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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative analysis of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008), Anthony and Joe Russo's *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's graphic novel *Watchmen* (1987) which aims to investigate the tenuous difference between superheroes and supervillains and to explain why the "good guy / bad guy"- narrative is inadequate to thoroughly understand these types of characters. I have divided the topic into three chapters, each featuring a superhero story and will discuss the good and evil actions of the hero and villain, mainly from the perspective of the doctrine of utilitarianism. The first chapter examines the relationship between Batman and The Joker, two iconic characters in the superhero genre, as well as actions and other aspects that illustrate their similarities and differences. The second chapter discusses superhero ensemble the Avengers and the supervillain Thanos, and discusses what could be seen as problematic about their actions. Finally, the third chapter analyzes the two characters Rorschach and Ozymandias, and how the ultimate goal of the villain proves to be good, and the problematic aspects of questioning the decisions of superheroes.

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Introduction

The battle between good and evil is a prominent theme of superhero stories. Superheroes fight the forces of evil to promote good and supervillains fight the forces of good to promote evil, at least, this is what we generally tend to think when we hear the terms superhero and supervillain. This thesis questions this commonly believed narrative and seeks to discover whether superheroes and supervillains may be more similar than we tend to think. This thesis will examine the actions of superheroes and supervillains to discover these similarities. The thesis will further investigate the actions of both superheroes and supervillains in order to discover whether superheroes always do the right thing and if all actions of supervillains are evil. I will argue that this is a common misconception, and that superheroes, more often than not, tend to be blinded by their goal. The goal is what motivates actions, and it is evident that it is sometimes necessary to do evil in order to achieve good. However, this is also true for supervillains. Their goal is not necessarily evil, it does not have to involve a quest to destroy the world, as supervillains themselves believe they are doing good even though the costs are high. To discover these similarities, this thesis will investigate the characters in three different superhero stories: Batman and The Joker from Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008), The Avengers and Thanos from Anthony and Joe Russo's *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), and finally Rorschach and Ozymandias from Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' graphic novel *Watchmen* (1987). These stories and characters will provide examples to illustrate the tenuous difference between superheroes and supervillains, and that they are more similar than we might often think. It is also evident that there is more to these characters than what is reflected in their goals and actions. This thesis will, therefore, also investigate different aspects of the characters where similarities present themselves. The main objective for this thesis is to show that there is more to these characters than them being strictly good or evil.

Chapter 1 - Literary review

1.1 – Explanation of the project

This chapter will provide an explanation of what defines a superhero and supervillain. It will also look at explanations of evil and explore utilitarianism. The main idea of this thesis is that superheroes and supervillains might be more similar than we tend to think. It questions the idea that superheroes are these pure and good characters who always fight evil in a mission towards a better society, and that supervillains are foul and evil characters whose mission in life is to promote evil. For this thesis, I have chosen to focus on three texts, that is, Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008), Anthony and Joe Russo's *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* (1987). These three all have their roots in the genre of superhero comics, as both films have their origins in comic books. *The Avengers* #1 was first released in 1963. 49 years after this first comic was released, the first Avengers movie was produced, in the form of *The Avengers* (2012). The MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe) consists of 27 different movies at the time this thesis is written, and there are many more planned for release in the coming years (Bisset, 2022). The MCU has earned Marvel 25 billion dollars, with *Avengers: Endgame* making 2,8 billion dollars by itself (Clark, 2022). This suggests that the superhero genre has an immense popularity and proves that the genre has a huge place within popular culture.

In the same genre we find *The Dark Knight*, which is the second movie of a trilogy featuring Batman, a superhero whose first appearance in a comic book was in 1939 and who belongs to the DC Universe. He quickly became one of the most popular superheroes, granting him his own titled comic book in 1940, *Batman* #1, which is also the comic where the villain The Joker makes his first appearance. Batman was first seen on the big screen in 1966 with the title *Batman: The Movie* (1966). Since the release of this movie, there has been multiple titles featuring Batman. This thesis' focus lies in one of the modern titles from the 21st century.

The final text in focus for this thesis is *Watchmen*. In contrast to the other two texts, which are comic book inspired movies, *Watchmen* is a graphic novel. In an article entitled *Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative*, Hillary Chute explains that graphic novels rose from the underground publishing community in the second half of the 20th century,

where they wanted to create works with greater impact in the world of comics (Chute, 2008, p. 453). The first book marked as a graphic novel was Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978) and we can now find the "graphic novel" section in bookstores all over the world. Chute argues that graphic novel is often a misnomer, as many works grouped under this category - including Spiegelman's World War II focused *Maus* (1980) which helped rocket the term into public consciousness – are not novels at all. They are works of nonfiction, where Chute argues for the more suitable term: graphic narrative (Chute, 2008, p. 453). Graphic narrative and graphic novels are, in essence, quite similar. They are both much longer graphic works than a comic book, but what separates them is if the story is fiction or nonfiction. Spiegelman's *Maus* for instance is a story of how Spiegelman's father survived World War II and the holocaust as a polish Jew, it is not a fictional story. *Watchmen* is a story of vigilantes, superheroes, and supervillains which is pure fiction. Graphic narrative is compliant with a novel concerning the length; however, it also accommodates modes other than fiction. A graphic narrative is a book-length work in the medium of comics (Chute, 2008, p. 453). To clarify: A graphic novel must be a fictional story in the medium of a comic, while a graphic narrative is a nonfictional story in the medium of a comic.

When I chose which texts to work with for this project, I had to choose from texts featuring superheroes and supervillains. The texts also needed to include characters that can illustrate that the difference between a superhero and a supervillain, might not be as obvious or extreme as we tend to think. The idea is inspired from the reddit forum called *Thanos did nothing wrong*, a forum with over 600.000 followers. Most posts are memes about how Thanos' actions are justifiable. There is no denying that overpopulation might be one of humanity's greatest issues, and the movie illustrates this on a much grander scale – a universal scale. The reason behind choosing *Avengers: Endgame* and not *Avengers: Infinity War* for this thesis is that *Infinity War* would not provide me with any substance of what could happen after "the snap". The result of the action is displayed in *Endgame* and the reactions are also shown in this text. I felt that this thesis needed to show the results and show how superheroes would fight back after a devastating loss. This idea, that Thanos did nothing wrong, stems from a concept from Jeremy Bentham called the principle of utility or utilitarianism, which in essence means that all actions are justified if they are beneficial for the greater good. This concept is extremely relevant for this thesis, and it kept showing up in different literature. I decided that I needed to close read texts where utilitarianism is present, and superheroes are problematized. This became the reason for choosing *Watchmen* as one of

my texts. The novel has a clear connection to utilitarianism through the character Ozymandias. Ozymandias prevents a nuclear holocaust by scheming humanity into thinking they all have one common enemy – aliens. In addition, the text problematizes superheroes, it features superheroes or vigilantes who do whatever it takes to succeed in their quest. The most interesting character in this regard is Rorschach, who often goes to extreme lengths to achieve his goals. When reading up on utilitarianism, I also came across another idea from Bentham, the panopticon prison system. The panopticon seemed very similar to a surveillance system used by Batman in *The Dark Knight*. I was intrigued by this concept, and the fact that it originated from Bentham meant that it has some connection to utilitarianism. Also, Batman is quite like Rorschach in the context of both being vigilantes and not superhumans. I felt that choosing these three texts would grant me a basis to discuss utilitarianism, superheroes, and supervillains. They can provide adequate examples which problematizes these characters and help see supervillains from a different point of view. As will be argued, utilitarianism is a useful concept for this thesis because it can illustrate how some actions, although meant to be good, can have an evil aspect to them or, at least, can end up in a category that we can define as ambivalent.

1.2 – Supervillains

“The viler the villain, the more heroic the hero” (Peaslee, Prettyman, & Weiner, 2020, p. XV). This quote was edited into the introduction of *Bring on the Bad Guys* (1976) by Stan Lee in 1998. It means that if we want to create a great hero for a story, he or she must be supplemented by an equally great villain. The villain is not only important, but essential for the story. In the introduction to *The supervillain reader* (2020) Robert M. Peaslee, Duncan Prettyman and Robert G. Weiner argue that the purpose of a backstory for supervillains is to illustrate that these characters are more than just common criminals (Peaslee, Prettyman, & Weiner, 2020, p. XXV). In addition, Peter Coogan argues in the fifth chapter that they often take up a new identity, like “The Joker” from *Batman* or “Venom” from *Spider-Man*, to illustrate that same purpose (Coogan, 2020, p. 54). Further Coogan argue that supervillains relate to their corresponding heroes in several ways, such as self-worth, where villains get their feeling of self-worth from the quality of the hero they oppose. Other points of connection are that they are archenemies, in the sense that the villain is the hero’s greatest

opponent; doppelgängers, in the sense that the villain has the same powers or very similar powers to the hero; oedipal, in the sense that the villain is representing the hero's relationship to his parents. Other points are displacement, as the villain frequently represents a displaced aspect that the hero struggles with, often connected to the hero's relationship to their parents; and rouge's gallery, where the hero repeatedly faces a band of villains (Coogan, 2020, pp. 54-58). These relations create villains, not criminals. While it can be argued that villains are criminals, considering the way villains relate to the hero, a villain is much more than just a common criminal.

In the following I will argue that villains are the backbone of the story, they create the story. If there is no villain, there is nothing for the hero to do. If Sauron never existed, Frodo would never have taken the ring to Mordor, because there would be no ring in the first place. Further, I am going to discuss the tenuous difference between supervillains and superheroes in the graphic novel *Watchmen* and the two films *The Dark Knight* and *Avengers: Endgame*. I will argue that the "good guy / bad guy"- narrative may not be adequate to understand these typical characters and investigate whether they might be more similar than we tend to think.

1.3 – Superheroes

Superheroes are commonly thought of as the good guys who fight evildoers, or the protectors, the characters who do the right thing. A basic definition of a superhero can be found in the *Oxford Learners dictionary*, which states that a superhero is "a character in a story, movie, etc. who has unusual strength or power and uses it to help people; a real person who has done something unusually brave to help someone" (Dictionaries, Oxford Learner's, 2022). In *Supervillains & Philosophy: Sometimes, Evil is its Own Reward* (2009), Liddy Barringer says about superheroes that "[l]ike ordinary people, it's not always easy to peg these characters down as strictly good or bad. They are flawed. Sometimes, even acting with the best intentions, their dealings have terrible consequences" (Barringer, 2009, p. 91). In *Superheroes & Philosophy: Truth, Justice and the Socratic Way* (2005), superheroes are described as someone who has powers and abilities far beyond those of ordinary people. They are people that pursue justice, helping those who cannot help themselves and overcoming evil with the force of good (Loeb & Morris, 2005, p. 11). These two quotes are contradicting, and, at the same time, they complement each other. In the first quote we see that superheroes are flawed,

it is not always easy to determine if they are good or bad, thus creating the idea that not all superheroes are good. On the other hand, the quote does admit that the hero acts with the best intentions, however the results may vary. It is stated in the second quote that superheroes are the “good guys”, they fight for the ones who cannot fend for themselves, they pursue justice, they use the forces of good to overcome the forces of evil. In other words, both arguments agree that superheroes are good, or they try to be, but there is a point here that sometimes it can be hard to manifest superheroes as purely good. The important thing to keep in mind is that superheroes are, in most cases, elevated human beings. Their powers are greater than those of an ordinary person, and these powers are what defines the superheroes. It can be superstrength, superspeed, the ability to fly, shooting lasers from their eyes, or in Iron Man and Batman’s case, super rich individuals whose fortune helped them in creating a powerful alter-ego. Many more powers and abilities exist in the world of superheroes, and it only illustrates the immense potential of these individuals. This, however, also creates a problem for the society housing these individuals. How can the authorities control them if they are this powerful? The truth is that they cannot. The superhero will, most likely, be his or her own master, and will be in control of their fate. The superhuman will have to make the choice of being good or evil, because no ordinary human can control them.

1.4 – Utilitarianism

The problematization of good and evil is a key aspect for this thesis. Thinking that evil is obvious in the light of any given action would be a wrong assumption, as defining an action as either good or evil has troubled both religion and scientists for centuries. In *Supervillains and Philosophy: Sometimes Evil Is Its Own Reward* (2009) Robert Arp mentions the philosophy of *Utilitarian* which places an emphasis on the apparent usefulness (utility) of a deed in order to define good and evil (Arp, 2009, p. 44). Actions are good insofar as they increase the pleasure or decrease the pains of people, in general (Arp, 2009, p. 44). The idea of utilitarianism stems from Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). In *Bentham: A guide for the Perplexed* (2009), Philip Schofield explains Bentham’s principle of utility. Schofield states that Bentham bases this idea on the foundation of psychology and ethics, which in his mind are derived from the sensations of pleasure and pain. In Bentham’s own words:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do.... The *principle of utility* recognizes this subjection, and assume it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law. Systems which attempt to question it, deal in sounds instead of sense, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light (Schofield, 2009, pp. 44-45).

What we can gather from this is that Bentham thought that pain and pleasure are the two feelings or sensations which impacts us the most. These are the sensations that not only influences our actions but controls them. Bentham linked these sensations to our psychology and ethics. Psychology representing what we do, and ethics representing what we ought to do. Hence, psychology and ethics were linked by their relation to pleasure and pain (Schofield, 2009, p. 45). As psychology was not a familiar concept during Bentham's time, but rather became a field of study in 1854, it is safe to assume that Bentham never directly linked the sensations of pain and pleasure to psychology himself. However, studies of Bentham from modern time, including Schofield's, find the connection to psychology.

Bentham's principle of utility derives from accepting that what is done and what is morally right to do depends entirely on the sensations of pain and pleasure. Bentham viewed the desire or want of pleasure and the absence or annihilation of pain as a foundation of all human actions. Only pleasure and pain matter when determining an action as good or bad. The question which must be asked in context of any action, is if it will lead to general pleasure or general pain. To illustrate this point further, I will visit two terms which is of great importance for this thesis, that is *good* and *evil*. Following Bentham's principle of utility, the question asked when an action regards other beings is "Can they suffer?", do they have the ability to suffer? To suffer is to experience physical or mental pain, or feelings of pain and unhappiness (Dictinaries, Oxford Learner's, 2022). Without pain and pleasure, words such as "suffering", and "happiness" makes no sense. It is necessary to understand that they must be explained by referring to these sensations, they have no substance of their own accord. Good is pleasure or absence from pain, and evil is pain or loss of pleasure. To say that in the root of all actions is pain and pleasure is to say that all actions are motivated by a desire for pleasure and an aversion to pain. Actions are motivated by the prospect of obtaining some form of pleasure or to alleviate some form of pain (Schofield, 2009, p. 45). It stands to reason, then, that good actions are rooted in actions seeking pleasure or happiness, while evil actions have

root in actions seeking pain and suffering. Logically, this means that if someone wants to perform an action or make something happen, and this action will result in some form of pleasure, the person will be motivated into performing the action. The person must have a desired outcome that he or she wants to achieve, again, to desire something makes no sense without the sensations of pleasure and pain. If you desire something and you achieve it, you get the sensation of pleasure. If you fail in your desire, you will experience it as pain.

However, there are some problems with this line of thought, and Bentham recognized this. Bentham understood that we will not always be successful in our desire because we may act on inadequate or incorrect information, or make a poor choice caused by a lack of judgement (Schofield, 2009, p. 46). For example, a young child may see a flame and feel a desire to touch or hold that flame. The child expects to feel pleasure when he or she reaches out to touch the flame, however, the action will result in pain when the child burns his or her hand. The expected result does not correlate with the actual result, the child had insufficient knowledge of how a flame works, or how flesh reacts when encountering flame, and the child will burn his or her finger. In other words, if you do not fully oversee or understand the consequences of your choices and actions you may end up achieving the opposite from the intent which was a desire to obtain pleasure, or to do good. To have such oversight and knowledge will inevitably often be difficult, or even impossible hence one may end up doing bad even though the meaning and intent was to do good.

It is not the pursuit of our own happiness that is the right and proper course of action, a right and proper course of action in one that promotes “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” (Schofield, 2009, p. 46). The question remains, then, how is it possible to achieve the greatest happiness of the greatest number if all actions are personally motivated? Bentham is criticized for advocating an egotistical or self-centered theory of ethics. This critique stems from the claim that an individual acts in the right way when he or she attempts to maximize their own happiness without regard to the happiness of others. Bentham believed that if every individual acted in this fashion, it would turn out for the best overall. This is enough for many critics to condemn the theory; however, Bentham’s theory is not egotistical, he attempts to show what is wrong with egotism through his “axioms of mental pathology” (Schofield, 2009, pp. 46-47). In this case, pathology means the study of emotions, passions or feelings, and axiom means propositions that cannot be proved by reference to more general propositions (Schofield, 2009, p. 47). An axiom of mental pathology is that suffering produced by loss is greater than the happiness produced by gain. To illustrate this, imagine

someone picked your pocket for 20\$. The pickpocket gained 20\$ and you lost 20\$, the money is worth the same, it only changed hands, it can seem that the pain you felt over losing 20\$ is evened out by the pickpocket's pleasure of gaining 20\$. However, Bentham claims that the pain of loss outweighs the pleasure of gain. Two important points are illustrated in this example. Firstly, when there is a clash of interest between two individuals, the happiness gained is at the expense of the other individual's happiness. Secondly, the presumption must be that the loss of happiness on the part of the disadvantaged individual will outweigh the gain of the advantaged individual. This is how Bentham showed why the pursuit of own happiness, or egotism, is wrong if it exists a clash of interests that results in an overall balance on the side of suffering (Schofield, 2009, p. 47).

