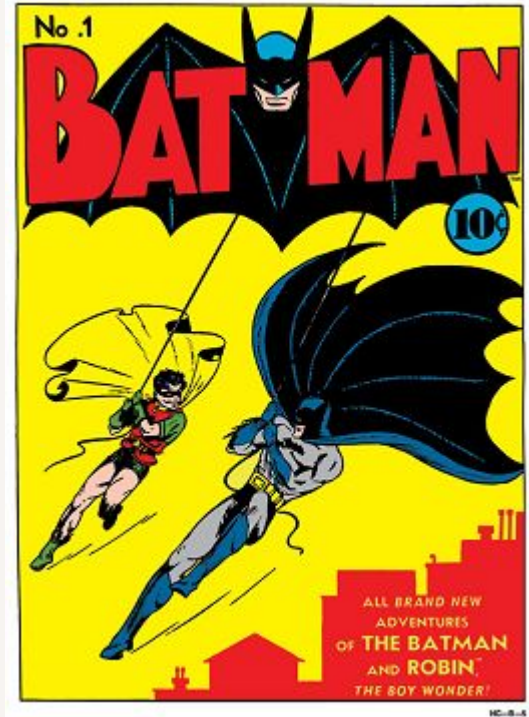




# Batman: Vigilantism & Applied Ethics

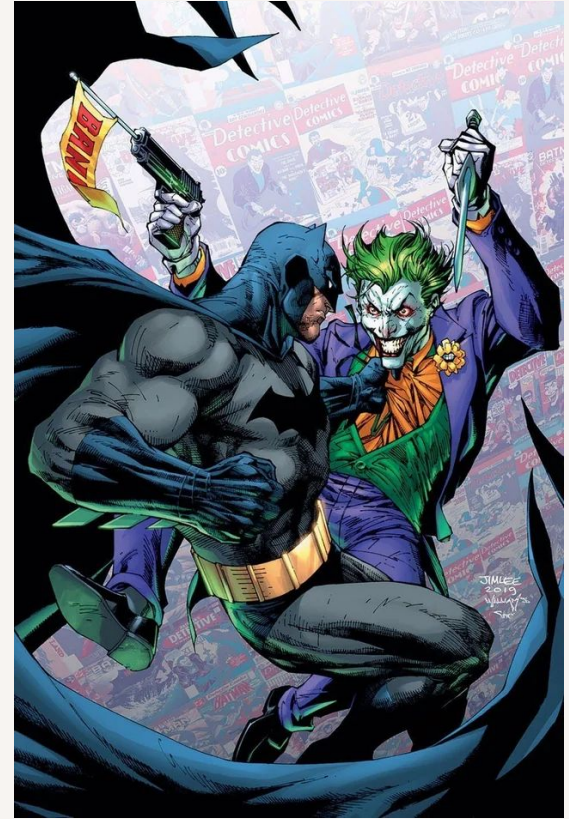
By Nahlini Hauser



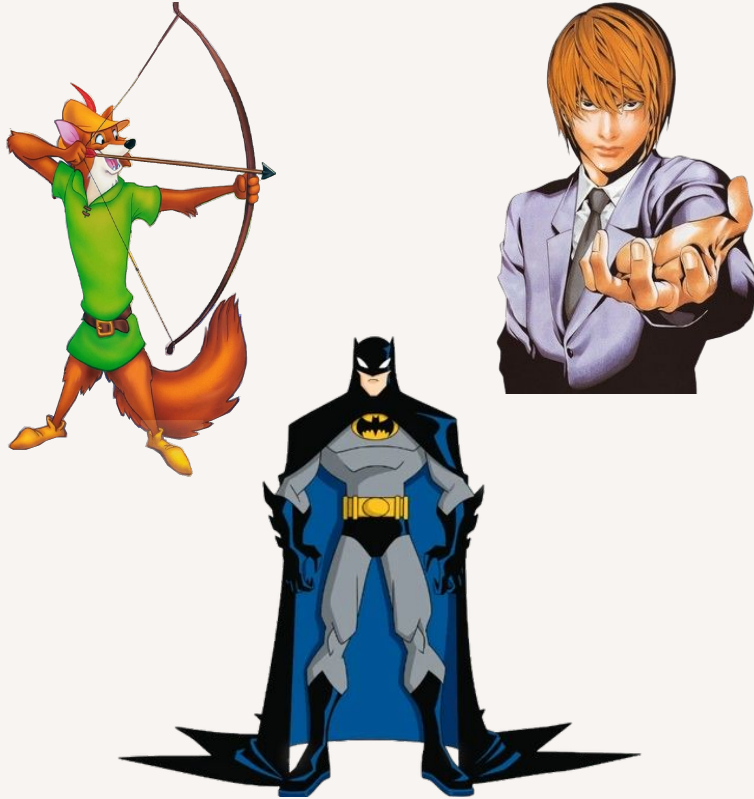
# What is Vigilantism?

