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2018

# Batman: Gotham's Savior or Undoing?

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# 4

## BATMAN: GOTHAM'S SAVIOR OR UNDOING?

ALYSSA LYNN ROSS

*“You think that being a hero is fun? That it's a game? A hero is a person who stands apart. A hero is no longer part of the mainstream humanity. A hero treads the razor's edge between heaven and hell because a hero is not bound by sentimentality or the vagaries of public opinion. A hero is held to a higher standard of truth and justice. I'm a crime-fighter and a detective. I don't call myself a hero. It's not a job description...it's an appellation--bestowed upon one by posterity.”*

– Batman (Hama, 1999)

Since the creation of the very first Batman comic in 1939, the character of Batman has appeared in an immense variety of films, graphic novels and television shows, each with a unique author, speaking to different audiences at different moments in history. Consequently, analysis of a character like Batman and each new piece of his ever-changing storyline creates its own special challenges. In this chapter, I will try to remain faithful to the original comics as is possible, given that some of the comics are self-contradictory or revisionary. Let me be clear: I am not a Batman expert. I have read Batman comics, watched

animated versions of the franchise, and seen many Caped Crusader movies. My analysis is that of an intelligent layperson and fan of the franchise, and I acknowledge that my examination of Batman might seem limited to those who are more knowledgeable.

This book is based on a survey that was administered to 200 people of the Millennial generation, with Batman emerging as one of their most frequently listed heroes. The only other superhero listed was Superman. Surprisingly, Batman also appeared on the list of villains. Three of the Caped Crusader's villains were also on the naughty list: The Joker, Two-face, and The Penguin. What about Batman prompts such popular yet mixed responses regarding who he is to millennials? This chapter will illuminate the characteristics of Batman that prompts people to consider him to be both hero and villain, leaving it up to the reader to make a final judgment. First, I'm going to provide a quick synopsis of how Batman is presented over time. Then I will offer an overview of Batman's biography, transformation from Bruce to Batman, and how he transformed his sidekick Robin. Afterward, I will discuss whether Batman is a hero or a villain, leaving it up to readers to decide, but ultimately concluding that Batman needs to be deemed a hero.

#### BATMAN THROUGH THE AGES

Batman has passed through several distinct phases, being remarkably dark at times while at other times being incredibly technicolor. The Batman who originally appeared in Detective Comics #27 in 1939 was heavily influenced by both noir films and the heroes of pulp magazines (Johnson, 2014). 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 writers developed a "no-kill" policy within a year of the character's creation, Batman still saves the day while being extremely violent. In *You Shoulda Seen Him*, Batman threatens a mugger saying, "I swear that if you harm that woman at all, I'll make you pay! I will break and twist things within you. You can't conceive of the pain I can cause. It's pain that will go on forever! You won't escape it... because I won't let you

die!” (Starlin, 1988). This violent tendency is one element of Batman's history which blurs the line between hero and villain.

However, not everyone was fond of Batman's initial dark grittiness, and thus he started losing popularity. Batman underwent major changes in the Silver Age of comics, from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s (Johnson, 2014). During this period, Batman storylines shifted away from dark detective tales and instead turned toward lighter plots revolving around science fiction. This lighter tone eventually paved the way for the campy television series starring Adam West, which aired from 1966 to 1968 (Johnson, 2014). These lighthearted depictions of Batman's heroism prompted a movement back toward a dark, complex version of Batman at the end of the Silver Age. Current batman works completely reject the camp of the Batman television series. Rather than depicting an ethically spotless hero, writers created a morally ambiguous Batman.

#### TRANSFORMATION FROM ORDINARY

Joseph Campbell's (1949) hero's journey defines the archetype of many of our oldest stories, but also helps explain some of Batman's story. In the monomyth, a hero embarks on an adventure when she is thrust into a new and dangerous world. The hero is charged with accomplishing a difficult task and receives assistance from unlikely places. There are formidable obstacles and villains to overcome on the expedition. After trials and suffering, the hero learns an important truth about herself that forever changes her. She returns to her original world and bestows some type of gift to that society, a gift that is only made possible by her own personal journey of growth and change. In short, heroes undergo a personal transformation that includes the development of a motive to improve the lives of others (Allison & Goethals, 2017). When Batman's parents died, he was cast from a life of luxury and tasked himself with ridding Gotham of street crime. He encountered unlikely allies and fought his way through countless villains just like the mythological heroes of old. The Batman story is still being told; however, he has already learned new things about himself and changed Gotham for the better. The transformation of Bruce Wayne into Batman nicely fits Campbell's hero monomyth.