Returning to the question: how is it psychologically possible for an individual to pursue the greatest happiness? Bentham introduced the legislator, a person with power to control the laws of society. Bentham assumed that no legislator could deny his objective of promoting the happiness of the members of society subjected to him (Schofield, 2009, p. 47). We still operate under the two sovereign sensations pleasure and pain. The legislator's goal is to promote the most amount of happiness and least amount of pain. The legislator, therefore, uses reward and punishment to encourage or discourage particular actions (Schofield, 2009, p. 48). The legislator can introduce sanctions, both positive and negative, in order to promote pleasure and pain for his subjects. Bentham referred to these sanctions as a source of pleasure and pain and identified three such sources to impose pleasure and pain in the individual performing an action. Firstly, the political sanction where the individual must act according to the will of the state, this is imposed by a judge. Secondly, the moral or popular sanctions where the individual must act according to the public or members of society. Lastly, the religious sanction where the individual must act according to their religious belief, God will account for your sins (Schofield, 2009, p. 48). If we revisit the example of the pickpocket, now looking at it from the perspective of the pickpocket, he calculated that stealing the 20\$ would be beneficial for him. We still operate under the assumption that the pain felt by the loss of 20\$ is greater than the pickpocket's pleasure from obtaining 20\$, this will also be the opinion of the legislator. The legislator, wanting to promote the greatest amount of pleasure for his community concludes that it would be better for people in general not to have their pockets picked. Therefore, he introduces a law, making pickpocketing illegal and he introduces a punishment to this offence. He also introduces a police force whose job it is to detect and arrest the pickpocket. Now the situation of the pickpocket has changed, he now

calculates that if he picks your pocket, he is likely to be detected and punished accordingly. The potential gain of pleasure is no longer worth the risk, as the pain that could follow the action is greater than the pleasure. The legislator has managed to alter the pickpocket's behavior by applying a sanction to the action he wanted to perform. The pickpocket no longer has an incentive to perform an action which affects the community in a negative way. He is free to pursue his own interest insofar as it causes no harm to others, and insofar as it proves beneficial to others (Schofield, 2009, pp. 48-49).

Further, Bentham stresses the point that the legislator not only has to understand that he must operate through pain and pleasure, but he must also understand the force or value of different pains and pleasures. A more valuable pleasure is a pleasure of greater quantity. The value of a pleasure or pain concerning individuals, is estimated by referring to six elements or dimensions. The intensity refers to the strength of the pleasure; duration refers to the length of time pleasure is experienced; certainty refers to the likelihood of experiencing the pleasure; propinquity refers to the point in time you begin experiencing the pleasure; fecundity refers to the likelihood that the pleasure will lead to further pleasure; and purity refers to the likelihood of pleasure not leading to the sensation of pain. If the value of a pleasure or pain is considered in relation to more than one individual, an additional element is introduced; the element of extent which refers to the number of people affected by the action. Bentham's method for coming to an exact account of the general tendency of any act where the interest of a community is affected, is to calculate the good or evil tendency of an act by balancing the value of pleasures and pains produced in a single individual. Then, repeat the process for every individual affected and aggregate the results (Schofield, 2009, p. 49).

Take the *Balance*; which, if on the side of *pleasure*, will give the general *good tendency* of the act, with respect to the total number of community of individuals concerned; if on the side of pain, the general *evil tendency*, with respect to the same community (Schofield, 2009, pp. 49-50).

Looking one last time at the example of the pickpocket, the legislator must evaluate the value of pleasure and pain produced by the action. The legislator recognizes that pickpocketing is detrimental to achieving the greatest pleasure, therefore, adding a sanction or punishment to the act. If the sanction is too mild it will not have any effect. While too much punishment would be unnecessary. The legislator cannot give out a random punishment, it must correlate to the action in question. This method forms the basis for a rational penal-code,

or the basis of rules for criminals. Actions which are harmful to happiness for the general population are offences which need punishment, while actions which are not harmful should be left alone (Schofield, 2009, p. 50). Following the principle of utility, the legislator would, in the case of the pickpocket, probably establish a fine for pickpocketing or a mild prison sentence. These sanctions should be enough to keep the person from pickpocketing and pursue other things with his life.

1.5 – The utilitarian superhero and supervillain

The principle of utility is, in many ways, a backbone of this thesis. As I seek to discuss the tenuous difference between superheroes and supervillains, it needs to be clear what defines both good and evil actions. Utilitarianism works as an impartial judge in this matter, as its only concern is whether an action creates more general pain or pleasure. Utilitarianism is relevant to this analysis in a number of ways. For instance, if we look at one text in focus for this thesis, *The Dark Knight*, we can see that the film features both a distinct hero and villain, Batman and The Joker. Batman is the hero and the good guy; he is the one who fights evil and pursues justice. The Joker is the villain, he falls under Coogan's criteria of being an archenemy, doppelganger, and a displacement. Even though we define Batman as the hero of the film, he does perform some questionable actions, however. In the later stage of the movie, Batman creates a device which enables him to spy on every single citizen of Gotham. The device is very similar to Jeremy Bentham's panopticon prison, a model based in the philosophy of utilitarianism. Panopticon means "all seeing", and the point of the panopticon prison was for the guards to be all seeing. The basis of the design is to monitor as many prisoners as possible with as few guards as possible. The prison consists of a central tower for the guards with a ring of cells surrounding it. This way, the guards in the tower could always see what was going on in the cells while the prisoners could not see the guards. Bentham's idea with this was that prisoners would modify their behavior and work hard to avoid further punishment (UCL, 2022). Being under 24-hour constant surveillance might seem unbearable, however, Bentham argued it would be beneficial in multiple ways. He states that this prison would help change morals, preserve health, giving life to industry and strengthen the economy (Bentham, 2011, p. 95). It is clear that the panopticon prison system is based on the principle of utility because it aims to overall better the society, reforming criminals and help

them get back into society with a new purpose. While there is a sensation of pain connected to the system, namely that being under constant surveillance leads to the loss of privacy, from the perspective of society the sensation of pleasure produced by the system outweighs the pain. The panopticon will be relevant in the chapter concerning *The Dark Knight* as an example of Batman's surveillance system is quite similar in structure to Bentham's panopticon prison. The purpose is different, however. While Bentham's prison is designed to reform criminals, Batman's surveillance system has the goal of catching one specific person in a city of millions. The system uses sonar surveillance, Batman has tapped into every single microphone possible in the city of Gotham. He then uses the audio to create a complete sonar image of the entire city, much like how a bat sees in real life. While every sound is picked up a live feed of everything that is going on is created. This way, Batman only needs a sample of The Joker's voice to track him down. When the audience sees the surveillance system, we are introduced to a wall of screens with sonar images and a desk in front. Very similar to the panopticon prison system, the screens with images being the cells and the desk would be the guard tower. The system is, obviously, much more advanced than the architecture of a panopticon prison. The prison is limited to the construct, one can only see what is going on inside it. The sonar surveillance is limited to the entire city of Gotham. Using the system, Batman is able to discover the location of The Joker, which results in stopping him from blowing up two boats, one filled with prisoners and one with ordinary citizens of Gotham. Also, it leads to the capture of The Joker. All in all, it worked out as intended. Batman was willing to do everything necessary to capture The Joker. Taking a step back, looking at the principle of utility, Batman determines that the general pleasure of the community would be greater if The Joker was to be behind bars. This much is obvious, as no legislator would want a dangerous criminal free to roam the streets, murdering people, and robbing banks. However, the legislator would, probably, not think that the general pleasure of the population would increase if every citizen was being kept under a constant surveillance. This causes a dilemma, as we need to determine if the overall pleasure produced by this action is greater than the pain. This example will be further discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. For now, it is sufficient to conclude that Barringer's statement of it not being easy to peg superheroes down as strictly good or bad is evidentially true. Through the principle of utility, it can be argued that Batman is evil for the use of his surveillance system. However, it can also be argued that as he is following Bentham's panopticon model, a model designed to promote pleasure to society, confirming the action as good.

As it is evident that the principle of utility is relevant to the analysis of superheroes, I will now look at it in context with supervillains. Another film in focus for this thesis is *Avengers: Endgame*. This film features a wide variety of Marvel superheroes, all introduced in earlier movies. Spider-Man, Iron Man, Ant-Man, The Hulk, Dr. Strange, Vision, Wanda, Captain America and many others are present for this film, all considered to be heroes. The villain is Thanos, a titan from the planet Titan, who relates to the heroes as an archenemy, being the greatest enemy any of the avengers has ever faced. He is first introduced in the end credit scene of the movie *The Avengers* (2012), and further mentioned in the movies leading up to *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018). It is impossible to discuss this character without looking at *Avengers: Infinity War* as well. This is because the whole premise of *Avengers: Endgame* is to undo the damage Thanos created in *Avengers: Infinity War*. Thanos, as mentioned, is a titan. Titans are the original Greek gods in Greek mythology, sons and daughters of the primordial deities Uranus (heaven) and Gea (earth), who overthrew their father (Greek Mythology, 2021). Titans are also the parents of the Greek gods who eventually overthrew them. In the MCU, a titan is nothing less than a god. They evolved on the planet of Titan, and this is the place where Thanos started to realize what is wrong with the universe. His motivation and reasoning behind his actions are revealed in a conversation between Thanos and Dr. Strange towards the end of *Avengers: Infinity War* on the planet of Titan:

Thanos: Titan was like most planets; too many mouths, not enough to go around. And when we faced extinction, I offered a solution.

Dr. Strange: Genocide.

Thanos: But random. Dispassionate, fair to rich and poor alike. They called me a madman. And what I predicted came to pass (Russo & Russo, *Avengers: Infinity War*, 2018).

From this conversation, it is evident that Thanos considers overpopulation to be the greatest problem of the universe, as every civilization is subjected to it. Overpopulation was a problem on Titan, there was not enough resources on the planet for the titans to thrive, and eventually, they caused their own extinction, Thanos being the only remaining titan alive. Had the titans agreed to Thanos' idea of a random genocide, which would eliminate half their population, the other half could have continued to live and thrive with a sudden overflow of resources. This, however, did not come to pass. Thanos put it on himself, as a life mission, to reduce the population of the universe by 50%. This would, in his mind, remove the problem of overpopulation, and all species and civilizations would thrive as a result. In *Avengers: Infinity*

War, Thanos' plan ends in success. He manages to acquire all six infinity stones and used their power to wipe out half of the universe's population with a snap of his fingers. The snap makes it so half of all life in the universe ceases to exist. Looking at it from the principle of utility, Thanos believes that the general pleasure of the population would increase if the population was reduced by 50%, but which legislator would consider it beneficial for his society that half of the population subjected to him was to be executed? There is an obvious clash of interest here between multiple individuals. It can be argued that the remaining half of the population would thrive and live better lives, but the cost would also ensure an immense sensation of pain, as people all over the universe would lose family and friends in the process. The other half of the population, the half who gets snapped out of existence, will not feel any sensation of pain or pleasure, they do not exist anymore and cannot be taken into consideration as a result. It becomes a question of whether the physical pleasure of living a better life can outweigh the psychological pain of losing the people you love. This example will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter Three of this thesis, however, we can already understand that Thanos' actions, although seeming evil at first glance, might be good from a certain perspective, the action is ambivalent.

These two examples confirm that the actions of superheroes and supervillains is not always easy to determine as either good or bad. In the case of Batman's surveillance system, Batman violates the privacy of millions, all in the effort of catching one individual. Going to these extreme lengths to rid his society of this one person, might not be the proper cause of action. In the end it does work, The Joker is caught and sent to jail, but the price paid for it to happen can be considered extreme. Looking at it from the principle of utility, it is hard to determine if the resulted pleasure of getting The Joker behind bars is greater than the pain resulting from everyone being under constant surveillance. It can also be worth mentioning that if this device had ended up in the wrong hands, it could create immense sensations of pain. The whole idea of having or even creating such a powerful surveillance system could also be considered evil in nature. In Thanos' case, the lines are even more blurred. Who can decide that eliminating half of the population in the universe is a good thing? Which legislator would condone an action like this and deem it beneficial for society? The thing to take into consideration in this example is that Thanos has seen what the end result will be. If everyone is left alone, we will all experience the same fate as the titans did on Titan. Overpopulation will eventually lead to extinction. The solution is to cut the population in half and instead of extinction, the races will thrive, a universal genocide becomes the solution to the problem, as

it will generate a lot of pleasure for each society. The problem, as already stated, is the psychological pain which will also be generated because of this action.

1.6 – Evil

Evil, according to the *Oxford Dictionary*, is a force that causes bad things to happen; morally bad behavior, or a bad or harmful thing; the bad effect of something (Dictionary, Oxford Learner's, 2022). However, evil can stretch itself to be a variety of things. When trying to define evil, one also must consider that evil can be viewed differently depending on a person's views and beliefs. In *On Evil* (2010), Terry Eagleton states that evil is often supposed to be without rhyme or reason, that the less sense something makes, the more evil it is. Evil has no relation to anything beyond itself, such as a cause has no relation to anything beyond itself (Eagleton, 2010, p. 3). In this sense, evil is just that, evil. Eagleton explains that the word "evil" is generally a way of bringing arguments to an end, much like taste (Eagleton, 2010, p. 8). An example of this would be that I say that I like this type of music and my friend says he does not like that type of music. I can end that argument by saying that this is my taste in music, and he cannot argue against me anymore. The same can be done with evil, I can watch the news with a story on terrorism, the newscaster can describe the action as evil and there is no point in continuing the argument, because we would accept the newscaster's statement as final. Further, Eagleton states that evil is thought to be uncaused or its own cause. He says that this is a point that makes evil resemble good. Apart from evil, only God is said to be the cause of himself (Eagleton, 2010, p. 4). He also says that pure autonomy is a dream of evil (Eagleton, 2010, p. 12). In essence, Eagleton describe evil as something that just is, it is created by itself, for itself. It has a dream of being self-governed, it does not depend on anything else because it is truly its own thing. It appears without reason; it makes no sense.

Evil is never ending, Eagleton illustrates this point by using Slavoj Žižek's argument of immortality. Žižek says that immortality is usually associated with goodness, but it is actually reverse. The primordial immortality is that of evil: "Evil is something which threatens to return forever, a spectral dimension which magically survives its physical annihilation and continues to haunt us" (Eagleton, 2010, pp. 50-51). If we accept this argument and Eagleton's argument of evil being nothing beyond itself, we can say that evil is its own thing, and it will always survive. One of the materials used in this thesis is the graphic

novel *Watchmen* (2019), where the main character is called Rorschach. What is most relevant for the purpose of this discussion about Rorschach is that I would characterize him as both good and bad. He is a good guy because his intentions are good, he pursues justice. He is a bad guy because he is willing to do bad things in pursuit of justice. To illustrate; we see him break a man's fingers in the first chapter because he believes the man or someone in the bar can tell him who murdered his friend. This action creates an argument which relates Rorschach to evil, as he creates a sensation of pain by performing the action. In addition, the action of breaking the man's finger is without a cause, he could have achieved the same result, being told that they knew nothing, by just asking, there was no need to break his fingers. The action, just like evil, was without reason and made no sense, thus making it an evil act. The act could also be determined evil as it creates no sensation of pleasure, only pain. This is only one example of an evil act performed by Rorschach in the book, there are many more. It correlates with Zizek's argument of evil being something that threatens to return forever, the evil nature of Rorschach's personality will not be annihilated, it continues to haunt his enemies. This is also true for most superhero stories, as the villain of these stories does not always die, they often receive a setback to their plan or is defeated in the context of that story, but they are not gone from the world. Also, if the villain were to die, there is another villain in the next story. Evil will always survive.

In *The Roots of Evil* (2005), John Kekes both problematizes the general approach to evil and tries to give an adequate explanation of Evil. The first chapter of the book consists of multiple ways of defining evil, and how many explanations fall short in this task. Kekes states that evil has an ominous connotation that goes beyond badness (Kekes, 2005, p. 1). This means that if something is defined as evil, it is worse than if something was simply bad. Kekes continues the argument by stating that evil involves serious harm that causes fatal or lasting physical injury, for instance, murder, torture, and mutilation. Also, he acknowledges that serious harm can be psychological, however, judging serious harm from a psychological standpoint requires complex questions to be answered, and is therefore not discussed (Kekes, 2005, p. 1). Evil is primarily to do with serious harm caused by human beings to other human beings, as torture or murder. These actions can be excused on moral grounds, such as self-defense or deserved punishment. What truly makes an action evil is that it causes serious harm with the lack of an excuse (Kekes, 2005, p. 1). Evil, being serious harm caused by one person, can translate into evil being a serious sensation of pain, linking Kekes argument to the principle of utility. Furthermore, the complex questions which need answers when dealing

with evil in psychological terms, are found when discussing the principles of utility. Questions mainly centered around what causes the most general pleasure or pain in a society. Kekes argues that the evil of an action consists of three components: the malevolent motivation of evildoers; the serious excessive harm caused by their actions; and the lack of morally acceptable excuse for the actions (Kekes, 2005, p.2). All three components must be present for an action to be deemed evil. Malevolent motivation is not enough as the action can fail due to unexpected circumstances. A bomb could fail to explode even though the intention was for it to blow up a building. An action can cause serious harm; however, it can be justified by being accidental, forced or morally justified. Lastly, an action can be prompted by malevolent motivation and cause serious excessive harm, but it would still be morally justified if it is excused by being a justified punishment. Evil, therefore, requires motive, consequence, and lack of excuse (Kekes, 2005, p. 2). Motive, consequence, and lack of excuse can be put into degrees. Malevolent motives can be a sudden anger which rises within you, wanting you to cause harm for a short period of time, to a lifelong hatred towards something or someone. Serious and harmful actions can range from the murder or torture of one individual, to the murder or torture of thousands; and a morally inexcusable action can range anywhere from culpable ignorance or weakness to knowingly doing evil for its own sake. This allows for multiple levels of evil, people can be evil when performing evil actions, however, they can be seen as less evil or more evil depending on the level of evil they do (Kekes, 2005, p. 2). Again, there is a clear connection between evil and the sensation of pain. The level of evil in an action is determined by how much pain that action causes. For instance, if a person captures, tortures, rape and murder another human being, the action will cause a lot of pain for the victim. If we imagine that this person is a serial killer, he will capture, torture, rape, and murder multiple people. The sensation of pain will multiply and, therefore, the level of evil will increase. The actions level of evil is increased by the amount of pain generated by the action.

