity of good and bad, similar to how one character affects the other's morale, shows that there is no distinction. Positivity can take up the form of pessimism and vice versa, but as long as society accepts it, then it will be deemed acceptable.