



Introducing Issues in Ethics through *Batman and Philosophy: The Dark Knight of the Soul*

Course Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to ethics or moral philosophy (in Western philosophy, mostly) through the popular culture medium of *Batman* stories. In doing so, articles from the book *Batman and Philosophy: The Dark Knight of the Soul* will be used as starting points for description, analysis, and discussion of a few of the basic philosophical views from this philosophical area. Also, at appropriate times throughout the course, the instructor may wish to utilize actual stories from *Batman* in movie, episode, or comic book forms.

Course Procedure (One Possible Way to Proceed)

Since logic underpins all philosophical areas (as well as being an area of philosophy itself), it makes sense to begin the course with a brief logic primer where the student can digest a few of the basic principles of sound reasoning, including: (a) argument identification, formation, and analysis; (b) deductive vs. inductive reasoning; (c) truth, soundness, and cogency; (d) evidence for our beliefs; (e) fallacious reasoning. Philosophers are about the business of argumentation, primarily, so the instructor may begin the course with this logic material and then give a little information about Superman, Batman, and their qualities, powers, and histories, using this chapter as an example of an argumentative essay:

“Why Batman is Better than Superman” by Galen Foresman

KNOWING ONESELF AND WHAT IS GOOD

One way to approach issues in ethics is to analyze one’s own psychological states—and the psychology of people in general—so as to understand what kinds of things people think about and are inclined to do in various circumstances and situations. Thus, a kind of moral psychology may be investigated as a precursor to understanding moral philosophy. If the instructor pursues this route, then the following chapters will be useful, in the following order:

“Batman’s Identity Crisis and Wittgenstein’s Family Resemblance” by Jason Southworth (this chapter, and the next two, will also be a good transition from issues in logic)

“What is It Like to be a Batman?” by Ron Novy

“Could Batman have been the Joker?” by Sam Cowling and Chris Ragg

“Under the Mask...” by Sarah Donovan and Nicholas Richardson

Then, one central question that must be answered in ethics is whether someone’s psychological states contribute to moral responsibility, or not. If someone is “crazy” or mentally ill, can they still be held morally responsible for their actions? This chapter may be used to explore this question that is central to moral philosophy:

“The Joker’s Wild...” by Randall Jensen

VIRTUE ETHICS AND THE GOOD LIFE

After a discussion of the nature of the good, the importance of being good, and the importance of having moral exemplars around us who are good, the instructor may use these chapters for emphasis and critique:

“What Would Batman Do?...” by Ryan Rhodes and David Johnson

“Should Bruce Wayne Have Become Batman?” by Mahesh Ananth and Ben Dixon”

Then, while speaking about moral exemplars as role models the instructor may use these chapters:

“Is It Right to Make a Robin?” by James DiGiovanni

“Leaving the Shadow of the Bat...” by Carsten Nielsen

“The Tao of the Bat” by Bat-Tzu



Part of being a moral exemplar is cultivating virtues such as self-control, truth-telling, courage, and others, while avoiding vices such as self-indulgence, lying, cowardice, and others. While emphasizing the value of leading a virtuous life, the instructor may use this chapter:

"Batman's Virtuous Hatred," by Stephen Kershner

Healthy friendships are also part of the virtuous life, so while discussing the value of friendship the following chapter may be used:

"World's Finest..." by Dan Malloy

RELIGIOUS ETHICS AND ITS REJECTION

Basing one's actions in faith in some god or religion is standard for most people on the planet. Also, there is strong reaction against religious-based ethics, often times in favor of some form of agnosticism or atheism, such as existentialism. Thus, if the instructor chooses to explore this area (I certainly would!), the following chapters may be used:

"Alfred, the Dark Knight of Faith..." by Christopher Drohan

"Dark Knights and the Call of Conscience," by Jason Howard

"Batman's Confrontation with Death, Angst, and Freedom" by David Hart

DEONTOLOGY VS. UTILITARIANISM

The instructor may contrast the typical deontological rule-and-individual-rights-based ethics with the utilitarian consequence-and-community-good-based ethics by using the following chapters:

"Why Doesn't Batman Kill the Joker?" by Mark White

"Batman's Promise" by Randall Jensen (especially since promise-keeping is one standard deontological rule)

Then, since these two positions underpin much of the political debates concerning rights, laws, appropriate governing, and other issues in political philosophy, the following chapters may be used to introduce some cross-over material from moral philosophy to political philosophy (a natural extension dating back to Plato and Aristotle):

"No Man's Land..." by Brett Patterson

"Governing Gotham" by Tony Spanakos