Kekes want to add to the explanation of evil because the most influential explanations stem from religion and the Enlightenment world views. These, according to Kekes, tries to explain evil by explaining it away. These explanations denies that evil facts are a genuine portion of reality. They have a world view which they try to fit evil in to, the problem is that evil does not fit in these views, which is why they try to explain it away (Kekes, 2005, p. 3). The religious world view assumes that a morally good tendency is transparent in the scheme of things, including human lives. The problem of evil becomes the problem of explaining why

everyone is not subjected to this general goodness, why do we deviate from good? Most religious explanations assume that this deviation is caused by the misuse of evildoers' reason or will. Evil is seen as a defect in evildoers, not a defect in the scheme of things. The explanation, however, faces two major difficulties that its defenders are unable to overcome. The first being to justify the belief that there is a general good order in the scheme of things, even though experience and history proves the opposite. The second being since all human beings are part of the scheme of things, any defect in evildoers is a defect in the scheme of things. The fact that evil exists contradicts the view of a morally good order in the scheme of things (Kekes, 2005, p. 3). In an Enlightenment world view, the belief is that human beings are basically good, and their well-being depends on living according to reason. The more reasonable lives are, the better they are supposed to become. The problem with evil in this world view is the problem of explaining why we fail to be reasonable when it is in our interest to be so. The explanation provided is that external influences, in the likes of political arrangements, corrupt our basic goodness. Evil is explained as a deviation from our natural goodness. The problem is that there is nothing to support the idea of humans being naturally good. There are many bad human qualities, and they often outweigh the good ones. What are the reasons for believing that our good qualities are natural, and the bad ones are not (Kekes, 2005, p. 4)? Further, Kekes argues that if the corruption of our supposed goodness is the result of bad political arrangements, it needs to be explained how these political arrangements came to be. The arrangements are made and maintained by human beings, if they are bad, it stands to reason that the people creating them are bad as well. The fact that bad political arrangements exist is reason enough to doubt basic human goodness, not a way to explain evil (Kekes, 2005, p. 4).

Both a religious world view and an Enlightened world view share the assumption that good is basic or natural, while evil is a constant variable that interferes with the good. These views seek an explanation linked to the nature or cause of the interference. Kekes argues that this is a wrong approach, as it seeks to explain evil in a place based on the wrong assumptions. He states that there is no reason to believe that good is basic and evil is variable, and that there is no more reason to believe that evil is interfering with good than that good is interfering with evil (Kekes, 2005, p. 4).

Chapter 2 - *The Dark Knight*

2.1 – Introduction

As one of DC Comics' "big three", Batman is one of the most famous superheroes in the world. Ever since his creation in 1939 and the release of *Batman #1* in 1940, the Batman comic book has been almost continuously published. In addition to hundreds of comic books published over the last 80 years, Batman has also been of interest to filmmakers, featured in 14 movies, where ten of these had him as the main protagonist (Sharma, 2022). This thesis will use Christopher Nolan's film *The Dark Knight* for its analysis. *The Dark Knight* is the second movie in a stand-alone trilogy featuring Batman. The other two movies are *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). For the purpose of this thesis, *The Dark Knight Rises* will not be discussed, however, *Batman Begins* will. The reason that *Batman Begins* is relevant, is the fact that this is a stand-alone trilogy and the Batman in question for this thesis was created in the trilogy. As a result, to understand Batman's actions in *The Dark Knight*, one must first look at how Bruce Wayne became Batman and what motivated him to become a superhero.

The Dark Knight contains several characters relevant for the investigation undertaken by this thesis. Bruce Wayne (Batman), The Joker, Alfred Pennyworth, Lucius Fox, Harvey Dent, James Gordon and Rachel Dawes will all have to be discussed in this thesis as every one of them affect Batman and his actions. They are Batman and Bruce Wayne's archenemy, helpers, love interest and friends. They supplement our hero in both positive and negative ways. They help form the character that we know as Batman, by influencing how he acts in certain situations and helping him deal with the consequences.

Further, I will discuss various scenes and events where Jeremy Bentham's principle of utility is relevant. Batman must make a lot of choices over the course of the movie. With the premise of utilitarianism, and the fact that Batman is a hero, every choice Batman makes should be directed towards generating the most amount of pleasure and alleviating the most amount of pain for the general population. Batman, as a hero, should always strive towards making Gotham the best it can be. On the other side of this spectrum, we find The Joker. As the villain of the story, he should be the opposite of Batman, and promote evil actions. In the context of utilitarianism, all The Joker's actions should be directed towards alleviating

pleasure and promoting pain. However, the premise of this thesis is that there might not be such a vast difference between these two characters. I will therefore discuss whether the difference between the actions performed by The Joker and those performed by Batman is as great as we would like to believe and whether, from a utilitarian point of view, one can be considered evil while the other can be considered good.

2.2 - *Batman Begins*

Batman Begins is the first movie of Christopher Nolan's stand-alone Batman trilogy. It shows us how Bruce Wayne become Batman, and also introduce some important aspects of the character.

2.2.1 - The important aspects and scenes from *Batman Begins*

In the beginning of *Batman Begins* we are provided with an explanation of why Bruce Wayne fears bats and how this fear had unexpected and detrimental consequences. We see Bruce and his friend, Rachel Dawes, playing on his parents' estate. Bruce falls down a well and is attacked by bats, developing a fear of them. Later Bruce and his parents attend the opera where the actors are masquerading as bats. Bruce's fear of bats causes the Wayne family to leave early. Outside awaits a robber, Joe Chill, who murders Bruce's parents, leaving Bruce an orphan who is raised by the family butler, Alfred Pennyworth. In Bruce's mind, his parents died because of him, because he got scared. If he had not feared the actors masquerading as bats, Bruce believes that his parents would still be alive, and he blames himself for the death of his parents.

Years later, we see Bruce struggling to accept that his parents' killer will be released from prison. Intent on murdering Chill, and believing revenge is the answer, he is baffled by the fact that he does not feel any sense of joy when beaten to it by an assassin working for Falcone, who is the mob boss of Gotham. When Bruce reveals his intention of killing Chill to Rachel, she slaps him, telling him that his father would be ashamed of him. Bruce starts to understand that killing is not the correct course of action. He seeks out Falcone and learns that real power comes from being feared, and that people fear that which they do not understand.

Again, fear becomes relevant. Bruce decides to leave Gotham and ends up training with the League of Shadows under a man named Henri Ducard. With the League, Bruce learns how to fight. In addition, he also learns theatricality and deception which is crucial to become, as Ducard puts it, invisible. The most important thing Bruce learns when he trains with the League, however, is to conquer his fear. He is put to the test, getting intoxicated with a fear inducing substance, which will be relevant to the story later. Overcoming the substance, Bruce earns his spot in the League of Shadows. As a final test, Bruce is told to execute a criminal captured by the League. He refuses, believing fully that murder is not the answer and states that he will not become an executioner. Defying the League and his master Ducard, he burns down the League's temple. Ra's al Ghul, the leader of the League, is killed by falling debris as the temple is burning. Bruce saves Ducard, who lays unconscious on the floor and returns to Gotham as a changed man.

Bruce returns to Gotham and takes up the alter ego of Batman. A series of events leads to the arrest of Falcone. We are now formally introduced to the villain of the story, Dr. Jonathan Crane. Crane is a corrupt psychologist who has been aided by Falcone in smuggling drugs into the city. The drug in question is, in fact, the same fear inducing substance that Bruce was exposed to with the League of Shadows. Crane has perfected it and has used it to evaluate criminals as insane. Spraying the prisoner with the substance drives them mad with fear, the prisoner can then be transferred to Arkham Asylum where Crane can continue doing research on them. When Crane shows up to do the psychological evaluation of Falcone, the true horror of Crane's character is revealed. Falcone believes he can just tell Crane that he is going insane, and everything will be alright. What Crane really does, is putting on a scarecrow mask, not very intimidating at first sight, but when the subject is exposed to the fear inducing substance, the mask becomes terrifying, and the subject goes mad with fear. This is what happens to Falcone, and he is transferred to Arkham Asylum. Crane is using the substance as a weapon, which in essence means that he has turned fear into a physical weapon, it is no longer just a "scare-tactic".

Batman gets information about "the Scarecrow" and follows a trail leading him to Crane. Batman is ambushed, and Crane exposes him to a lethal dose of the substance. Alfred saves Batman, and together with Lucius Fox, they create an antidote for the substance. Rachel goes to Arkham Asylum and accuses Crane of corruption, knowing that Falcone was not insane and has no business being transferred from police custody. Before drugging her, Crane reveals that he has put the substance in the city's water supply. Batman saves her and subdues

Crane. When Batman interrogates Crane, who is now exposed to the fear inducing substance himself, Crane reveals that he is working for Ra's al Ghul. After Batman has saved Rachel, and given her the antidote, Ducard reappears and reveals himself as Ra's al Ghul. Ra's is the true villain, seeking to destroy Gotham as the League deems it beyond saving. They have used Crane as a puppet, as a disguise of who is really behind everything. The plan is to expose every citizen of Gotham to the fear inducing substance, hence, causing mass hysteria and panic, they will destroy the city from within.

Here we see that fear proves itself to be the ultimate weapon. In the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, fear is defined as: "the bad feeling you have when you are in danger, when something bad might happen, or when a particular thing frightens you" (Dictionary, Oxford Learner's, 2022). Fear reveals itself as a sensation of importance. Not only in *Batman Begins*, but it will also play a huge role in the story of *The Dark Knight*. Fear, in other words, is a negative emotion we can link to the sensation of pain. Fear also works as a link between the hero and the villain; however, the use of fear differs from hero to villain. Crane promotes fear in a literal way, in the sense that he has produced this substance which physically attacks the victims mentally. The mask is not intimidating at first sight, it simply looks like he put a potato sack over his face. However, when the Scarecrow attacks with the substance, he physically injects fear into his victims. The mask becomes terrifying, which we understand as audience, because we can see maggots creeping out of the mouth, his voice changes to a monster-like pitch, and the victim is paralyzed. In Batman's case, however, fear is more symbolic. Most people do not fear bats in the same way as Bruce does. I will argue that the fear Batman presents is not physical, like Crane's substance, but rather symbolic. Batman becomes a symbol of hope for the citizens of Gotham, and at the same time, a symbol of despair for Gotham's criminal underworld. He is overpowering, invisible and deceptive. Batman manages to achieve two very important things by using fear. Primarily, criminals fear him, and they become more reserved. He obtains power over the underworld because they fear him, they fear this uncanny creature which they do not understand. Secondly, Batman inspires the ordinary citizens to stop fearing Gotham's criminals. With fear, Batman becomes a symbol for Gotham's ordinary citizens. The fear criminals have for Batman, translates into a feeling of pleasure for the ordinary people who no longer fear the criminal underworld as much as they used to. In contrast, Crane uses fear to get control for himself. They are both using fear to obtain power, in the sense that Crane uses it to create anarchy, while Batman uses it to uphold civilization.

All in all, *Batman Begins* creates the premise of the Batman we see in *The Dark Knight*. Batman has learned to conquer his fear and started to use fear as a weapon. The criminals of Gotham fear Batman, giving him power over them, as Falcone said: “Real power comes from being feared”. Fear is a reoccurring theme in this trilogy, and *The Dark Knight* is no exception. Fear and power are linked, if the people fear you, you also have power over them. The question, then, is how fear is used, by whom, and to what end? We see examples of how fear is used in *Batman Begins*, both from the villain, and the hero. It is evident that it can be used as a weapon from both sides, however, the goal differs. Batman also understands that he cannot do this alone, he cannot create personal justice through Batman, as he knows he cannot be an all-powerful judge, jury and executioner. He needs public figures and friends to take the evidence he can provide as an outlaw in order to make real changes happen.

2.3 – *The Dark Knight*

The Dark Knight is the second movie of Christopher Nolan’s Batman trilogy and takes place about one year after the events of *Batman Begins*. Batman is still roaming the streets at night, inducing fear in Gotham’s criminal underworld. However, things are not improving for Gotham’s citizens, as the police is still taking bribes and the justice system is led by corrupt judges and lawyers. Gotham’s new district attorney, Harvey Dent, becomes a beacon of hope for the city, and Bruce starts to think that if Dent can be Gotham’s lawful protector, the city will no longer need Batman and he can go live a normal life with Rachel Dawes. The following plot summary will explore important aspects and scenes from *The Dark Knight* before I move on to the discussion of our two main characters, The Joker and Batman.

2.3.1 – The important aspects and scenes from *The Dark Knight*

In the opening scenes of *The Dark Knight*, we are briefly introduced to the villain of the film as a gang of criminals are robbing a bank. The Joker, who planned the heist, manipulates his crew into killing each other to obtain a bigger share. In the end, only The Joker remains, and he escapes with the money. During the heist, we also see The Joker for the first time. All the robbers are wearing a clown-mask, and no one knows that The Joker is a part of the heist.

When all the robbers are dead, The Joker reveals himself to the bank director by taking off his mask. We see that the director is completely frozen by shock at this reveal, as The Joker does not need a mask. He has painted his face, full white adding black eyes and a huge red smile over his mouth. He is uncanny, creating fear from his mere presence or appearance. Uncanny will be explained in further detail in the next subchapter, for now it is enough to point out that the uncanny has to do with a sense of strangeness, mystery, or eeriness (Bennet & Royle, 2016, p. 35). It is something familiar that we do not understand, a description which fits both the hero, Batman, and the villain, The Joker, as we can consider them both uncanny creatures.

The bank robbery affected Gotham's mafia, as it was their bank. What the mob did not know was that the police were tracing their money through irradiated bills, meaning they were affected by radiant energy, making them easier to track. The police now knows that the bank was used by the mob and lieutenant James Gordon, district attorney Harvey Dent and Batman form an alliance to take down the mob. Dent goes along with Gordon's request to raid the bank, hoping it will result in the arrest of the mob. This does not come to pass, as the mob's corrupt accountant, Lau, figured out that the money was being tracked and moved it. This leads to the scene where The Joker is formally introduced.

We have already seen The Joker; however, we have not learned anything about him other than the fact that he is calculated and brutal, referring to the way he made his accomplices kill each other. The scene in which he is formally introduced starts with a meeting between the different mob-bosses of Gotham and their accountant Lau. Lau has control and power over the situation. He is set up in a video call, and he tells the mob that he moved all their money without their permission, as he knew the police was going to raid the bank. Further, he will not tell the mob where the money is. He does this for safety reasons, as, if the police catch one of them, all their money would be at risk. This is where the scene changes, as we walk into the meeting with The Joker. The camera follows The Joker into the meeting, illustrating to the viewer how outnumbered he really is, we see the scene from The Joker's perspective. The Joker walks in and sets to perform a "magic trick", he will make his pencil disappear. The Joker puts his pencil on the table, and when one of the mob's men goes to deal with him, he slams the guy's head in the table, penetrating his eye with the pen. One important thing to keep in mind here is that this all seems natural, and The Joker becomes even more terrifying than he already was. He is now dominating the room, and the mob is willing to hear his proposition. The Joker now propose that the mob pay him to kill Batman, as Batman is the reason for everything going wrong for the mob. He also points out that

Batman has no jurisdiction, and that it does not matter whether Lau is in Hong Kong or in Gotham, Batman will catch him either way and make him talk. At this point, Lau turns his video call off, and The Joker has taken full control of the situation, the power now lies with him. To kill Batman, The Joker demands half of the mob's money. This causes all of them to laugh at him, and they tell him that he is crazy. Finally, one from the mob goes to make a move on The Joker, but he reveals that he is rigged with explosives, and they quickly back off. The Joker then leaves, but he puts down his "card" so they can reach him when they are ready to take him seriously. The card he leaves behind is a joker from an ordinary deck of cards. This last act, with the card, is important because it manifests The Joker as just that, a joker. A joker in *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* is "an extra playing card that is used in some card games, usually as a wild card" (Dictionary, Oxford Learner's, 2022). This fits The Joker, as he is a wild card. He is difficult, or impossible to predict. He just does things, seemingly without logic and sense, again manifesting him as an uncanny character. The most important thing to gather from this scene is that The Joker is powerful. He is a much greater threat than the mob, and this scene really makes it clear that The Joker is the villain of the story.