Transformation is the main component of any hero's journey, even the journey of superheroes. Sometimes the change is sudden and dramatic, as when there is a literal physical transformation. The physical change is merely a way of representing the overall change. Peter Parker offers a striking example. He gets bitten by a spider and physically changes, gaining the powers of a spider and becoming Spider-Man. However, the more important psychological change is that he realizes that "with great power, comes great responsibility," and that he must use his powers to help others, even if that means making important personal sacrifices. The transformation into a hero can also happen much more slowly. Oliver Queen was a young billionaire playboy who was marooned on an island after a shipwreck. At first he struggled to survive without the luxuries of his life, but Queen eventually learned to rely on the archery and training he had received as a child. After rescuing a passing ship from pirates, he realized that he could and should use these abilities to help people, and ultimately he became Green Arrow. Even when there is a great physical transformation, the more significant transformation is using new powers or abilities to help the greater society.

A family outing to the cinema ended in tragedy for young Bruce Wayne. Walking homeward, Bruce, his father, and mother, accidentally ventured into Gotham City's notorious "Crime Alley" and were confronted by a mugger. Not content merely to rob the wealthy family, the mugger, Joe Chill, shot Dr. Thomas and Martha Wayne dead before fleeing into the darkness (Miller, 2012, Num. 404). As he knelt beside his parents' bodies, Bruce swore to avenge them. At age 14, Bruce embarked on a journey, Campbell's (1949) change in setting, which took him to every continent as he sought to learn all the skills he would need to honor his vow. He studied many different sciences including criminology and forensics. He trained his body to fight learning from esteemed martial artists but also from thugs and trained bounty hunters. Bruce's transformation is a perfect example of purpose-guided heroism, in which a dramatic incident motivates people to acquire a clear sense of purpose that leads them to act heroically (Bronk & Riches, 2017). Bruce Wayne's early childhood tragedy gave him the purpose to forge himself into a living weapon with the heroic goal of waging war on crime and injustice.

The death of his parents was definitely traumatic for young Bruce. Post traumatic growth theory suggests that adversity might not only be endured but also presents an opportunity of change both within ourselves and within the broader world (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2014). Trauma can be a catalyst for major growth

and even wisdom (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). This growth can be seen in Batman's declaration: "I made a promise on the grave of my parents that I would rid this city of the evil that took their lives" (Leob, 2002). Some of the most courageous acts that human beings can perform involve facing their own failings and vulnerabilities and allowing that experience to change them for the better (Plews-Ogan et al., 2016). The definition of purpose includes three important elements. First, a purpose is a highly meaningful, long term goal. Second, a purpose in life requires individuals to develop a meaningful life that they actively work toward. Finally, a purpose in life is also relevant to the broader world (Bronk & Riches, 2017). Bruce found his purpose in becoming a "something of something"; specifically, he became the Hero of Gotham (Kocher, 2016). He was able to take the tragedy of his parents' death and use it for the betterment of the greater world.

Once he returned to Gotham, Bruce stalked street thugs as a plainclothes vigilante. However, it didn't go very well. He was beaten by the very people he intended to protect, and Bruce barely survived his first night out. Bruce knew that he had to first strike fear in the hearts of his foes if he was ever going to win. One day a bat crashed through the study window, giving Bruce all the inspiration he needed. Establishing a secret headquarters in the caves beneath his mansion, Bruce became Batman, a Dark Knight to protect Gotham and its citizens from villainy. This marked Bruce's transformative change in self (Campbell, 1949). Unlike most superheroes, Batman does not possess any superpowers. He only has his intellect, detective skills, science and technology, wealth, and physical prowess to rely upon in his war on crime. Batman became an urban legend, a cautionary tale that sent shivers through the city's underworld. Batman is not an altruistic do-gooder like Superman or Wonder Woman. He uses intimidation, fear tactics, physical violence, and darkness to subdue criminals. He is driven and motivated by revenge on his parents' killer, but then once he discovered that Chill had been killed some time previously, Batman's vengeful motivation transformed into something broader.