## Vigilantism is...

- **Defined as** “law enforcement undertaken without legal authority by a self appointed group of people”
- **Or** the practice of people taking unofficial action to prevent crime, to catch criminals, or to punish them
- **A common theme** in media. Ex. the premises of Robin Hood, Light Yagami, Spiderman, TMNT, etc.
- **Exemplified by** Batman “swearing vengeance against criminals after witnessing the murder of his parents, a vendetta tempered with the ideal of justice,” “crafting a bat-inspired persona,” and endeavoring to monitor Gotham streets at night. <sup>[1]</sup> Not very stoic of him.
- **Illegal**, violent civil disobedience.



# Vigilantism cont.



- Vigilantism comes into play when individuals believe they have the right and ability to serve justice better than the law can, or when they believe the law is flawed and needs to be remodeled
- Across different iterations across media, vigilantism has had a wide range of effects:
  - Robin Hood vs Light Yagami
- A popular critic of this form of justice is that retributive justice inevitably ends up the scenario "an eye for an eye leaves everyone blind" predicts
- *Is beating up a mugger for stealing someone's wallet a sustainable or morally acceptable form of justice? Is meeting injustice with more violence meaningful, as it doesn't attack the root of the problem of injustice but rather just punishes the violent?*

# Note: Batman & the Police



The Batsignal



The Batman (2022)



The Batman  
(2004) (TV)



The Dark  
Knight (2008)

Batman's partnership with the police is reluctant and stained, but his motivation to fight crime does not stem from anger towards the justice system (*DN*) but rather from vengeance.



# Capitalism & Bruce Wayne



- Batman's brand of vigilantism is similar to Spiderman's, but is more anchored in capitalism.
- Capitalism and crime have a causal relationship. In Gotham city, crime is committed both out of necessity and cruelty, but you can't solve a problem stemming from capitalism with violence.
- Bruce Wayne is practically the epitome of a victim of the violence occurring in Gotham: His origin story begins with his parents being murdered in front of him in Crime Alley.
  - This is what jump starts his plight to prevent crimes like these from happening again.
- However, Bruce Wayne is a billionaire who inherited his fortune, and benefits off of the same system which keeps the lower class down. While Batman Rogues are often Just Like That, lower class people often make up the criminal population in Gotham
- So, as Batman strives to bring criminals to justice/eliminate crime, the existence of Bruce Wayne perpetuates this inequality.

The LEGO Batman Movie once said:



# The Necessity of both Bruce Wayne and Batman As Personified in *The Batman* (2022)



Recluse Bruce Wayne in *The Batman* makes little public appearances or contributions to Wayne Foundations established by his parents.



The antagonist Riddler's goal is to bring to light the corruption existing within Gotham city officials. His crusade to kill most corrupt of the Gotham elite was inspired by the Batman: while he idolizes Batman, he targets Bruce Wayne in his attacks.



The ending of the film emphasizes how the solution to Gotham's corruption lies in reconciling the two crucial roles Bruce Wayne plays in Gotham society.



Pictured left to right: Two-Face, Man-Bat, Catwoman, Joker, Scarecrow, Ra's al Ghul, Riddler, Poison Ivy

# The Rogue Gallery

Over the 85ish years of Batman's existence, the character's accumulated an impressive amount of enemies, relatively known as the Rogue Gallery. Each rogue has a different motive behind "doing evil," and participates in a varying level of "wrongdoing."

- Scarecrow/Dr. Jonathan Crane: Uses toxins to "study the effects of fear on humans," wants to break the spirit of Gotham by displaying the "futility of hope." Isn't actually seeking justice or change. <sup>[2]</sup> <sup>[3]</sup>
- Poison Ivy/Dr. Pamela Isley: An world-class eco-terrorist motivated by "misandry, botany, and extremist environmentalism," goes about doing the right thing, the wrong way (murder, terror, etc.). <sup>[4]</sup>
- Man-Bat/Dr. Kirkland Langstrom: An experiment gone wrong; Man-Bat is controlled by his animal instincts when going about his business, which is usually terrorizing Gotham. (Sometimes) retains his sanity and uses his mutations for good!

Utilitarianism & Kant: *which actions are justified? How?*



# Harvey Dent/Two-Face in *The Dark Knight* (2008)

*"It's not about what I want, it's about what's fair! You thought we could be decent men in an indecent time. But you were wrong. The world is cruel. And the only morality in a cruel world... is chance. Unbiased. Unprejudiced. Fair."*

- Harvey Dent, the new Gotham City DA, is a compelling character because he's a good person in the beginning of the movie. He believes in justice as well as in Batman's conviction of criminals.
- The death of his fiancée and the burning off of half his face drives him to take on the moniker, "Two-Face," a villain who decides the fate of other people by flipping a coin.
- Dent discovers that being a good person doesn't prevent tragedy, and comes to the nihilistic conclusion that being trying to be "good" or being "bad" has never mattered. Chaos, and leaving things up to chance is the only *fair* morality in Gotham. Nihilism, baby!