Following this meeting, The Joker's prediction comes to pass as Batman travels to Hong Kong and brings Lau back to Gotham. This makes it possible for Harvey Dent to apprehend the entire mob. The mob is now desperate, and in their desperation, they hire The Joker to kill Batman. The Joker is now unleashed, and he threatens to start murdering people unless Batman reveals his identity. He kills the police commissioner and the judge who oversees the mob trials. He also tries to kill the mayor, but Gordon saves him. Wanting to stop the murders, Bruce decides to reveal his identity. Dent will not let him and announces that he is Batman instead. Dent does this because he believes that Batman stands for something special, and that Batman should not give in and crumble under The Joker's actions. He is too important to the city of Gotham, and he cannot let The Joker win. After Dent's fake reveal, he is taken into custody and The Joker attacks the convoy which is escorting him to prison. Batman and Gordon save him, and they apprehend The Joker.

In prison, Batman is allowed to question The Joker. It is now revealed that The Joker has kidnapped both Harvey Dent and Rachel Dawes. The Joker makes Batman choose who he wants to save. He gives him both locations and Batman races towards saving Rachel while Gordon goes to save Dent. Batman arrives and learns that The Joker has tricked him once again as he arrives at Dent's location instead. Batman manages to get Dent out of the building right before it blows up, however, half of Dent's face burns in the explosion, leaving him

disfigured. Gordon reaches the other location, but the building blows up when he arrives, and Rachel dies. These series of events illustrate a lot to be discussed. Primarily, that Batman's strength has no dominion of The Joker. Batman can be as physically powerful as he wants, but The Joker is not affected by this. His plan is for Batman to make a choice. A choice between Harvey Dent, Gotham's white knight who openly fights the city's underworld. And Rachel Dawes, who is Bruce's love interest and childhood friend. By choosing to save Rachel, Batman shows the limit to his resolve, a line he will not cross in his attempt to save Gotham from crime. By going after Rachel, Bruce proves that he is not willing to do anything to save Gotham.

The Joker escapes from prison and now threatens to blow up a hospital. He goes to visit Harvey Dent in the hospital and convinces him to seek revenge for Rachel's death, as Rachel was Dent's girlfriend. The Joker blows up the hospital and Dent goes on a killing spree as the vigilante Two-Face, seeking out those he holds responsible for Rachel's death. The Joker then rigs two ferries with explosives, one ferry with civilians and one ferry with prisoners. He threatens to blow up both boats, however, if one boat decides to blow up the other, he will let the people of that boat live. Batman must find The Joker and stop him, and he makes use of a sonar surveillance system which uses the microphone of every cellphone in Gotham to create a sonar image of the city, meaning he can track and find anyone. After Batman finds The Joker, he wins the final battle, and the people on the boat refuses to blow up the other ferry, proving that there is still hope for Gotham. However, The Joker reveals to Batman that he has an ace up his sleeve, referring to how he manipulated Dent to go seek vengeance for Rachel's death. He gloats that when the city learns of Dent's actions, when they learn that their white knight has gone off and killed several people, including cops, they will lose hope. The Joker thinks that he has won the battle for Gotham's soul. Batman goes to stop Dent or "Two-Face", who is holding Gordon's family hostage. Dent shoots Batman and threatens to kill Gordon's son. Before Dent gets the chance to kill Gordon's son, Batman tackles him off the building, and he falls to his death. To preserve Dent's image as Gotham's white knight, Batman tells Gordon to blame Dent's murders on him. This makes it possible for Gordon to continue the prosecution of the mob, and it starts a manhunt for Batman. Batman is no hero; he is what Gotham needs him to be. He has become The Dark Knight.

2.4 – Discussion

In the following I will discuss the tenuous difference between Batman and The Joker. The summaries above tell us that fear is a reoccurring theme in this trilogy, and that fear is used by both hero and villain. It is also pointed out that the uncanny has a place in this discussion, as both Batman and The Joker can be considered uncanny characters in the sense that they are both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. The uncanny can be linked to fear, which I will illustrate below, and it works as a link between these two characters. Finally, I will move the discussion over towards good and evil, with a primary focus on how the actions of these two characters would be viewed from a utilitarian point of view. The goal is to discover whether these two characters can be considered similar in nature, or complete opposites.

2.4.1 – The Uncanny

In *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (2016), Andrew Bennet and Nicholas Royle say that “To try to define the uncanny is immediately to encounter one of its decisive paradoxes, namely that it has to do with a *troubling* of definitions, with a fundamental disturbance of what we think and feel” (Bennet & Royle, 2016, p. 35). The uncanny is not something logical with an obvious definition. Bennet and Royle believe that the uncanny can be a wide variety of things. The uncanny is a disturbance, something we think we are familiar with, but proves to be unfamiliar. The trouble of defining the term is linked to our thoughts and feelings as human beings. We have different perspectives, different ideas of how things are and should be perceived. The uncanny can be a feeling, for example, the feeling of *déjà vu*, where you have the sense that you have experienced a situation before, and you know what is going to happen. You get the feeling of familiarity, but it is disturbed by an unsettling feeling of which you cannot explain. How can you know what is going to happen if it has not happened yet? The problem with this situation is that if one experiences a situation and gets the feeling of *déjà vu* one would experience an uncanny feeling. If the same situation happens when one is there with a friend, the friend might not feel anything abnormal like *déjà vu*, and the situation would only be uncanny for oneself and not the friend. It is one’s personal perspective of the situation which generate the uncanny feeling.

Further, Bennet and Royle state that “the uncanny has to do with making things *uncertain*: it has to do with the sense that things are not as they have come to appear through habit and familiarity, that they may challenge all rationality and logic” (Bennet & Royle, 2016, p. 36). This means that uncertainty and the uncanny are indisputably linked. That things we perceive as familiar take different shapes or forms which causes us to not understand what we are looking at. This point is of importance for this thesis as it allows for both Batman and The Joker to be considered uncanny. I will argue that Batman and The Joker are both uncanny because they are both recognizably human and humans are familiar. To see a human is a familiar feeling and humans are not unnatural or challenging in any way shape or form. However, there is also something unfamiliar about Batman and The Joker. As already mentioned, they are both human beings and share general human attributes, but they have changed their appearance to something unnatural and illogical for a human being which defamiliarizes them. The Joker’s makeup is uncanny, both because of the big smile he has painted across his face, which makes his mouth unnaturally big, and in the exaggerated use of eyeshadow, which makes his eyes look much bigger than that of an ordinary person. The white paint he uses across his face makes him look like a corpse, while his hair resembles seaweed. All these changes to his appearance make him look unfamiliar, but he is also wearing a suit. The suit represents something familiar and stands in contrast to the unfamiliar aspects of his appearance. Batman’s suit makes him resemble a Greek god, or a statue, as he is huge and very muscular. The cape gives him a sense of sublime authority, and the mask hides half his face. The mask is uncanny because we can see, but at the same time, we cannot see. The mask creates a false front, where even though it looks human, it is not. The same is true with The Joker, however, he does not need a physical mask like Batman. His face is the mask, which again creates this false front where we think we know what we are looking at. They both become uncanny creatures because they change the familiar to the unfamiliar, and because they are unfamiliar and familiar at the same time.

Bennet and Royle continue by providing thirteen forms that the uncanny can take, of which two are relevant for this thesis. The first being animism, which is “the rhetorical term referring to a situation in which what is inanimate or lifeless is given attributes of life or spirit” (Bennet & Royle, 2016, p. 37). This form of the uncanny is mostly relevant for The Joker, but it also relates to Batman in the sense that he looks much like a statue or a machine. However, Batman also resembles a bat, which is not an inanimate or lifeless object. Bats are creatures which we know to be alive. Batman dressing up as a bat does not change the fact

that bats are animated lifeful creatures. The Joker, on the other hand, takes up the appearance of a joker from a deck of cards, and he also resembles a corpse. A corpse, or a joker, is contrary to a bat, inanimate and lifeless objects, which makes The Joker more suited for this part of the discussion. We would never expect that one of the jokers in the new deck of cards we buy at the store should suddenly come to life, nor that Grandpa Smith suddenly wakes up from his grave. The Joker takes inanimate and lifeless objects and gives them attributes of life. He merges his own persona with that of a joker playing card which makes the depicted joker on the card a live human being. This is what creates an uncanny feeling when dealing with The Joker. We would not question anything about seeing Heath Ledger (the actor who plays The Joker) walking down the street, as this would simply be a man walking down the street, there is nothing unfamiliar or unsettling about this. But if Ledger were to put on his Joker makeup and walk down the street, we would experience an uncanny feeling because it would trigger the feeling of unfamiliarity. Watching a joker walk down the street would be unsettling, as a joker is not something that should be walking around. The same goes for watching a corpse do the same thing.

The other relevant form of the uncanny that Bennet and Royle have provided is anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism is “a more specific (because specifically human) form of animism. It is the rhetorical figure that refers to a situation in which what is not human is given attributes of human form or shape” (Bennet & Royle, 2016, p. 37). This specific form of animism relates to the character of Batman. As standard animism relates to The Joker because a joker playing card is an inanimate object, anthropomorphism relates to Batman because Batman gives bats, a creature which has nothing to do with humans, human attributes. Batman takes something we are familiar with, a bat, and makes it unfamiliar. Bats should not have legs and arms, it should not in any shape or form, look anything like a human. By taking up the appearance of a bat, Batman creates a situation where something that is not human is given human attributes. This is what truly makes the character of Batman uncanny, as a human bat is illogical, unnatural, and unsettling.

To sum up what the uncanny means, Bennet and Royle offer the following explanation: “In sum, then, the uncanny can be described as the thoughts and feelings that may arise on those occasions when the homely becomes unhomely, when the familiar becomes uncomfortably strange or the unfamiliar becomes strangely familiar.” (Bennet & Royle, 2016, p. 40). In essence, this means that the uncanny is the feeling we get when something we know changes form or looks different to what we expect. The uncanny is here

described as a feeling, however, it is a feeling that occurs when we encounter something strange, something that we do not understand. By this definition, in addition to the two forms of uncanny which are mentioned above. The uncanny is a description which fits both Batman and The Joker, as they are, or they represent, something strange and unfamiliar which we do not understand. They create the feeling of the uncanny from their presence which makes them uncanny in nature.

All in all, the uncanny is a product of what is strange, unfamiliar, or unhomely. It is a feeling that occurs when we, as humans, experience something that feels out of place, a strange or frightening feeling. The uncanny is, therefore, linked with fear. The definition of fear, which is mentioned above, is the bad feeling you have when you are in danger, when something bad might happen, or when a particular thing frightens you. The uncanny frightens us, and because it frightens us, we can say that we fear the uncanny, we fear that of which we do not understand, we fear the unfamiliar, the unhomely, the strange. Both Batman and The Joker are characters that people fear, and we fear them because they are uncanny. This is how the two characters are similar. The similarity is not, in this instance, a similarity in actions, of what they do and how they behave. It is a similarity in the nature of each respective character. What I mean by this, is that the actions they perform do not matter. The fact that Batman spends his nights on rooftops and beating up criminals, or that The Joker spends his time planning how to disrupt order and promote chaos, is insignificant for this part of the discussion. In this context, the two are similar because they are both uncanny, they are both unnatural and strange creatures who promotes fear in their victims. The uncanniness attached to both characters also makes us uncertain about what to expect. There is an ambiguity connected to these characters, in the sense that they are both familiar and unfamiliar. This also creates a sense of ambiguity in how we perceive them, as it is difficult to know whether they are good or bad when presented in such an ambiguous way.

2.4.2 – Representation of Good and Evil in *The Dark Knight*

In the previous chapter, I made an emphasis on the difficulty of defining evil. The term is too broad and complex for an accurate definition, however, I decided to use Jeremy Bentham's idea of the principle of utility as a guide to determine whether an action can be considered good or evil. This is done because utilitarianism is unbiased. It does not consider who

performs an action, it only questions the morality of each given action. The question asked for each action is whether the action promote pleasure (good) or pain (evil) for the general population in a society. It is a common belief that all superheroes are good, and all supervillains are bad. The hero's actions are always good, and the villain's actions are always evil, or motivated by evil tendencies. In the following I will discuss actions performed by both Batman and The Joker and use the principle of utility to determine how these actions can be considered either good or evil.

2.4.2.1 - The Joker

The Joker performs a lot of unmoral and questionable actions over the course of the movie. Let us start by looking at the beginning of the movie where The Joker and a band of criminals are robbing a bank. The Joker manipulates these criminals to kill each other, one by one, and he ends up killing the last one himself as he escapes with all the money. According to utilitarianism, all of mankind is subjected to the sensations of pain and pleasure. It is pain and pleasure that governs us, they tell us how we ought to behave and how we should behave. In the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, pain is described as “the feelings that you have in your body when you have been hurt or when you are sick, or, mental or emotional suffering” (Dictionary, Oxford Learner's, 2022). And pleasure is described as “a state of feeling or being happy or satisfied, or, the activity of enjoying yourself, especially in contrast to working” (Dictionary, Oxford Learner's , 2022). Now, what does all this mean in the context of this bank robbery? Is it possible to establish any sensation of pleasure to it? The short answer would be no. There is no sensation of pleasure for the general population gained by this act. None of the victims are enjoying the heist or feel any sense of happiness as they are forced to hold a live grenade in their hands as the robbery is taking place. The action does generate pain, as the victims will experience, perhaps, both mental and emotional suffering because of it. The only sensation of pleasure that can be gained is for The Joker himself, as he accomplishes the heist and leaves with a lot of money. The Joker also kills one person and manipulate others to kill for him. Murder is another action which has nothing in common with the sensation of pleasure, and The Joker performs the action as naturally as if he where to put milk in his cereal. He has no empathy; no conscience and he does not fear the consequences that could follow. When he describes himself, he says that he is “an agent of chaos. He is like

a wild dog chasing a car, he would not know what to do with it even if he catches it.” All he does is random acts which in some form benefit him. The society as a whole is of no interest, and the actions he performs underline this fact.

Further, we can look at all the other actions of The Joker and how they relate to the sensation of pain or pleasure. The problem is, all his actions are similar to the actions performed during the bank robbery. Murder without thought or consequence, manipulation, forcing difficult or impossible choices. These are all actions The Joker performs, and none of them gather any sensation of pleasure for the general population. Examples of these actions can be his meeting with the mob, which involves a murder. When he is hired to kill Batman, he starts to murder innocent people. When he kidnaps Harvey and Rachel, he forces Batman to choose whom he wants to live. When he manipulates Dent to go seek vengeance for Rachel’s death and blows up the hospital. Or, when he rigs the two ferries with explosives, which forces the passengers to either blow up the other ferry or get blown up themselves. None of these actions generate pleasure for the general population. They do however, generate pain.

Let us revisit Bentham’s idea of a legislator, a person who controls the laws of society and whose task is to promote happiness in the members of his society. This is the person who is supposed to evaluate actions in regard to pain and pleasure and to discourage any action which promotes pain. The problem that occurs when dealing with The Joker is that he is not subjected to anyone but himself. He does not care about any type of legislator as he is his own master, no one controls him. Now, this is not to say that Gotham does not have any legislator. Gotham is a huge city, which we can compare in size to New York City. There are laws in Gotham, which are determined by a legislator. They have politicians, judges, lawyers, and police, who all try to follow these rules and punish those who break them. The legislator is detrimental for how Bentham thought an action should be considered in the context of good and evil. In this view, good and evil has to do with a general balance of tendencies, which would be up to the legislator to decide. The tendencies can be evaluated by the six dimensions of intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, and purity. If more than one individual is affected, we must also add the dimension of extent. What is meant by a balance of tendencies is whether the action, in context to the seven dimensions, are on the side of pleasure or pain. If the action sides with pleasure it is a good action, if the action sides with pain it is an evil action.

In the case of The Joker's actions, all these dimension's side with pain. He does not generate any sort of pleasure for the general population. The people he murders are usually civilians, with a few exceptions of some mob bosses and people in their crew. However, even killing a mob boss will not generate pleasure for the general population, as The Joker takes over the gang and continues to spread chaos and fear throughout the city. His attempts to kill Batman lead to the death of multiple civilians, a judge, and the police commissioner. Again, there is no pleasure to be gained by these actions as all they do is to continue spreading chaos and fear. The tendency towards pain is especially evident when he forces Batman to choose between Rachel and Harvey. This action becomes even more malevolent when Batman discovers that he was tricked, as he was sent to save Harvey instead of Rachel. Both Batman and Harvey wanted Rachel to be the one who lived. Their pain is visualized in the following scenes where we see Bruce sitting in his living room, contemplating how he could have done everything different, and believes he has lost everything. Harvey wakes up in the hospital and sees the coin he left for Rachel is burned. Harvey screams out in agony, ripping of his bandages and dives into a mental hole where all forms of pleasure is gone, and only pain remains. In Harvey's case, The Joker's actions have generated so much pain that he no longer sees any light. He willingly seeks out those he deems responsible for Rachel's death, however, there is no one to blame but The Joker. With the people on the ferries, it is the same story. They get the choice of blowing up the other boat, which means they will practically murder hundreds of people, they can wait and get blown up themselves, or they can all wait, and The Joker will blow up both ferries. Every outcome of this will have a tendency towards pain. What we see from the discussions on the boat is that when put into this situation, the people vote to blow up the other ferry, however, no one is able to follow through. In the end, they all just await their destiny in silence. There is no joy nor pleasure to be found in this situation.