Batman's presence in Gotham City created a new type of criminal, no longer the simple thugs and gangsters involved in Gotham organized crime, but ones with more colorful personalities. The first person inspired by Batman was Catwoman, a dangerous seductress using his methods of darkness and

uncertainty towards her own ends, namely thievery (Miller, 1987, Num. 407). Dr. Hugo Strange was a mad scientist who had created Monster Men to do his bidding (Wagner, 2006). The Scarecrow was an outcast who developed techniques to strike terror into the hearts of his victims for his own pleasure (Moench, 1995, Num. 19). The Riddler was another deranged genius who felt a psychological compulsion to demonstrate his intellectual superiority, constructing elaborate crimes while delivering clues and daring law enforcement to catch him (Finger, 1948, Num. 120). Poison Ivy attempted to destroy the city when a deep connection to plant life led her to wage a personal war against humanity (Grant, 1995, Num. 3). The psychotic Mister Freeze used dangerous experimental technology to take revenge against society when his wife died (Williams, 2005). The Penguin was a crime boss and eccentric criminal mastermind with a desire to prove himself. Batman met his greatest nemesis when the Joker first appeared, a brilliant serial killer dressed like a clown who murdered people uncontrollably. He had been exposed to chemicals in an accident that drove him completely insane, and he swore revenge on Gotham for creating him (Brubaker, 2005). Gotham's new breed of criminals replaced the traditional gangsters that Bruce Wayne first transformed himself into Batman to fight against. As his enemies increased, help arrived in the form of another young boy, Robin, left parentless by brutal crime.

Batman went through a very traumatic transformation when he was young, inspiring him to vow to never let something like that happen to anyone ever again. He was a regular man but became a hero. To be truly considered a hero, Batman must not only undergo a personal transformation, he must also use his new powers and ideals to help others transform themselves as well. Batman is truly drawn to saving others in whom he sees some of himself. He thus offers them a chance at heroism, too. As a member of the Flying Graysons acrobatic family, young Dick Grayson thrilled audiences nightly on the high wire beside his circus aerialist parents. But when gangster Boss Zucco sabotaged the high wire because the owner of Haly's Circus refused to offer up protection money, the elder Graysons paid with their lives (Wolfman, 1989, Num. 436). Bruce Wayne was in the audience that night, and after the show Batman visited the grieving Dick Grayson. Batman offered Dick a chance at retribution by becoming Robin, the Dark Knight's sidekick in his personal war on crime.

As the first Robin, Grayson was carefully schooled by Batman, learning all the skills he would need to bring Zucco to justice (Loeb, 2000, Num. 11; Loeb,

2000, Num. 12). Before long, Grayson was ready for action. Swearing a solemn oath, he joined the Dark Knight's crusade as his most trusted partner, Robin the Boy Wonder (Wolfman, 1989, Num. 437). After several years in service to the Dark Knight, Grayson -- then leader of the Teen Titans -- relinquished the mantle of Robin when Batman forced him to choose between his duties with the Titans and his promise to aid the Dark Knight. Adopting the identity of Nightwing, Grayson continued to battle crime while remaining Batman's close ally. However, this was not the end of Robin. Batman has taken in a total of three boys to be his protégé, each assuming the mantle of Robin.

Jason Todd was Batman's second Robin. Batman met juvenile delinquent Todd when the boy tried to steal the tires right off the Batmobile. Dick Grayson had given up the role of Robin so Batman decided to take Todd in and offer him both a home and a purpose. Todd began the same training regimen Grayson once undertook to become the Dark Knight's partner. However, Todd lacked maturity and was quick to anger. When Todd discovered clues that his long-lost mother was alive, he secretly traveled to Africa to find her. Tragically, the trail also led him straight into the clutches of the Joker, who savagely beat the second Boy Wonder within an inch of his life. The Clown Prince of Crime left Todd and his mother to die in a booby-trapped warehouse wired with a time bomb. They try desperately to get out of the warehouse but were still inside as the bomb went off; Batman arrived too late to save them. (Starlin, 1988). Todd's death hurt Batman deeply, sending him into a spiraling depression, but Batman himself was eventually saved by another Robin.