# *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice (2016)*



DISCLAIMER: I don't condone *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*.

*Lex Luthor [to Superman]: "I figured out way back if God is all-powerful, He cannot be all good. And if He is all good, then He cannot be all-powerful. And neither can you be."*



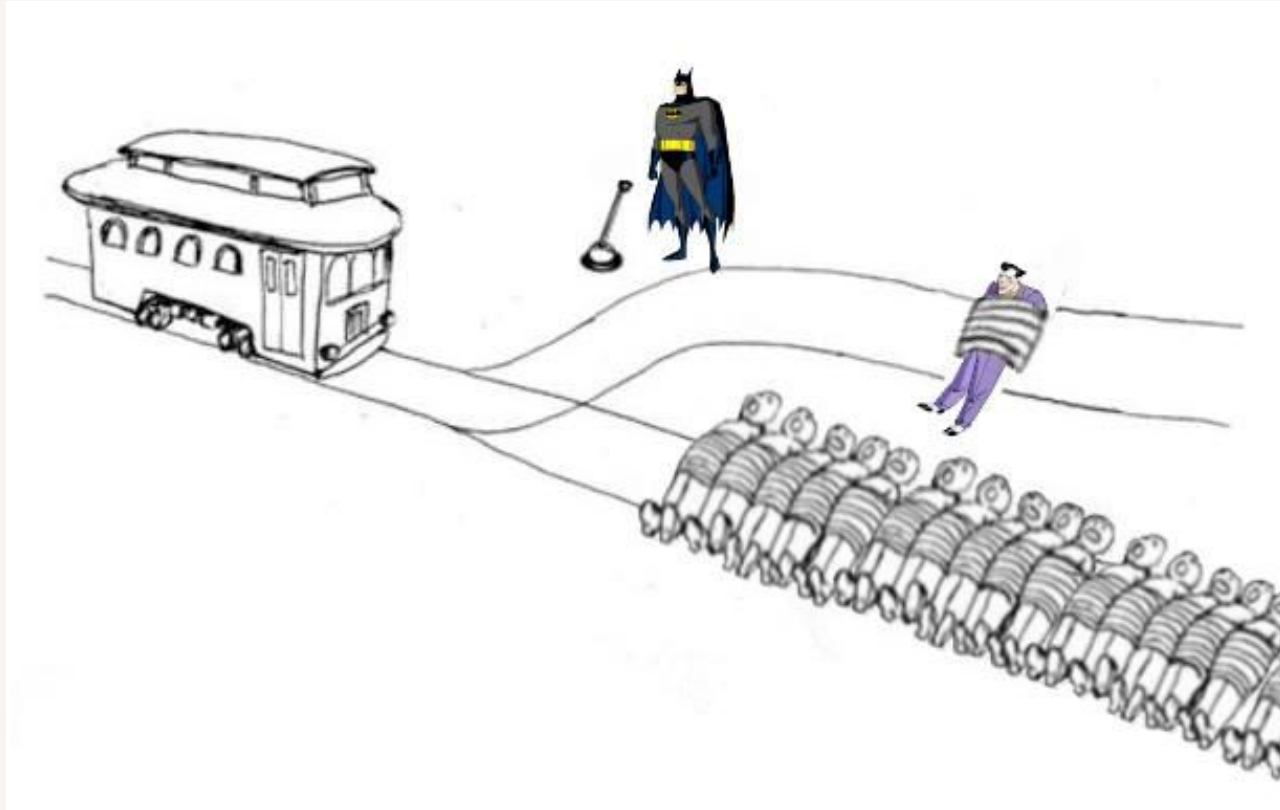
- Both the protagonist and antagonist of the film have a common enemy: Superman. Both of them have issues with the seeming invincibility and power that Superman holds.
- Batman sees Superman as a extinction-level disaster waiting to happen, and spends the movie devising and enacting his contingency plan to get rid of Superman.
- Lex Luthor sees Superman as a sort of God, and as an atheist STEM guy he obviously has to prove him fallible.
  - Something something Divine Right something something
- How much power should one being hold over others? Should those beings be allowed to keep their power regardless of whether or not they're "good"?

# *Under the Red Hood, the Killing Code, and the Joker*

- In this 2010 animated film Batman's code of no killing comes to a head, when Jason Todd calls it into question.
  - Jason Todd is a former Robin who was killed by the Joker (*A Death in the Family*, 1988) and revived (*Under the Red Hood*, 2005)
- The Red Hood asks Batman why the Joker is still alive, considering that the Joker killed Jason and hundred of others pre-and post-ADTF
- This resparks the debate over if Batman's refusal to kill, specifically the Joker, only brings about more death in Gotham.
- *Is taking the life of someone whose past, present, and future is brimming with bringing havoc, destruction, and tragedy to Gotham justifiable? Is not killing the Joker justifiable?*



# In other words: Philippa Foot's Trolley Problem





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# Thank you

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