All in all, The Joker is, in context to the principle of utility, a purely evil character. There is nothing about his actions which generates pleasure for the general population. Every action sides with pain, which gives them a general evil tendency. He is a fear-inducing, chaotic and – by all accounts - evil character. He has no concern for other people, his actions show no empathy, no wish of doing anything good. He destroys people, he creates chaos, death, and misery. Lasting physical and psychological pain is evident as a result of all his actions. The Joker's goal has nothing to do with creating a better society, it is all about disrupting order and creating chaos. To prove that all humans are bad, and that we are all

subjected to this inconvenient truth. There is nothing to support the argument that The Joker can be the “good guy”, as The Joker’s actions are all linked towards an evil tendency. Good and evil, in the sense of utilitarianism, is linked up with a social context. To determine an action as either good or evil has to do with how the citizens in general experience or are affected by said action. The Joker does not consider himself a citizen, he is the opposite of everything we need to uphold order in a society. This is also strengthens the argument of The Joker being uncanny, because we expect people to behave in certain ways inside a society, expectations which The Joker does not embody.

2.4.2.2 – Batman

Batman, or Bruce Wayne, is a character who lies on the border between a vigilante and a hero. In *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary*, a vigilante is defined as “a member of a group of people who try to prevent crime or punish criminals in their community, especially because they think the police are not doing this” (Dictionary, Oxford Learner's, 2022). This is a troubling definition, as it allows for a vigilante to also be a hero. It is also worth noting that The Joker puts himself above society, which is what a vigilante is in danger of doing. In the previous chapter, we find the definition of heroes and superheroes, which states that these people are protectors, people who do the right thing, people who use their powers to help others, they are brave, they pursue justice, they fight evil. This is, in essence, the same role as that of a vigilante. A vigilante also pursues justice and tries to help people who cannot fend for themselves. They take the battle in their own hands because they believe that the police, or the government, are inadequate in performing these tasks. The true distinction between a vigilante and a hero is found when looking at what motivates them. A vigilante has a more self-centered motivation, he is motivated by creating a sense of self-imposed justice, justice which is beneficial for himself. Many people might agree with what he is doing, however, this is not central to a vigilante’s motivation. The hero’s motivation is centered around selflessness, they want to create, not personal, but universal justice. Again, many people will agree with them, but in contrast to the vigilante, this is also what motivates them into action. Batman is often described as a vigilante by Gotham’s officials because they want to vilify him, no one should take the law into their own hands, as this is dangerous if the police is to have any effect. However, even though the police label him as a vigilante, Batman is not

motivated by creating any form of self-centered justice. His motivation is to restore hope to Gotham, a city which is drowning in crime and corruption. He seeks to inspire the citizens to “take back” their city, a city he knows has the potential to be great. He does not seek personal justice, as he learned early that personal justice is not justice at all. He wants universal justice, but the city’s officials are inadequate in providing it. This is why he takes on his mask, and also what makes him a hero and not a vigilante.

In *Superheroes and Philosophy: Truth, Justice and the Socratic Way*, Jeph Loeb and Tom Morris says that “The concept of a hero is what philosophers call a normative concept. It doesn’t just characterize what is, it offers us a glimpse of what ought to be. It has a claim on us. It presents us with something to aspire in our own lives (Loeb & Morris, 2005, p. 16). In the light of this, we can say that a hero is something we, as human beings, label onto other people who have done something heroic. This can for example be a war hero, where the person did some remarkable and selfless act to help his fellow soldiers, or it could be a person who runs into a burning building to save someone. We give these people the title of hero because they do selfless, and often dangerous, acts to help other people. It reflects something we aspire to be. It is important to remember that when dealing with Batman, we no longer deal with an ordinary hero, but a superhero. He falls under the superhero category because he also has unusual strength or power. This is not the typical strength or power we see in characters like Superman or Thor, where the strength is obvious from the fact that these characters have superpowers, like the ability to fly, shooting laser from the eyes or controlling the element of lightning. Batman has no superpowers, his strength or power lies with his training at The League of Shadows, he is stronger, faster, and more skilled than even the most proficient martial arts fighter. He is also an incredibly rich individual, which allows him to obtain a very high-quality body armor, his car, which is more like a tank than a car, and different useful gadgets which helps him jump from rooftops and disappear into the night. His powers and abilities are far beyond those of ordinary people, which is what makes him “super” and, therefore, also a superhero.

As a superhero, Batman tries to overcome evil with the force of good. In essence, this means that all of Batman’s actions should be good, or have a tendency towards good. If we look at Batman’s actions over the course of *The Dark Knight*, this general tendency is evident as Batman’s goal is to restore order to Gotham, to rid the city of its corrupt officials and criminal underworld. In Robert McKee’s *Story* (1999), a book about the foundation and key elements of storytelling, he says that: “If a character is put into a situation where he must

choose between a clear good versus a clear evil, or right versus wrong, the audience, understanding the character's point of view, will know in advance how the character will choose. The choice between good and evil or between right and wrong is no choice at all" (McKee, 1999, p. 248). If we look at this goal from a utilitarian point of view, the general tendency would side with pleasure, as achieving this goal would benefit the general population. The question which remains to be answered is whether his actions reflect the same tendencies as the goal. The first example I will use is when Batman captures Lau and brings him back to Gotham. By performing this act, Batman makes it possible for the police to apprehend the entire mob. The result is a generation of pleasure for the general population, which means that this is a good act. This is an act which generally reflects what Batman does and has done. He catches criminals and presents them to the police for a judicial punishment.

Moving over to more questionable actions performed by Batman, we see the likes of refusing to reveal who he is to stop The Joker from killing innocent people, and consequentially letting Harvey take his place. He makes the choice to save Rachel over Harvey when forced to choose between them. He develops a surveillance system which can locate and listen in on every single citizen of Gotham. He also ends up committing murder at the end of the movie when he pushes Harvey Dent off the building. To uncover whether Batman is fundamentally good or evil in the context of utilitarianism, these acts need to be discussed. The first act in question is to not reveal his identity. By refusing to comply with The Joker's demand, he ultimately forces The Joker to make good on his threat of killing more people until he does. In the end, Batman caves, as he is unable to endure the fact that these people die because of him. Just before he is about to reveal himself, Harvey steps in and takes his place. Rachel is outraged by this decision and asks Alfred how Bruce can let Harvey do this. The answer is interesting, as it illustrates the importance of Batman for Gotham City. Alfred's answer is that

Perhaps both Bruce and Mr. Dent, believed that Batman stands for something more important than the whims of a terrorist, Miss Dawes, even if everyone hates him for it. That's the sacrifice he's making. He is not being a hero; he's being something more (Nolan, 2008).

This answer tells us that to do good does not necessarily equal being well-liked or popular. The world is not black and white and sometimes we must make sacrifices for the greater

good. Bruce could stand up and accept his punishment, however, this would not stop The Joker. The Joker would probably continue to spread fear and misery around Gotham even if Bruce revealed himself. Batman is the only one who can stop him, and it is therefore the right decision to not give in to his demands. If Batman surrenders, The Joker will win. If we look at it from a utilitarian standpoint, not revealing himself is more likely to generate pleasure for the general population, as it allows for Batman to stop The Joker. This means that this is also an example of how Batman is a good character.

In Story, Robert McKee says that “TRUE CHARACTER can only be expressed through choice in dilemma. How the person chooses to act under pressure is who he is – the greater the pressure, the truer and deeper the choice to character” (McKee, 1999, p. 375). This means that we can discover who a character truly is by looking at the choices that he or she makes. The more pressure he is under when making said decision, the more accurate that choice reflects upon his true character. In the previous example, Batman is under a lot of pressure. He thinks that people die because he refuses to comply with The Joker’s demands. When Harvey takes his place, we see that Batman’s resolve deepens, that he believes Batman is more important and that he can stop The Joker without revealing who he is. The next example is again affected by choice, but this time he is faced with dilemma. McKee tells us that:

True choice is dilemma. It occurs in two situations. First, a *choice between irreconcilable goods*: From the character’s view two things are desirable, he wants both, but circumstances are forcing him to choose only one. Second, a *choice between the lesser of two evils*: From the character’s view two things are undesirable, he wants neither, but circumstances are forcing him to choose one (McKee, 1999, p. 249).

The Joker has kidnapped both Harvey and Rachel, and he tells Batman that he will only be able to save one of them. When Batman chooses Rachel, he shows the limit to his resolve. From an unbiased perspective, the choice of whom to save seems obvious. He must save Harvey because Harvey is the one who can cause real change to happen. He is the one who prosecutes the mob and makes the streets of Gotham free of organized crime. The dilemma is obvious as Batman chooses to save the woman he loves. His goal of restoring hope to Gotham fades as he knows he cannot live without Rachel; she must be the one to live. Even from a utilitarian point of view, this decision is hard to peg down as either good or evil, as the act has no obvious pleasurable outcome. If he saves Harvey, Rachel dies. If he saves Rachel, Harvey

dies. Pain will unquestionably be the dominant sensation to follow no matter what. In the light of Batman's goal, he should always choose to save Harvey in this situation, as saving Harvey would lead to an increase of pleasure in the general population because he can continue prosecuting the mob. The problem that occurs with this line of thought is that Harvey is also in love with Rachel, and no one can know how he will react to the death of the woman he loves. We get to see his reaction, which is Harvey turning into the vigilante "Two-Face" and he seeks out those he holds responsible for her death. Batman cannot know what is going to happen as a result of his choice. The choice he makes is emotional and it shows, not that he is good or evil, but that he is human. Humans make mistakes, and Batman is no exception. These examples of choice do not prove whether Batman is either good or evil, but they support Barringer's argument that superheroes are flawed, and even acting with the best intentions, their dealings can have terrible consequences.

The next example of one of Batman's more questionable actions has to do with the use of a high-tech surveillance system. In the literary review chapter, I have explained how this system works and that it is very similar in structure to Jeremy Bentham's panopticon prison. In short, this is a surveillance system which makes use of sonar, or soundwaves, to create images. The system is tapped into every microphone in Gotham and provides Batman with a sonar image of the entire city. When we are introduced to the system, we see that Batman is showing it to Fox, because he needs him to operate it for him while he is out looking for The Joker. Fox is obviously uncomfortable in the situation as he recognizes the device as both immoral and unethical. Batman defends it by stating that he needs to find The Joker, and he is out of options. The Joker has pressured Batman into making the choice of using this device, and Batman no longer sees any other options. The only thing that matters is to catch The Joker and stop him from spreading more fear, chaos, and misery. Fox agrees to help him, but that this will be the last time, as he cannot condone the existence of a device such as this. Using this device, Batman locates The Joker and is victorious in their final battle. The Joker is captured and as the mission is complete, Fox destroys the device. The destruction of the device is the most important aspect of this discussion, as it tells us that Batman only wanted to use it for a specific purpose. The device is unethical and should never be created by a person who wants to promote good. However, it is not used in any way which results in the sensation of pain. The potential for this device is unclear, however, it is obvious that it can be used to spy and keep track of everyone in Gotham. Therefore, it can be used in a way which will alleviate the feeling of privacy for the population. However, it is not used with this intention.

If the device were not destroyed, there is no telling us what could happen, and a continually use of it would most definitely be labeled as an evil act. In this case, the device served its purpose and was destroyed right after. It helped promote pleasure in the general population by removing The Joker from the society. Again, this action was forced, as Batman felt he no longer had any choice. He chose to use it, fully aware that the device is unethical. This choice might be considered evil because of the potential of the device, however, taking into account of how it was actually used, the action of using it did generate pleasure and not pain for the general population.

In a presentation of Michel Foucault's *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), SparkNotes says that:

The panopticon is not a dream building, but a diagram of power reduced to its ideal form. It perfects the operations of power by increasing the number of people who can be controlled, and decreasing the number needed to operate it. It gives power over people's minds through architecture. As it can be inspected from outside, there is no danger of tyranny (Editors, 2005).

This means that the panopticon cannot be subjected to tyranny, or evil, in the sense that people can watch what is going on inside. This might be true for the panopticon prison, a clear architectural construct, which is Bentham's idea. And it contradicts my discussion in the paragraph above, where I explain why a continued use of this device most likely will lead to pain, or in this sense, tyranny. It might also be a true statement if Batman's device was public, if access was granted in a way which would keep those who control it on a leash. Batman, however, is not a public figure who would leave control of this device to the government. It will never be subjected to inspection from the outside, and the argument that continued use will lead to the sensation of pain still stands to reason.

The final act of Batman which will be discussed is the murder of Harvey Dent. This example also illustrates McKee's point of choice of dilemma. One of the key aspects of Batman's personality is that he does not kill people. In the mind of The Joker, this is Batman's weakness, and The Joker attacks this weakness several times throughout the movie. In this scene Batman must choose between letting Harvey kill Gordon's son or do something drastic to get Harvey away from him. He chooses the latter, as he is not willing to let a child die when he had the power to stop it. He tackles Harvey, and they are both falling off the building. Harvey dies from the impact, but Batman survives because his armor protects him.

We always expect Batman to do good, to do the right thing. We expect him to save Gordon's son because it is the only right thing to do. This proves that the choice between good and evil or between right and wrong is no choice at all, as this is the only action which makes sense, it is the only action which promotes pleasure in the situation. The Harvey Dent we see in the beginning of the movie is gone, this is no longer Harvey, but Two-Face. Two-Face is a dangerous vigilante, who, if left alone, would only generate more pain for the general population. The dilemma of choice is not in the form of choosing who should be allowed to live in this situation, but rather an ethical dilemma because Batman does not kill. Batman's choice of tackling Harvey off the building is an action which promotes the most amount of pleasure for the general population, he does it for the greater good.

In sum, Batman is, in context to the principle of utility, neither strictly good nor bad. He is a great example of how heroes or superheroes are flawed and how acting with good intentions does not necessarily lead to a positive outcome. The figure of Batman also works as an example of the difference between a vigilante and a hero, where motivation is a key aspect. Batman's motivation links to his goal, which is to alleviate Gotham of organized crime and its corrupt officials, he fights for Gotham's soul. The goal reflects an obvious tendency towards generating the sensation of pleasure in the general population. All his actions correlate to this goal, which means that the essence or motivation in each given action has a good tendency. While the outcome does not always reflect the intention, this does not necessarily mean that the action is evil. Actions are controlled by choices, and choices, when put under immense pressure, are what shows the true nature of a character. Choices of dilemma reflects that we, the audience, always know what the character will do. If the character is constantly working towards good, we know that the character will never make a conscious choice towards promoting evil. Batman is always working towards promoting good, which means that the essence of the character is good. If one wants to make an argument of Batman being evil, the conclusion would be that some actions side with a general tendency towards pain. The problem with this line of thought is that in the situations where pain is the outcome, no pleasure could be gained, the choice was between the lesser of two evils. This proves that Batman is neither strictly good nor bad.

2.5 – Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I would like to start with another quote from *Superheroes and Philosophy* where Jeff Brenzel says:

Even when writers have adopted what literary critics might call oppositional or subversive postures with regard to superheroes, those same writers are still testifying strongly to, and relying heavily upon, the notion that comic-book heroes are *supposed* to be good.....they also provoke us into seeing that a superhero cannot be simply good by definition (Brenzel, 2005, p. 149).

In Christopher Nolan's *Batman*-trilogy, this statement is ultimately true in the sense that Batman is supposed to be good. It is also evident that Batman is not a good character strictly because he is a superhero, but because his actions have a tendency towards generating pleasure for the general population. It is easy to think that Batman is a good character because we know him to be the hero of the story. We know that Batman is supposed to fight evil and promote good. The trouble occurs when there is no obvious good outcome of a situation. Batman encounters multiple situations where a pleasurable outcome is unobtainable. These situations are often dictated by choices of dilemma, where the answer to the question "what is the right thing to do?" is that the right thing to do is the only thing to do. Actions or choices become forced when put into a situation where there is no obvious right decision. The right decision is, therefore, correspondent with the general tendency of the one who performs the act. In Batman's case, this means that, when forced, he will always choose in correlation to his goal. As Batman's goal has the tendency of promoting good, he will always choose the action which in his mind promote good. The action might have a tendency towards pain, but it will be less pain than the other choice. I will argue that Batman is neither strictly good nor bad, but in essence, he is good. He is good, not because all his actions reflect a tendency towards good, but because the essence of his character is to promote good to the best of his abilities. He is always working towards the greater good.

The Joker, on the other hand, is a character whose goal is to promote chaos, fear, and misery. He wants to prove that all humans are similar in nature, that no one is truly good. This correlates to his actions, which all have a tendency towards pain. The sensation of pain is linked to evil, which means that The Joker is evil. Batman and The Joker is, therefore, not similar in the sense of what their actions reflect. Everything Batman does is linked to promote

good, and everything The Joker does is linked to promote evil. The two are opposites as their motivation contradicts one another. In the light of their actions, one links to good, and one links to evil, which makes them different and not similar.