Tim Drake was barely more than a toddler when he sat in the stands at Haly's Circus and watched the Flying Graysons fall to their doom. Drake was transfixed as the Dark Knight swooped down to comfort young Dick Grayson. The moment was burned into his memory. Years later, Drake saw news reports of an unhinged Batman becoming more and more violent following the death of the second Robin, Jason Todd. Using his detective skills, Drake deduced the secret identity of Batman and the first Boy Wonder, Dick Grayson. After revealing this knowledge to the original Dynamic Duo, Drake argued the need for a Robin to give the Dark Knight hope, especially when faced with a seemingly hopeless and unyielding war on crime. Though reluctant at first, Batman gave Drake the

opportunity to prove that he was as good as his word (Wolfman, 1989, Num. 442). After months of grueling training, Tim Drake became the third Robin.

#### BATMAN AS A VILLAIN?

Batman may have undergone a physical transformation, but it is not clear if he fits well with Campbell's (1949) and Allison and Goethals' (2017) description of the transformed hero. This description states that during the journey, heroes acquire wisdom about themselves and the world, develop the courage to face their inner demons, become unified with all of humanity, pursue justice even at a cost to themselves, and are humbled and tempered (Campbell, 2014, p. 40). The argument can be made that Batman is not a hero because of his selfish motivations to fight crime. He fights criminals so that he doesn't have to face his parents' deaths; he does not pursue justice but instead desires vengeance; and his violent mannerism are certainly not tempered.

Allison and Smith (2015) discuss how heroes and villains differ in their transformations. Both heroes and villains are wounded in some way, but only heroes find ways to heal the wounds, even when the damage appears irreparable. Heroes transcend difficult circumstances; villains succumb to them. Although heroes and villains may both suffer trauma, only heroes find redemption. Villains, it seems, remain in pain and then project that pain outward onto others. Heroes transform to become more connected with the world, whereas villains are on a journey of separation from the world.

Batman could be a hero or a villain, depending upon how readers and viewers interpret his motivations. Kinsella, Ritchie, and Igou (2015) argue that a hero fulfils three basic functions: Uplifting and enriching the lives of others (enhancing), promoting morals and virtues (moral modeling), and protecting individuals from physical or psychological threats (protecting). Batman does not uplift anyone, besides possibly Robin, and he definitely does not promote moral values. Following this framework, Batman is at best a protector of Gotham, not a hero.

## VIGILANTE

Are superheroes in general truly heroic? They do not try to remake the world in profound ways. They do not try to cure cancer, or end world hunger, or eliminate poverty. They are hardly revolutionaries, and they are arguably limited in their heroism or even not heroic at all. Depending upon which DC universe Batman is in, he does not even think outside the bounds of Gotham. Superman does not desire to physically hurt or intimidate the bad guys; he does so only because it helps save the victims. Batman, however, focuses almost entirely upon the villains, doing all he can to strike them down in their fear. The entire idea of dressing as a bat is designed to induce fear and uncertainty into his enemies rather than inspire hope in the downtrodden. Batman does not act as a stereotypical superhero should. He would rather punish the guilty than save the innocent. The only reason that Batman is considered a superhero is because his actions happen to save some innocent lives by accident. On many occasions, the Joker has suggested that Batman belongs with him in the Elizabeth Arkham Asylum for the Criminally Insane along with the rest of the costumed villains whom Batman has defeated.

Batman's existence as an extra legal force renders the democracy he defends impossible. Even when Batman has defeated his current villain, the very presence of Batman suggests that victory is only temporary. Despite appearing as a force that holds society together, he is really antagonizing and setting into motion systems that tear it apart. In becoming a vigilante, Batman suggests that the mechanisms for maintaining order in society are insufficient. Batman strives for a world where Batman himself is unnecessary, but that is impossible because he is breaking down the systems that will make Batman unnecessary simply by existing. As long as there exists a hero of this nature, stability, the justice system, and order are impossible. By existing as a vigilante and therefore rendering order impossible, Batman seems much less of a hero than many might think of him in the first place.