There are, however, similarities between these two characters when we move away from looking at the actions they perform and rather look at how they present themselves. Both characters are uncanny, and by being uncanny, they are also both fearful. They both generate fear in their victims from being uncanny in the sense that they present themselves in an unfamiliar way. The uncanny is the thoughts and feelings that arise when we, as humans, encounter that of which we do not understand. Batman and The Joker reflects animism and anthropomorphism, which are aspects of the uncanny which makes them unfamiliar. The familiar is the fact that they are human, but by using makeup and costumes they present themselves in a way which does not reflect a standard human being. They are familiar and unfamiliar at the same time; they create the feeling of uneasiness because we no longer understand quite what we are looking at. The similarity between the two characters is linked to fear. While they use fear differently, the essence is that they both promote fear. The uncanny is, therefore, what makes these two characters similar, in the sense that the uncanny nature of the characters both help to promote fear. It is how this fear is used, and what they hope to achieve through the use of fear which makes them different.

Chapter 3 – *Avengers: Endgame*

3.1 – Introduction

In contrast to *The Dark Knight*, which is a story about one superhero, *Avengers: Endgame* is a movie which features multiple superheroes. The Avengers is a team of superheroes whose task is to protect Earth. When the first comic book was released in 1963, the team consisted of Iron Man, Ant-Man, Hulk, Thor, and The Wasp. The team grew when Captain America was introduced in the fourth issue, and many more were introduced later (Wikipedia, 2022). This thesis focuses on the film *Avengers: Endgame* which is part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). In short, the MCU is one universe which follows one specific timeline. Most of the movies or tv-series released by Marvel after the release of *Iron Man* (2008) belong in this universe. Some movies such as *Spider-Man* (2002) and *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012) are not a part of the MCU, however, in *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (2021) Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield appear as different versions of Peter Parker or Spider-Man because Dr. Strange causes a disturbance with the multiverse. This means that, even though we follow the events that happens in the MCU, the other timelines coexist.

If watched in chronological order, *Avengers: Endgame* is the 23rd movie in this universe and all the previous movies are important to some degree when it comes to the events of this film (Rottentomatoes, 2018). Every movie leading up to *Avengers: Endgame* introduces something of importance. This can be a new character, an important event, or an object. Many of the heroes were introduced to the MCU through their own movies, such as Iron Man, Hulk, Thor, and Captain America. The MCU introduced all these characters before we see them come together in *The Avengers*. For the purposes of this thesis, I will provide a short summary of important aspects leading up to *Avengers: Endgame*, where the events of *Avengers: Infinity War* will prove to be the most crucial of information. The most important factor in both of these movies is the villainous figure of Thanos, who will be thoroughly discussed in this chapter, and who will be placed in opposition to the Avengers group in general. In addition, the uncanny will be discussed in relation to the characters of Thanos, Iron Man, and Dr. Strange to further investigate the similarities of these characters in context to the uncanny.

As mentioned above, Thanos is the villain in both *Avengers: Endgame* and *Avengers: Infinity War*. Before the events that take place in *Avengers: Infinity War*, Thanos makes appearances in the post credit scene of *The Avengers*, and he also has a small role in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) and a final appearance in the post credit scene of *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015). These scenes all portray him as a clear antagonist. He is introduced as someone powerful and someone we should fear. These scenes in other words build towards the character we are ultimately introduced to in *Avengers: Infinity War*. It should also be noted that there are two different versions of Thanos in *Avengers: Endgame*, as the Avengers get tangled up with different timelines and the multiverse. As both versions of Thanos share the same goal, there might not be a vast difference between the two, however, I will further discuss this implication below.

Like in the previous chapter, I will discuss various scenes and events where Jeremy Bentham's principle of utility is relevant. Both sides have goals which reflect upon who they are and what they want to achieve, and the question becomes how these actions benefit the general population. I will try to move away from a purely human perspective, as the events of this film affect the entire universe. In the previous chapter, I suggested that the uncanny aspects of both Batman and The Joker are what made them similar. This chapter will, therefore, also look at the uncanny to discover whether the uncanny always presents itself in both superheroes and supervillains and whether this, in fact, complicates the relationship between them as purely "good" or "evil".

3.2 – The Prerequisites for *Avengers: Endgame*

Avengers: Endgame is what we can consider the end to what has been referred to as the Infinity Saga in the MCU. According to Marvel Cinematic Universe Wiki, the saga gets its name from the prominent role of the infinity stones and Thanos' quest to obtain them (Wiki, Marvel Cinematic Universe, 2022). As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, *Avengers: Endgame* is the 23rd movie in this saga, which subsequently means that there are 22 movies that need to be watched and understood in order to grasp everything about *Avengers: Endgame*. This thesis deals with superheroes and supervillains and how there might not be such a vast difference between them as the standard "good guy/bad guy" narrative implies. This chapter will therefore, discuss specific scenes and aspects in *Avengers: Endgame* in

context to the goal of this thesis. I will operate under the assumption that the reader of this thesis has prior knowledge of the MCU, and not go into much detail on events and characters from the previous movies.

In the following I will discuss the Sokovia Accords which is introduced in *Captain America: Civil War* (2016), as it is of interest for the discussion regarding the Avengers. The Sokovia Accords represent a need to obtain some control over superheroes, as their judgement in certain situations can prove detrimental. It directly reflects upon the problematic aspect of a superhero and their ability to be beyond the law. Further, I will look at the first scene where Thanos is formally introduced in *Avengers: Infinity War*, which will provide arguments for the uncanny aspects of the character. In addition, all scenes where Thanos obtains an infinity stone will be discussed, as these scenes illustrate the lengths he is willing to go to in order to complete his goal.

3.2.1 – The Sokovia Accords

The Sokovia Accords is quite similar to the Keene Act, which will be discussed in the next chapter on *Watchmen*. The Sokovia Accords is a set of legal documents designed to control and regulate the activities of enhanced individuals, including members of government agencies such as S.H.I.E.L.D. or private organizations such as the Avengers (Wiki, Marvel Cinematic Universe, 2022). The document was established by the United Nations as a result of the event in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. The Avengers have free reign to do whatever they like. They take the fight to wherever they deem it necessary. In the aftermath of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, the world population starts to have issues regarding how the Avengers operate, however, Tony Stark (Iron Man) believes that what humanity needs is a protective shield around Earth. In his mind, this shield is in the form of multiple AI controlled suits, much like the Iron Man suit, which will operate to control world peace and destroy any possible terrestrial threats that may come to earth like they did in *The Avengers*. With this goal in mind, Stark creates Ultron, who develops his own consciousness and thinks that the only way to save Earth is by making the planet extinct. Ultron almost succeeds, as he attempts to create a similar extinction event as that which killed the dinosaurs. Approximately one year after *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, we are put into the events of *Captain America: Civil War*. In the beginning of the film, the character of Wanda is partially successful in diverting an explosion

from killing Steve Rogers (Captain America). Using her telekinesis abilities, she moves the explosion away from Rogers, but the explosion destroys a building of humanitarian workers, which again leads many to conclude that the Avengers need to be supervised. Thaddeus Ross, the U.S Secretary of State informs that in the light of this action, the UN will pass the Sokovia Accords which will lead a UN panel to decide when and where the Avengers is needed, and whether they should be regulated. Stark supports the accord while Rogers does not. Stark feels responsible for Ultron and thinks that the Avengers need to be kept on a leash, but Rogers has more faith in his own judgement than that of this panel. This leads to a conflict between Stark and Rogers and the Avengers start a fight between themselves. In the end, the Sokovia Accords stands, and Rogers with a few like-minded Avengers, are outlawed.

The Sokovia Accords reflects a huge problem regarding the existence of superheroes or enhanced humans. Although Stark realize the need for some sort of control over him and the other Avengers, Rogers is not convinced. By opposing the Sokovia Accords, Rogers become an outlaw, however, who is there to arrest him? Who can assert control over superheroes if they refuse to comply with the government? This is the main problem with superheroes as we are dependent on them being on the right side. No ordinary human can oppose or stop them if they decide to go out of line.

The conflict questions whether it is better to be free or better to be safe. Libby Barringer says that the way Marvel responds to this question is best understood through the eyes of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and his depiction of the “state of nature”. In Hobbes mind, men and women are born equal and by equal, he means equally vulnerable and equally free (Barringer, 2009, p. 92). What this means is that we are all equal in the sense that we can all kill or harm others and, therefore, also be killed or harmed by others. We are not bound by any physical restraints which elevate these equalities. The problem with this state of nature in the context of superheroes is that they are also bound by this equality, however, they are much stronger, faster, and better than us, which puts us at a disadvantage. We fear superheroes because we are unsure of how they will use their abilities and we have to trust them to do the right thing. The Sokovia Accords is therefore a means to keep the public safe, or to feel safe. If superheroes are bound by law, the public’s fear of superheroes will decrease, and society will be safer. The means to obtain safety in society is to limit the heroes’ freedom, making the Sokovia Accords necessary for a peaceful society.

3.2.3 – Representation of Thanos and the Quest for Infinity Stones

As mentioned, Thanos has a few short appearances in previous MCU movies. The most prominent of these appearances is in *Guardians of the Galaxy*, where he sits on a flying throne. He is portrayed as someone of great power, but the scene is short and all we learn from the scene is that he is after “the orb”. The orb contains the Power Stone, and the scene merely illustrates that he is after the Infinity Stones. Power is a prominent theme of the Avengers movies. In *Oxford Learners Dictionary*, power is defined as: “control, or the ability to control people or things” (Dictionary, Oxford Learner's, 2022). Thanos is, therefore, a being who holds control, and seeks control of the universe. In the opening scene of *Avengers: Infinity War*, Thanos has attacked Thor’s ship with refugees from Asgard. He is now in possession of the Power Stone and on Thor’s ship, he obtains the Space Stone. Thanos’ appearance is uncanny, he shares basic human features such as a face, body, arms, legs, however, he is huge. Every feature is enhanced, and he looks more like a monster than a human. He is familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. In addition, he wears a golden armor and the Infinity Gauntlet. An armor is familiar to us, but this armor is made for Thanos, which makes the armor unnaturally large and illustrates the immense power that Thanos possesses. The Infinity Gauntlet is in essence a glove, another familiar object, however, this glove is also much larger than a normal glove. It is golden and is of obvious importance. The Gauntlet is more than just an ordinary glove which again turns the familiar to the unfamiliar. All these features are seen in this scene, and they establish Thanos as an uncanny character.

As mentioned, Thanos obtains the Space Stone on Thor’s ship. He murders 50% of the Asgardians and lets the other 50% live, which correlates to his goal of eliminating half of all life in the universe. The Space Stone is his reward for conquering the Asgardians, as they were the ones in possession of it. I mentioned power as a prominent theme for the Avengers movie, which is illustrated by these Infinity Stones. The stones give the wielder power over that aspect of the universe, in other words, control over that aspect of the universe. If Thanos obtains all the stones, he controls the universe. Both stones we see Thanos possess after this scene, the Power Stone and the Space Stone, was obtained through slaughter and destruction, as the Power Stone was obtained when Thanos destroyed the planet of Xandar. This indicates that when Thanos obtains a stone, he promotes pain for the general population. The stones are used as a means to an end, the end being his ultimate goal of bringing the universe back in

balance by eliminating half of all life in the universe. I will discuss this goal in context to the principle of utility below, as the goal is flawed when presented with logic.

The next stone that Thanos acquires is the Reality Stone, which is located in a place called Knowhere. The Guardians of the Galaxy goes to Knowhere to get the stone before Thanos, however, Thanos has already acquired the stone and destroyed Knowhere in the process. Thanos kidnaps the character of Gamora, who knows the location of the Soul Stone, and tortures Gamora's sister, Nebula, until she reveals the location. Gamora caves and tell Thanos that the Soul Stone is on Vormir. Thanos and Gamora travel to Vormir where they are met by Red Skull, the keeper of the Soul Stone. Red Skull tells Thanos that in order to obtain the stone, he must sacrifice that of which he loves, a soul for a soul. Gamora starts to laugh, as she believes Thanos is incapable of loving anyone. The laugh quickly fades as she realizes that Thanos loves her as a daughter. Thanos sacrifice Gamora and gets the Soul Stone. These actions continue to prove that Thanos is willing to do anything to obtain the stones. He destroyed Knowhere and its inhabitants, he is willing to torture one of his daughters, Nebula, to get information from Gamora and he is willing to sacrifice Gamora to obtain the stone. The sacrifice is interesting in the sense that it proves that Thanos is capable of love. The stone would not, according to Red Skull, present itself unless the one who obtains it understands its value. In Thanos' mind, he had no other option here than to sacrifice Gamora, he must get all the stones, and this was the only way to do it. The action proves the true nature of Thanos' character and that he really is willing to do anything to get the stones.

The next stone is the Time Stone, kept by Dr. Strange on Earth. The Children of Thanos attacks Earth and when they are unable to get the stone from Dr. Strange, they kidnap him and takes him aboard their ship heading for Titan. Iron Man and Spider-Man has sneaks on board and rescues Dr. Strange. The three of them decides to let the ship take them to Titan, bringing the fight to Thanos. When they arrive at Titan, they meet The Guardians of the Galaxy who also traveled to Titan in an attempt to stop Thanos. Dr. Strange uses the Time Stone to look into future outcomes of the coming conflict. He sees 14,000,605 possible outcomes where the Avengers only win in one of the predictions. Dr. Strange formulate a plan to make this future happen. Thanos arrives from Vormir, and a fight breaks out between them, Thanos is victorious and as he is about to kill Iron Man, Dr. Strange offers him the Time Stone if he spare Iron Man's life. Thanos accepts the deal and Dr. Strange hands over the Time Stone. Thanos then uses the Space Stone to transport himself to Earth where the last stone is located.

The Mind Stone was used in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* to create the character of Vision. The stone resides in Vision's forehead and grants him many unique abilities. The Avengers have traveled to Wakanda in order to separate the stone from Vision's forehead before they destroy it, as Vision believes that Wanda has the ability to do so. Thanos has sent his army to obtain the stone and a final battle between our heroes and Thanos' army occurs. The fight goes poorly for the Avengers, but Thor shows up when all hope seems to be lost. With Thor on the battlefield, the tides turn, and it seems like our heroes might win. This is when Thanos arrives from Titan, and he works his way towards Vision. No one is capable of stopping him, and Wanda destroys the stone while it still resides in Vision's forehead. Thanos uses the Time Stone to revert Wanda's action and brings Vision back to life, he then rips the stone from Vision's forehead. Now in possession of all the stones Thanos snaps his fingers and teleports away. Next, we see that half of all life disintegrates as many characters gets turned into dust. Thanos has completed his goal, and by doing so, eliminated half of the universe's population. This is where *Avengers: Infinity War* ends, and we get to the events of *Avengers: Endgame*.

3.3 – *Avengers: Endgame*

Avengers: Endgame takes place in the immediate aftermath of *Avengers: Infinity War*. Thanos' snap did exactly what he intended, and half of all living creatures have ceased to exist. The movie shows how the Avengers deal with the new world and how the loss of their loved ones affected them. The following plot summary will explore important aspects and scenes from *Avengers: Endgame* before I move on to the discussion of Thanos, the Avengers, and the uncanny

4.3.1 – The Important Aspects and Scenes from *Avengers: Endgame*

The opening scene of *Avengers: Endgame* shows Tony Stark and Nebula who is trapped in deep space. Captain Marvel rescues them and takes them back to Earth. Stark blames Rogers for not listening to him when he warned about the prospect of something like this happening, and he takes off his Iron Man suit, retiring from the Avengers. The Avengers locate Thanos on a remote planet and plans to use the stones to bring everyone back. They find a weakened

Thanos, who has no chance of fighting them off. Thor chops off Thanos' arm and the Infinity Glove falls to the floor, but the Infinity Stones are gone. Thanos reveals that he used the power of the stones to turn them into atoms, this way, the snap can never be undone as the stones are gone. Enraged by this, Thor decapitates Thanos, and we move five years forward in time to 2023.

Scott Lang (Ant-Man) escapes the Quantum Realm after five years, as the people who were supposed to pull him out vanished in the snap. He concludes that time works differently in the Quantum Realm, as he only experienced the five years as five hours. This leads him to believe that if there is a way to navigate the Quantum Realm, it would be possible to exit at specific points in time. Lang goes to the Avengers Compound, and they recruit a retired Tony Stark to help with this idea. Stark solves the issue with time travel and creates a wristband which allows them to navigate the Quantum Realm. The Avengers formulate a plan to go back in time, obtain the Infinity Stones, return to their present time, and use the stones to bring everyone back. The way time works in the MCU is a problematic aspect when we want to view the Avengers as good. The idea seems good at first glance: they get the stones and bring everyone who vanished back to life. Bruce Banner, or Hulk, explains time in short detail when some of the Avengers thinks of the "kill Thanos while he is still a baby" idea. "If you go into the past, that past becomes your future, and your former present becomes the past, which can't now be changed by your new future!" (Russo & Russo, *Avengers: Endgame*, 2019). What this means is that when you change something about the past, it will not affect your future, but rather the future of that timeline. Consider a timeline as a universe in itself. Changing a timeline will only affect that specific timeline, or universe, it is therefore not possible to change the past in order to change the future that you come from. The problem is, therefore, not that the Avengers plan is a bad one considering how it will affect their own universe, but it is bad in the context of how it will affect the new universes which will be created because of them. I will provide examples of this below.