Instead of vengeance, however, some may say that the reason Bruce became Batman was because he felt a calling for justice. The three dimensions of a calling, as defined by Dik and Duffy (2009), are an external summons, purposeful work, and prosocial motivation. The external summons was the death of Batman's parents, and while this was terrible it instilled an overwhelming need for justice in a corrupt society. The second dimension of calling connects

what a person does with a broader sense of purpose and meaning in their life. Stopping crime makes Batman feel useful and important to Gotham because of how much the city needs his help. The third dimension is the feeling that one's work is not principally carried out for personal happiness but rather for the greater good (Dik et al., 2017). Bruce is called to carry out justice because of what happened to his parents, because Gotham needs help, and because it is the right thing to do. Becoming Batman is the best way Bruce could think of to fulfil his calling in a corrupt and crime ridden society like Gotham. He did not become Batman simply for his own personal vengeance. One of Batman's closest friends and advisors, Alfred Pennyworth, affirms this idea. He says in *Mask of the Phantasm*, one of Batman's many animated films, "Vengeance blackens the soul, Bruce. I've always feared that you would become that which you fought against. You walk the edge of that abyss every night, but you haven't fallen in and I thank heaven for that" (Randomsi & Timm, 1993).

As a vigilante, Batman is not afraid to break the law in minor ways, but he does so in order to achieve a greater good. Batman truly believes that without all the villains Gotham has a chance to heal itself and become just again. This belief in something greater than himself motivates him to fight crime. Gotham is overrun with corruption, greed, violence, but Batman still sees the potential for good. As Batman says in Christopher Nolan's movie *The Dark Knight Rises*, "A hero can be anyone. Even a man doing something as simple and reassuring as putting a coat around a little boy's shoulders to let him know that the world hadn't ended" (Nolan, 2012).

#### COSTUMED ARMS RACE

The streets of Gotham were slowly being taken over by costumed freaks, or super villains, and Batman's presence is arguably the cause (Loeb, 1998). The creation of Batman could have sparked a hero-villain arms race with no cease fire in sight. The existence of superheroes creates the existence of supervillains. At first, Batman drastically brought down crime rate in Gotham, but then the game changed: supervillains appeared, and along with it a costumed arms race.

“There's war in Gotham City. Perhaps where crime is concerned, there always has been. But seldom this open, this rabid. A madness seeping into every stratum of criminal society. Escalating like a plague, threatening to surpass even the horror that created me.” – Batman (Goodwin, 2000)

To put it in other words: Batman was an anti-biotic, villains were germs, super villains were super germs, and Gotham was the sick patient. Batman came in and took out the weak germs, but the ones left became super resistant. Over time, the bacteria grew stronger in order to survive, creating more super germs. At this rate, Batman made only a small difference to the violent crime rate in Gotham City compared to the time before his arrival. Before Batman, Gotham's biggest threats were a few mob families; now, there were vastly more dangerous super villains with a penchant for destruction and bloodshed.

On the other hand, the creation of Batman and supervillains could serve as an example of antagonistic coevolution, a theory hypothesized by Duntley and Buss (2017) that explains homicide adaptations and anti-homicide responses. Gotham used to be a morally upstanding city, but then the criminals adapted to corrupt the justice system; this provided the optimal environment for Batman to be created, but once he arrived, the criminals adapted again by creating a slew of supervillains to oppose him. This is one simple way of explaining the cause and effect of how Gotham got to be so bad, but it doesn't place Batman as the cause of it all. The initial corruption of the justice system is what caused the creation of The Joker, Poison Ivy, and the rest. Without Batman, these super villains would be spending no time in prisons at all, simply because the police would not be able to stop them. Batman is just another product of a system gone awry.

#### MORAL CODE

A rogue's gallery is defined as a group of shady characters. For Batman, the term refers to the ever-growing list of supervillains opposing him. They try to upset the delicate peace in Gotham, and Batman does what he needs to do to stop them. They get arrested and are sent to Arkham Asylum for a bit, and then they get released or escape only to bring about chaos again. Batman and his second Robin, Jason Todd, argued about the philosophy and morality behind

the rule against killing. Jason explained that he never blamed Batman for failing to save him, but he did blame him for letting the Joker live to escape and kill thousands of more people. If Jason had the opportunity, he would not have hesitated to put the madman down. Delivering a final ultimatum, Jason gave Batman a gun and threatened to shoot the Joker unless he was lethally stopped. Batman had an emotional breakdown at this point, but then he ricocheted a batarang off the wall and hit Robin in the neck non-fatally to save his enemy. Joker then grabbed the gun and shot the explosives inside the building, detonating a massive explosion (Winick, 2006, Num. 650). Is Batman more of a hero by not killing the Joker or the other villains that he faced, leaving them to escape from asylums and prisons to potentially kill again? Does not killing them allow them the possibility, or even the probability, of killing innocent others again?