Putting their plan into action, the Avengers forms three teams who will go to three different times to obtain the stones. Banner, Lang, Rogers, and Stark travels to 2012 where they can find three of the stones in New York City. Rogers secures the Mind Stone by taking it from Hydra. Stark and Lang are unsuccessful in obtaining the Space Stone, and 2012 Loki escapes with it. This forces Rogers and Stark to go further back in time to 1970 where they find a different version of the Space Stone. Banner goes to the Sanctum Sanctorum to get the Time Stone from Dr. Strange, however, Dr. Strange is, at this point in time, still Dr. Stephen

Strange the surgeon, and he meets the Ancient One instead, the current keeper of the Time Stone. This is where Banner understands the true implications of their plan, as the Ancient One tell Banner that the Infinity Stones are detrimental to the timeline. She explains:

The Infinity Stones create what you experience as the flow of time. Remove one stone and that flow splits. Now, this may benefit your reality but my new one, not so much. In this new branched reality, without our chief weapon against the forces of darkness, our world will be over run. Millions will suffer. So, tell me Doctor, can your science prevent all that? (Russo & Russo, Avengers: Endgame, 2019)

Banner offers the solution of promising to return the stones to their timeline after the Avengers use them to get everyone back. The Ancient One cannot risk the fate of her universe on a promise, however, Banner says that Dr. Strange gave the stone away willingly which changes the situation. She believes that Dr. Strange is supposed to be the wisest and best of their order, and if he gave away the stone, he had to have a reason. She gives Bruce the stone, and he returns to 2023.

The second team consists of Rocket and Thor, who travels to Asgard in 2013 to obtain the Reality Stone. They get the stone, and before they leave, Thor also retrieves his old hammer Mjolnir. The third team consists of Barton (Hawkeye), Romanoff (Black Widow), Rhodes (War Machine), and Nebula, who travels to 2014 to obtain the Soul Stone and the Power Stone. Barton and Romanoff travels to Vormir where they meet Red Skull who explain, as he did when Thanos and Gamora were there, that the stone requires a sacrifice. Romanoff ends up sacrificing herself so Barton can get the stone. Meanwhile, Rhodes and Nebula travel to the planet of Morag to get the Power Stone. They obtain the stone, and Rhodes return to 2023 with it. Nebula, who was supposed to return as well, gets incapacitated by her cybernetic implants which is linked to 2014-Nebula, who still believes in Thanos' cause. This allows 2014-Thanos to see 2023-Nebula's memories and he learns of his victory and how the Avengers are now trying to undo everything. 2014-Thanos captures 2023-Nebula and sends 2014-Nebula forward in time to prepare for his arrival.

When all teams have returned to the present with the six Infinity Stones, the Avengers places the stones in a new Gauntlet created by Banner, Rocket and Stark. Banner, who has the most resistance to the stones' radiation, puts on the gauntlet and reverses Thanos' snap. Meanwhile, 2014-Nebula activates the time machine and transports 2014-Thanos and his ship to 2023. Thanos uses the cannons on his ship to destroy the Avengers Compound and chaos

erupts. 2014-Thanos lands in the ruins and commands 2014-Nebula to bring him the stones. Stark, Thor, and Rogers go to confront Thanos and he reveals his new plan:

As long as there are those that remember what was, there will always be those that are unable to accept what can be.

I will shred this universe down to its last atom. And then, with the stones you have collected for me, create a new one, teeming with life, that knows not what it is lost but only what it has been given (Russo & Russo, *Avengers: Endgame*, 2019).

Stark, Thor and Rogers fight 2014-Thanos, but Thanos proves to be too strong. Dr. Strange and everyone else who vanished finally arrives and the fight starts again. The Avengers tries to secure the gauntlet and the Infinity Stones, but Thanos manages to get a hold of it. In the second before Thanos snaps his fingers and destroys the universe, Stark interrupts and steals the stones. He snaps his fingers and disintegrates Thanos and his army, causing himself to die from the stones' radiation. The Avengers win, but at the cost of Iron Man's life.

After Stark is buried, Rogers get the mission of bringing the stones and Mjolnir back to their respective timelines. Realizing that this is a chance to live out his life before he got trapped in the ice for 70 years, Rogers remains in the past to live with the love of his life, Peggy Carter. He returns to the present as an old man, passing on the iconic Captain America shield to Sam Wilson (Falcon).

3.4 – Discussion

In the following I will discuss Thanos' goal in context to the principle of utility. I mentioned above that the goal is flawed when presented with logic, and I will explain what I meant by this below. In addition, I will investigate if there are any differences concerning 2018-Thanos and 2014-Thanos. Further, I have also explained how time works in the MCU and that the Avengers actions are bad, or evil, because they do not grasp the consequences of tangling with time. I will, therefore, provide a few examples of how detrimental these consequences can become. This will also illustrate the need for a document such as the Sokovia Accords. Furthermore, I will discuss the uncanny, and how or if the uncanny is present in both the Avengers and Thanos. In closing, the discussion should prove the tenuous difference between the heroes and villain.

3.4.1 – Thanos

In the previous chapter I concluded that a character's goal is ultimately what inspires their actions. Thanos' goal is to bring balance to the universe, meaning that his actions should all be motivated by this goal. In *Avengers: Infinity War*, he explains why he thinks this is needed: "This universe is finite, its resources finite. If life is left unchecked, life will cease to exist. It needs correction" (Russo & Russo, *Avengers: Infinity War*, 2018). As aforementioned in Chapter 2, Thanos believes this because his planet, Titan, was destroyed because of overpopulation. He wanted to reduce the population by 50% which would lead the rest to thrive. The Titans did not concur with his proposition, and eventually went extinct as a result. Ever since, Thanos has been travelling the universe, going from planet to planet and wiped out 50% of the populations before moving on to the next. He considers himself a savior, and his work an act of mercy.

When Thanos obtains all six Infinity Stone, he no longer has to travel all across the universe to fulfill his goal. This is because he now holds power, or control, of the entire universe in his hand. He snaps his fingers and half of all life ceases to exist. The mission is complete. In Thanos' mind, he has saved the civilizations of the universe from extinction. This is also how he justifies the undeniable evil action of genocide. There is no denying that overpopulation is a problem for the human race, in the abstract of the article *The Problem of Overpopulation: Proenvironmental Concerns and Behavior Predict Reproductive Attitudes* (2019), Adam C. Davis, Steven Arnocky, and Mirella Stroink say that: "Human overpopulation continues to be a pressing problem for the health and viability of the environment, which impacts the survival and well-being of human population" (Davis, Arnocky, & Stroink, 2019). This means that overpopulation is, and continues to be, a problem for the environment and the well-being of all humans. If we operate under the assumption that this is also true for the human race in the MCU, and of all species across the universe, Thanos' solution, although being a mass-genocide, might still be necessary for life to continue to exist.

I stated that Thanos' solution, or goal, is flawed when presented with logic. This is evident if we look at human population and its growth over the last century. According to Worldometer, a website which show statistics for current human population, previous growth, and predicted growth. The human population doubled in 40 years from 1959 (3 billion) to

1999 (6 billion). We reached 4 billion people in 1974, which is about half of our current population of around 7,9 billion in 2022. Growth rate peaked in the late 1960s with a 2,09% annual increase, and today it is around 1,05% annual increase, adding 81 million people a year (Worldometer, 2022). To illustrate, then, how Thanos' goal is flawed, let us operate under the assumption that the human population is 7,9 billion at the time of the snap. 7,9 billion divided by 2 equals 3,95 billion. Further, we can assume that, in the light of the statistics above, the human population will grow from 3,95 billion with at least a 1% increase each year. The calculation will look like this: $3.950.000.000 * 1.01^x = 7.900.000.000$. This equation shows the population of 3,95 billion after the snap times a 1% increase in x number of years to reach the previous total of 7,9 billion people. Put this equation into a calculator and x equals 69,7 if rounded up to the closest decimal. What this means is that Thanos' solution to the overpopulation problem will, on earth, be reversed in less than 70 years. It could be argued that Thanos can perform a new snap after 70 years to keep the population low, however, he destroyed the stones after the snap which makes this action impossible. This also illustrate that Thanos' justification of genocide by saving life from extinction is unjustified, in the sense that he murders billions which will be replaced within a century. The action is purely evil.

We can consider humans as an advanced species, and there are many other species in the MCU whose also just as advanced or far more advanced. It is therefore fair to assume that other species will have approximately equal population growth after Thanos' snap, making the snap useless in correlation with Thanos' goal. In addition, Captain Marvel says early in *Avengers: Endgame* that Thanos wiped out half of all living creatures. The president of Marvel Studios, Kevin Feige, confirmed this in a tweet from the official Avengers twitter account in 2019:



Figure 1: Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige tweet from official Avengers Twitter Account (Feige & @Avengers, 2019)

This raises the question of how the snap is supposed to correct the universe? In what way will the snap be beneficial for the general population? If the snap also eliminates trees, plants, and animals, how will the remaining population thrive with an overflow of resources? Many resources are obtained from living plants and trees. Animals are food for any species that is not an herbivore, and herbivore's need plants and trees to survive. Thanos justifies his goal by stating that the remaining population will thrive. However, there is nothing to support that statement. 2014-Thanos realize that it would be better to create a new universe from scratch, which again makes no sense as there is nothing to support the argument that this new universe would be any different than the one he shreds to pieces.

In closing, Thanos' goal is to reduce the population with 50% to ensure that life continues to exist. All his actions are, therefore, in correlation to this goal. The principle of utility states that an action is good if it generates a general tendency towards pleasure for the general population. Working towards his goal, Thanos tortures and murders many living creatures, defending the actions by presumably working towards the greater good. To ensure life, life must be corrected. Every action he makes towards the goal, however, generates the sensation of pain. When he accomplishes the goal in the end of *Avengers: Infinity War*, the sensation of pain is dominant as trillions of lifeforms cease to exist. In essence, he murders 50% of the universe with a snap of his fingers, causing everyone to lose someone they care about. The only way to view the action as good would be that his plan makes sense. That the remaining population will thrive. In the discussion above, this is disproven, and the effects from the snap will keep push towards the sensation of pain. I will, therefore, define Thanos as

a purely evil character as none of his actions, neither short term, nor long term, generate any sensation of pleasure.

3.4.2 – The Avengers

This part of the discussion will investigate the problem of leaving superheroes unsupervised. It will illustrate how the actions of superheroes, although intended to be good, can have detrimental consequences. *Avengers: Endgame* is a movie where the concept of time, and timelines, is extremely relevant. In the summary above, I stated that the Avengers do not fully grasp the consequences of tangling with time. The Avengers are in disarray after the snap, even five years after the snap, they are still grieving the loss of their loved ones. When Lang suddenly appears and offers a way to reverse everything, they go into action without really thinking about the ramifications. They quickly realize that Lang's idea is plausible, and they jump on the opportunity to bring everyone back. Before they initiate their plan, none of the Avengers stop to think of the consequences their actions might cause. Banner understands that you cannot change the present by changing the past, however, he does not think about how their actions in the past will affect the future of that past. Before Banner's conversation with the Ancient One, the Avengers had no intention of bringing the stones back to their timelines, and it is only Banner who gets this information. The other teams are simultaneously gathering the stones without thought of the repercussions.

In the discussion of timelines, and subsequently universes, there are infinite amounts of opportunities. Think of time in the MCU as a tree that never stops growing. It follows the trunk and when something causes it to deviate from the trunk, a branch grows which causes a new universe to exist. From this new branch, twigs grow, causing even more universes to exist. This continues to happen indefinitely, and we are presented with the multiverse. With this analogy, the multiverse would be the tree, and an infinite number of branches and twigs represents an infinite number of universes. For the purposes of this discussion, the MCU is the trunk. When the Avengers travel back in time, they travel to a different point in that trunk. This is where the problematic aspect of time travel starts to present itself. The aforementioned conversation between Banner and the Ancient One states that the removal of an Infinity Stone, although being beneficial for Bruce's present, will be devastating for the Ancient One's new reality. If she provides Bruce with the Time Stone, her

new reality will no longer have access to its chief weapon against the forces of darkness. The forces of darkness referred to in this conversation is the inter-dimensional entity Dormammu who rules the Dark Dimension. In *Doctor Strange (2016)*, Dormammu seeks to merge the Dark Dimension with earth, but Dr. Strange stops him by using the Time Stone to trap them both in an infinite time loop. Dormammu eventually agrees to seal the portal between the dimensions allowing Dr. Strange to break the time loop. Without the Time Stone, Dr. Strange will not be able to stop Dormammu, and Earth will be merged with the Dark Dimension.

Another example regarding this dilemma is the removal of the Mind Stone. The Mind Stone is, as previously mentioned, used to create Vision in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. The creation of Vision is a key aspect to the defeat of Ultron. Without the Mind Stone, the Avengers cannot create Vision, which means that Ultron will win. Ultron seeks to create an extinction event on earth. He builds a machine which raises the city of Sokovia from the ground, creating an artificial meteor capable of destroying the world. This means that if the Avengers removes the Mind Stone from this timeline, all of humanity is doomed. Likewise, this same event would happen in the 2013 timeline which Rocket and Thor creates as Thor brings Mjolnir with him. Without Mjolnir, 2013-Thor would not be able to provide the power-surge needed to create Vision. There are more problems concerning the loss of Mjolnir than this specific event, as 2013-Thor would be devastated and completely lost without his hammer. However, this example illustrates how the Avengers' actions and there consequences are not fully considered and thought through.

Every new timeline the Avengers create as a result of their tangling with time will cause a new branch to develop. By returning the stones, they effectively cut these branches of the tree and the events will keep following the path of the trunk. However, this is not necessarily true. Especially if we bring the 2014-timeline into the discussion. In this timeline, Thanos learns of the plan to reverse the snap, causing him to travel into the future to take the stones and create a new universe. The Avengers win this battle, as Iron Man use the stones to snap Thanos and his army out of existence. This means that the 2014-timeline no longer has a Thanos, which might seem like a good thing. However, without the presence of Thanos, The Guardians of the Galaxy will never form. If the Guardians does not exist then there is no one to stop the celestial Ego, Peter Quill's father, from terraforming the universe as we see in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2 (2017)*.

In conclusion, the Avengers are a group of superheroes who is willing to do everything in their power to promote good. Devastated after Thanos' victory in *Avengers: Infinity War*, they search for any opportunity to bring back those who were lost. Blinded by this goal, they never stop to question the repercussions of time travel, which will ultimately doom the new timelines they create into a world of suffering or annihilation. Even after returning the Infinity Stones to their respective timelines, there is no guarantee that events will happen in correlation to their own. This is especially evident in the 2014-timeline where bringing back the Power- and Soul Stone will not stop the branching of a new universe as Thanos no longer exist in this universe. This supports Barringer's argument of superheroes being flawed, and even when acting with the best intentions, their actions can have detrimental consequences. By reversing Thanos' snap, the Avengers will generate an immense amount of pleasure for the general population. The action is good insofar as their own universe is concerned, however, the consequences for the other timelines will be met by a generation of pain, making the action evil. There is, therefore, no clear answer to whether the action is good or evil because it will prove to be good in one universe, but evil in others. This also illustrates the need to control the actions of superheroes through a document such as the Sokovia Accords. It becomes evident that superheroes may inadvertently act recklessly, and that they might not always choose the right course of action. The need for regulation and control proves to be necessary when dealing with individuals who are as powerful as these individuals.

Looking at it from another point of view, the timelines they change are heading towards the same fate as the one they are trying to mend. What this means is that if they continue to do nothing, everyone is destined to live in the universe where Thanos' snap becomes reality. The snap, and all of Thanos' actions before the snap, generated the sensation of pain, which leaves no good outcome. The only way to secure a universe with a dominant sensation of pleasure is to travel back in time and reverse the snap by obtaining the Infinity Stones. The other universes created by the action becomes collateral damage which cannot be prevented as it is the only option. This goes back to McKee's statement of dilemma, as there is a question about the lesser of two evils where the Avengers must choose one. The action is neither purely good nor purely evil, but less evil than the other option.

3.4.3 – The Uncanny

In the previous chapter, I discovered that the similarities between Batman and The Joker was linked to the uncanny. The way they look turns the familiar to the unfamiliar and promotes a sense of ambiguity in how we perceive the characters and what it is that they truly represent. Superheroes and supervillains often present such ambiguous aspects, mostly connected to their appearance. They change their normal appearance to the unnormal, the familiar to the unfamiliar. This discussion of the uncanny will focus on three characters: Iron Man, Dr. Strange, and Thanos, to investigate how the uncanny presents itself in a wider variety of superheroes and supervillains.

In my description of Thanos, I mentioned that he was uncanny in the sense that he has a human, yet monstrous appearance. Every aspect of the character shows how the familiar is turned unfamiliar. Thanos is a titan, a godly being inspired from Greek mythology. He shares the same features as that of a human, but every aspect is enlarged, making him more monster than human. Monsters add to the anthropomorphism form of the uncanny which Bennet and Royle mention, as it gives monsters human attributes, or alternatively, give humans monstrous attributes. Something which is not human is presented as human, which makes them unnatural and unsettling. Thanos adds the animism form of the uncanny to his appearance by wielding the Infinity Gauntlet. The Infinity Gauntlet is an inanimate object, however, by attaching the Infinity Stones to it, the glove is given attributes of life or spirit. The power which is bestowed in the glove makes the glove something more, it is significant in the sense that it has abilities which is not generally connected to an ordinary glove. The armor is significant because of its size. It is made to fit Thanos, who is much greater in size than any human. The armor creates an uneasy feeling as we know it is too large for any human to wear it. It is the uncertainty of what being could bear such an armor which creates the uncanny feeling.