The premise behind the death sentence is that killing evil people is not morally equivalent to killing innocent people. By killing the villains and preventing them from killing civilians, Batman would remain on the high moral road. Violent actions counter the fundamental moral rule of “do no harm” (Gray et al., 2012). Although the perpetrators no doubt believe they are doing the right thing, their very acts seem to make use of immorality to further their personal view of morality. The ends do not justify the means. Is it moral to hurt someone who is immoral and who is looking to hurt another? 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 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 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 in Gotham, and by never actually eliminating them he ensures that there will always be someone plotting destruction. If Gotham City were truly cleaned up, the fantasy would die, and Batman doesn't 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.

Whatever his other motivations for being Batman, Bruce Wayne holds one moral conviction most dear: Never kill. Moral convictions are very strong attitudes

based on perceptions of morality and immorality (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). These convictions are not simply moral judgments, but involve imperatives that reflect core beliefs about right and wrong. Those with moral convictions believe they have mandates that release them from having to follow or obey others, including authorities (Skitka, 2010). Research has found that people with moral convictions continue to maintain their conviction even in the face of strong pressures to conform. The courage to act heroically derives from a moral conviction to do the right thing. However, moral convictions are associated with more violent means to achieve ends consistent with one's convictions and they facilitate rejection of the proper rule of law (Skitka et al, 2005). Batman believes that what he is doing is right, but it also makes him more willing to break the non-moral laws like those opposing assault, in order to achieve his moral goals.

Some continue to raise the question of whether or not Batman should kill his enemies. But that would be the same as saying that because prison breaks do occur, we need to increase capital punishment (Goldberg, 2016). A far simpler solution would be to give Arkham Asylum stricter standards and make sure that the building is not so easy to escape. Though Batman does not directly work to help the justice system in terms of making it harder for prisoners to escape, Bruce Wayne Enterprises runs a massive charity which helps people. The Wayne Foundation with two divisions; Thomas Wayne Foundation and Martha Wayne Foundation. One runs a lot of schools and orphanages, and the other does medical research, so he does do other things, even when he isn't Batman, which benefit society.

#### BATMAN AND THE LEGAL SYSTEM

Batman often beats up people who turn to crime due to their socio-economic status. Rather than fully committing to philanthropy, Bruce Wayne uses his large bank account to finance his crime fighting. If Gotham's citizens had enough money to buy food, water, and shelter, they might not turn to profitable organized crime that was rampant throughout Gotham. Instead of helping people financially, Batman chooses to spend his money on his fancy Batmobile and weaponry to defeat crime. Batman's skewed priorities add fuel to the argument that he justifies his actions by claiming they are heroic when in reality

he is responding to the psychological trauma of his parents' death through his vigilante crime fighting.

Batman rarely cares about the state of the legal systems in Gotham or the fact that many of his foes regularly escape prison or Arkham Asylum. Furthermore, he shows absolutely no interest in the rehabilitation of criminals after he has beaten and scared them time and again. In fact, it seems as if he relies upon these scare tactics to make criminals not want to commit crimes for fear of him, rather than fear of the justice system or advocacy of a moral codes. Could it be that Batman might not care about reforming the justice system, because when the criminals break out it gives him an excuse to go beat up more people and exact his ongoing revenge against his parents' killers?

In evolutionary biology, fitness costs are factors that compromise a person's ability to survive and reproduce. Duntley and Buss (2017) define evil as inflicting fitness costs upon others, with the greatest infliction being the ending of someone's life. Batman routinely inflicts fitness costs upon villains by locking them up, but could such actions be interpreted as evil? The villains are planning on doing greater evil because they desire death and chaos, while Batman tries to promote order and refuses to end a life. Batman uses evil and violent means to promote a more beneficial end for the citizens of Gotham. The intent to do harm is an essential part of the definition of evil (Weiner & Simpson, 1989). Batman never really intends his enemies harm, otherwise he would just kill them. He just wants to stop them in order to prevent them from doing harm towards others. If Batman stooped to killing, he would be no better than the supervillains he fights. Joker realizes this and actually wants to have Batman kill him to prove that he can corrupt anything. If Batman kills Joker, the Joker wins and he proves that Batman is just as prone to human failure as everyone else, and it destroys any faith Gotham has in Batman.

Biswas-Diener (2012) defined courage as "the willingness to act toward a moral or worthwhile goal despite the presence of risk, uncertainty, and fear" (p. 10). No one can deny that Batman has physical courage. Acts of physical courage entail individuals risking bodily harm or even death on behalf of other individuals in peril. However, Batman also exhibits moral courage. Acts of moral courage include standing up for less powerful individuals or groups. Courage entails the willingness to confront and master one's fears and anxieties in the face of an

uncertain and dangerous unfolding moment in order to provide the greater world with a benefit.

The term hero derives from the Greek word *heros*, meaning protector or defender. Zimbardo's (2007) four features of a heroic act include: it must be engaged in voluntarily; it must involve physical risk or potential sacrifice; it must be conducted in service to one or more other people or community as a whole; and it must be without secondary, extrinsic gain anticipated at the time of the act. Superman was destined to be a hero, with his alien abilities allowing him to accomplish things that no human could ever dream of. Batman, on the other hand, made a conscious choice to take the risk and transform himself into a hero in order to do whatever was humanly possible to make a difference. He used his passion for fighting crime and instilling justice, not for personal reward or accolades, but because it needed to be done. Batman was not born a superhero; he transformed himself into one, accepting significant risks and sacrifices to do what he deemed necessary for the greater good.

#### BATMAN NEEDS TO BE A GOOD GUY

Empathy and compassion are often borne of suffering. There are many examples of individuals who manage to find meaning and create profound positive change out of their own personal tragedy (Plews-Ogan et al., 2016). Parents create foundations and awareness campaigns following the loss of their child. As with Batman, people work to serve the greater good in order to prevent the same suffering in other families. One powerful example very similar to Batman's motivations involves the story of Sorrel King. Sorrel's daughter died at a hospital when staff administered the wrong drug. Sorrel was fueled by her desire to punish those responsible who had allowed this tragedy to happen. Yet along the way, she saw the bigger picture. With the settlement money, she created a foundation in her daughter's name that has prevented countless deaths caused by medical errors (Plews-Ogan et al., 2016). Sorrel and so many other remarkable individuals transformed their suffering into a better world. How is this scenario any different from Batman's story?

Batman really does care about the people for whom he is fighting. He does not simply use them as an excuse to beat up bad guys. In *Night Cries* Batman sits

with a victim who is scared of him. He tells her, “Kathy...? I’m sorry. I don’t want to frighten you. I did once when you saw me through the window at your home. I know I look scary and there have been too many scary things in your life. So I want you to see... I’m just a man, a man who’s trying to help” (Goodwin, 1992). He reassures her when he doesn’t have to. Little moments like this are what truly makes Batman a hero, not beating up the bad guys. This is the hero readers need to see, the human moments, the man under the mask.

Batman even cares about those whom he fights, especially if the “villains” aren’t evil. Ace of Clubs was one of five children kidnapped from their homes and placed in a facility where they were trained to use their innate powers as weapons. Ace escaped, but over time her mental powers increased to the point where she could alter reality. If Ace died it would create a psychic backlash that would kill everyone within hundreds of miles, and her powers were consuming her. Batman volunteered to be the one who would use a special device to kill Ace before she died. However, Batman chose not to use the device, and instead talked with her and comforted her. He empathized with Ace, telling her that he knows how it felt to lose a childhood. Ace then caused everything she changed with her mind revert back to its original appearance before she died (Riba, 2005). Batman showed such incredible compassion to his presumed enemy, and although he could not save her, he helped her as much as he could.

Part of what makes Batman such an interesting and enduring character is that he can be read many different ways. Batman can be the savior of the day, or he can be a menace in the night. He can be both, or just a guy trying to deal with his inner demons. But in the end, through the darkness, grittiness, and violence, readers need Batman to be the hero. Batman is such an iconic character, a legend admired for decades, that people identify strongly with him and his struggles. Batman has no innate powers, and neither alien strength nor mutant abilities. Anyone can imagine that they could be Batman and save themselves and their city from the evils that lurk in the night. Heroes are made by the paths they choose, not the powers with which they are graced.

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