Iron Man is a character whose appearance shifts from ordinary human to machine. It is his suit which turns the ordinary human of Tony Stark into something strange. An armor which looks human but is not human. Bennet and Royle describe this form of the uncanny as automatism. “This is a term that can be used when what is human is perceived as merely mechanical: examples of this would be sleepwalking, epileptic fits, trance-states and

madness” (Bennet & Royle, 2016, p. 37). This description, however, does not apply to Iron Man but Bennet and Royle further explain that “On the other hand, robots and other automata are also potentially uncanny, for the opposite reason: what is perceived as human is in fact mechanical” (Bennet & Royle, 2016, p. 38). This makes the uncanny form of automatism present in the character of Iron Man as Iron Man is a mechanical suit. The armor, or suit, takes the form of a human but it is mechanical. We perceive the armor as human because it takes the form of what we recognize as human. It has a face, arms, legs, hands, feet, it is a human made into a machine. Iron Man is, therefore, uncanny in the sense that his armor looks human, but is in fact mechanical.

The final character I want to discuss in context to the uncanny is Dr. Strange. In the discussion above, I mentioned how Dr. Strange use the Time Stone to create a time loop in order to defeat the inter-dimensional entity of Dormammu. This is interesting in context to the uncanny as Dr. Strange creates the sensation of *déjà vu*. Bennet and Royle explain this form of the uncanny as repetition:

Repetition. For example, strange repetition of a feeling, situation, event or character.

Two obvious examples of the uncanny, in this respect, would be the experience of *déjà vu* (the sense that something has happened before), and the idea of the double (or *doppelgänger*) (Bennet & Royle, 2016, p. 36).

What this means is that Dr. Strange defeats Dormammu with the uncanny. In the time loop, Dormammu kills Dr. Strange over and over again, but he can never escape the moment. Even though he is victorious, he loses because he can never reap the reward. The feeling of *déjà vu* and the realization that he is trapped is what ultimately causes his downfall. This also illustrates the power of the uncanny, as it turns into a weapon. Dr. Strange shows that the uncanny can be more than just a feeling of uneasiness. The uncanny is frightening and can also be used as a weapon to destroy the forces of evil.

In closing, the uncanny proves to be a reoccurring similarity between superheroes and supervillains. The uncanny presents itself in many different forms but it will always represent that which we do not understand. The frightening feeling which the uncanny generates is present in both superheroes and supervillains as their appearance promote this sensation, creating a sense of ambiguity in how we perceive them. It is also evident that the uncanny feeling can be used as a weapon, in the sense that fear and power are linked. By promoting fear, one also illustrates one’s power, or control, over an individual or situation. The uncanny

does not present itself in actions, but in how things are perceived. Good and evil aspects are irrelevant for the uncanny as both good and evil characters can have uncanny characteristics.

3.5 – Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many similarities between the heroes of the Avengers and the Batman from Nolan's trilogy. The goal of superheroes always seems to have a tendency towards generating the sensation of pleasure for the general population, supporting the argument that all superheroes are fundamentally good. The heroes are also forced into situations where there is no good outcome, resulting in a choice of dilemma. This chapter also illustrates the need for superheroes to be regulated, as their actions are often spontaneous and lacks thoughts on ramifications. This is also crucial for making the members of society feel safe, as too much freedom in the hands of superheroes damage the natural order in society.

Additionally, the character of Thanos supports the argument that the villain's goal seems to have a tendency towards generating pain. However, in the instance of Thanos, this generation of pain is buried under a presumption that he tries to do the right thing. My discussion of Thanos proves that this is a false front, and his actions is nothing less than mass murder on a universal scale. Even if he truly believes that what he does is the right course of action, the logistics do not support his argument. This continues to prove that villains are in fact evil characters whose goals seek to promote evil.

The similarities keep appearing in the form of the uncanny, as both supervillains and superheroes share general aspects where the familiar becomes unfamiliar. Human attributes are given to that which should not have it, and the strange sensation of ambiguity seems to always be present in these types of characters. They present themselves as different to that we perceive as ordinary, which creates the uncanny feeling that we do not understand. It is also evident that the frightening feeling of which the uncanny represents, is linked to power, and therefore, also control. This leads me to believe that the uncanny nature of these characters is present as a means for them to assert control over situations and individuals. The difference still lies with how this control is used, and what they hope to achieve. The goal is what separates the hero from the villain, as it is the goal which truly reflects their purpose and therefore also what decides whether they are good or evil.

Chapter 4 – *Watchmen*

4.1 – Introduction

Watchmen is a comic book series written by Alan Moore and illustrated by Dave Gibbons. Published monthly by DC Comics, the series consisted of twelve issues released in 1986 and 1987. Moore and Gibbons wanted to create a story where the standard superhero narrative is challenged. Ordinarily, superhero stories are full of enhanced individuals with extraordinary powers. Superpowers exist, and they are not questioned in the sense that people accept them to be present and real. In these universes, people do not question the existence of Superman, Wonder Woman, Vision, Thor, and so forth. They are part of the story and part of the world; they are known to be super and accepted as super. In Moore and Gibbons' *Watchmen* this narrative is changed to a world that questions what would happen if the release of the Superman comic inspired ordinary citizens to become superheroes. Vigilantism becomes a norm as ordinary people dress up in superhero costumes. The government allows the vigilantes to roam the streets, but the vigilantes have no legal jurisdiction. When a thermodynamic accident in 1959 disintegrates the nuclear scientist, Jon Osterman, the world is changed forever. Osterman reappears as a god-like entity with thermodynamic powers. A real superhero, with real superpowers now exists, and he becomes detrimental for the U.S. in the Cold War. Because of Osterman, who is given the name of Doctor Manhattan, the U.S. win the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal is never exposed, and Richard Nixon is president for the 5th term in a row. *Watchmen* tell a compelling story set at the height of the Cold War. The government has imposed the Keen Act which has outlawed the former superheroes and put those who remain under government control. Tension between the worlds' superpowers is high, and a nuclear war is imminent. From a simple murder mystery, the story develops into an epic adventure which questions the meaning of humanity.

I mentioned above that *Watchmen* is a story which does not follow a standard superhero narrative. Although it includes a clear protagonist and antagonist, it is not clear that the respective protagonist of Rorschach, and antagonist of Adrian Veidt, are the hero and villain. The two characters are of interest to this thesis in the sense that it is clear that the supposed hero of Rorschach is not a purely good character. Although he fights evil, it does not stop him from doing evil himself. Adrian Veidt has, like Thanos, a utilitarian goal which

causes him to do a lot of evil in the effort of promoting good. This chapter will, therefore, give a summary of the plot and discuss the implications of the Keen Act before I move on to discuss the characters of Rorschach and Adrian Veidt. Finally, I will discuss the uncanny aspects of these characters, and additionally, include the character of Doctor Manhattan to investigate how the uncanny make these characters similar.

4.2 – The important aspects of *Watchmen*

In the following I will present the Keen Act and a short plot summary of the graphic novel *Watchmen* before discussing two of its main characters, Adrian Veidt, and Rorschach.

4.2.1 – The Keen Act

Similar to the Sokovia Accords from the previous chapter. The Keen Act is a national law which outlaws all costumed adventurers not acting under the rein of the U.S government. The United States made costumed adventurers legal shortly after Doctor Manhattan's creation in 1959, resulting in the vigilante team called Crimebusters. The news uses Manhattan as propaganda, stating that "The Superman exists, and he is American". Manhattan became a symbol of power, and an ultimate trump card for the US in the Cold War. The following decade, Manhattan and the Crimebusters work as useful talents to keep the streets safe and the public happy. The Crimebusters manages to obtain a sense of safety in society by not exaggerating their freedom. As long as the Crimebusters operate within common sense and do not push the limits of the law too far, the public will trust that they use their powers to achieve good. However, following the Vietnam War, the public starts to lose trust in the costumed adventurers mostly because Rorschach breaks this trust. Rorschach goes too far and operates according to his own sense of justice. This causes outrage, and the people demands change. August 3rd, 1977, the Keen Act passes through Congress, and all forms of vigilantism is made illegal. Manhattan and the Comedian are the only ones who chooses to continue under the U.S. government, where they have to follow the new rules and continue to establish and maintain a sense of security for the public.

The Keen Act shows, like it did for the Avengers, a need to regulate the actions of superheroes. Giving too much power or freedom to powerful individuals causes unwanted consequences which the public eventually will oppose. Regulation is needed to make people feel safe. It becomes a question of what is most beneficial for society; freedom to do what they want, or, restricting to make the public feel safe. The latter seems like the obvious choice for government as they are supposed to be the ones in control. Allowing others to take control consequentially allows the others to have undesired power. This is why the Sokovia Accords, and the Keen Act are necessary, as it keeps power in the place where the public feels the safest and under public control.

4.2.2 – Plot

Watchmen starts with an investigation of New York City resident Edward Blake's death in 1985. The police speculate over the cause of death, as they are unsure if it was a murder or suicide. They conclude that the most important thing is to keep the murder quiet, as they do not wish for the last costumed hero, or adventurer, Rorschach to get involved with the investigation. Rorschach, however, arrives at the crime scene and starts to investigate himself. He discovers that Blake was in fact one of the remaining two legal costumed heroes, the Comedian. After the Keen Act was passed in 1977, all costumed heroes had to retire unless they agreed to work exclusively for the US government. Rorschach is the only one who defies the Keen Act in his personal quest for justice. Rorschach concludes that Blake was murdered by one who seeks to eliminate all costumed heroes, or "masks", and goes to warn his former colleagues, Daniel Dreibern (the second Nite Owl), Adrian Veidt (Ozymandias), Jon Osterman (Doctor Manhattan), and Laurie Juspecky (the second Silk Spectre). Where Jon, or Doctor Manhattan, is the other hero who still operates under government control.

Doctor Manhattan is also the only one in this story who actually is what we can describe as a superhero. He was transformed into nothing short of a God during a nuclear accident in 1959, as he was disintegrated and reformed himself a few months later as an all-powerful entity. Doctor Manhattan is vital for America in the Cold War as he is capable of destroying nuclear missiles in mid-air. The Soviet Union cannot threaten mutual nuclear destruction as long as Doctor Manhattan is there to defend the United States. He is also the reason for America's victory in the Vietnam War, and no one could hope to beat this all-

powerful entity. Doctor Manhattan starts to lose touch with humanity because he is no longer able to relate to human emotions. Additionally, ex-coworkers, including Manhattan's former lover, develops cancer, and the evidence suggests that Manhattan is the cause. Realizing that he is a threat, he exiles himself to the planet Mars. In Manhattan's absence, Soviet seizes the opportunity to invade Afghanistan which escalates the global conflict pushing President Nixon to consider nuclear retaliation.

In his search for the mask killer, Rorschach finds himself framed for the murder of a previous villain, Moloch. Unsuccessful in escaping the authorities, he is captured and sent to jail. Laurie, who tried to keep a romantic relationship with Manhattan, realize that she cannot endure Manhattan's increasing neglect for human emotions and seeks the company of Daniel when Manhattan decided to exile himself. The two start a romantic relationship and as Daniel start to believe Rorschach's conspiracy of a mask killer when Adrian narrowly escapes an assassination attempt, Laurie and Daniel both return to vigilantism and breaks Rorschach out of prison.

On Mars, Manhattan reflects on his history, and we learn that he perceives time in a non-linear fashion. He becomes a symbol for determinism, as he believes that everything that will happen has already happened. Knowing that a conversation between himself and Laurie is about to take place, he teleports Laurie to Mars. Laurie convinces Manhattan to again show interest in humanity and they return to Earth only to find New York City in complete chaos.

While Manhattan and Laurie had their conversation on Mars, Daniel and Rorschach kept searching for the mask killer. The evidence leads them to Adrian, and they start to believe that he is behind everything. Rorschach, who has his entire investigation written in his journal, mails the journal to a local newspaper, the *New Frontier*, before the two of them goes to confront Adrian on his base in Antarctica. In Antarctica, Adrian reveals that he is the perpetrator and that he orchestrated everything to make his true plan become reality. As humanity is heading towards a nuclear holocaust, Adrian came up with a plan to unite the superpowers against a common enemy - aliens. He explains that he created an alien body which he will teleport to New York City, when the alien arrives it will explode and annihilated half of the city's population. Adrian reveals that he killed the Comedian, arranged for Manhattan's ex-coworkers to contract cancer, and killed Moloch to frame Rorschach, all in order to make sure his plan was not exposed. He also staged the assassination attempt on himself to avoid suspicion. Rorschach and Daniel are appalled by Adrian's plan and say they

will try to stop him; however, Adrian is not a republic serial villain who would expose his masterstroke if there was a slight chance for anyone to affect the outcome. The plan was put into action thirty-five minutes before Rorschach and Daniel arrived.

Upon Manhattan's and Laurie's arrival in New York the complete chaos is the result of Adrian's plan being successfully executed. Manhattan finds joy in this uncertainty of not knowing every outcome, on the other hand Laurie is petrified and distressed. Tracing the source of the monstrous being in New York, Manhattan teleports himself and Laurie to Antarctica. When all the main characters are gathered at Adrian's base, he turns on multiple tv-broadcasts all depicting the terrible events from New York. The broadcasts also tell them that Adrian's plan was a success as the superpowers now starts to cooperate in the face of this new threat. All except Rorschach agrees to keep the truth hidden in the interest of world peace. Rorschach, however, keeps his black and white view of the world and continues to believe that all wrongdoings must be punished. In his own words: "Not even in the face of Armageddon. Never compromise." When Rorschach leaves, intending to tell people the truth, Manhattan stops him as he cannot let Rorschach destroy the newly obtained world peace. Unable to make him change views, Manhattan is forced to kill Rorschach. Manhattan returns to the base for a final conversation with Adrian who is sitting in his office contemplating everything he has done. Manhattan has decided to leave Earth and intends to find a new world where he can create life on his own. Before he leaves, doubt strikes Adrian and he asks Manhattan if he did the right thing, stating that: "It all worked out in the end." Manhattan answers by telling him that nothing ever ends.

The final page of the novel depicts the editor and an assistant at *New Frontiersman* who need to find something to fill the pages in their latest issue. The novel ends with the assistant reaching towards the crank files where Rorschach's journal lie waiting. The ending is ambiguous, as we do not know if the assistant will print Rorschach's investigation or not. It is up to the reader to conclude whether Adrian's new utopian world will continue or be ultimately destroyed by Rorschach's journal.

4.3 – Discussion

In the following I will discuss two of the story's main characters in context to their respective morals and goal. Adrian Veidt, and Rorschach are two characters who view the world in

completely different ways. Adrian Veidt views the world as a utilitarian. He is willing to do everything in order to achieve world peace, working exclusively for the greater good. Rorschach follows a sense of duty-based morality viewing the world as black and white. In his mind, there is good and there is evil, nothing in between, and all who do evil must be punished. Additionally, I will investigate the uncanny in these two characters, and in addition, look at Doctor Manhattan in this context as he is the only one in this story who can be described as an actual superhero.

4.3.1 – Adrian Veidt

Adrian Veidt is known for being the smartest man in the world and became a costumed adventurer in 1958 taking up the alias of Ozymandias. His intellect sets him apart from others, and the only person whom he ever felt any connection with is Alexander the Great. Adrian admired Alexander for his attempt of uniting the world and made it his life mission to achieve what Alexander could not. After traveling the world, following Alexander's footsteps, he came to realize that Alexander had merely resurrected the ancient pharaohs' immortal wisdom and adopted the Greek name of Rameses II – Ozymandias. Most of his superhero career was used to fight organized crime, however, realizing that he could not change the world as a costumed adventurer, he retired from that life in 1975, two years prior to the Keen Act of 1977. Revealing his identity to the world, he started to build an empire and became a self-made billionaire. As the public still had faith in the costumed adventurers in 1975, Adrian never experienced the public distrust which occurred after the Vietnam War, which allowed him to keep his popularity and market the figure of Ozymandias.

With his belief that the world is on course towards a nuclear holocaust, he uses his newfound wealth to construct a plan for uniting the world's superpowers, the United States, and the Soviet Union, against a common enemy. He employed geneticists who cloned a former murderer and psychic, Robert Deschaines', brain with the intent of creating an alien creature, making it seem like Earth faces an alien invasion. Additionally, Adrian invents a form of teleportation, but unlike Manhattan's successful form where no one is injured in the process, Adrian's form of teleportation causes the object to explode on arrival. By breeding a giant squid-like creature infused with Deschaines' brain, Adrian believes that the world will recognize the creature as alien, he is also aware of the damage his creation will cause when he

teleports it to the heart of New York City. In addition to the immediate explosion that follows the creatures' arrival, Deschaines' psychic brain will cause people to go mad from the sensory overload it creates. In the aftermath of the explosion, we see an example of this madness as one of the broadcasts reports that a pregnant woman is convinced that the unborn child was eating her. The plan ends in success, as the whole world immediately draws the planned conclusion that Adrian's creation is in fact an alien sent to attack Earth. The Soviet Union and the United States becomes allies, and The Cold War comes to an end, uniting the world in a way Alexander never could.

To make sure his plan would succeed, Adrian had to perform a lot of questionable actions. He deemed the murder of the Comedian as necessary when he learned that Blake discovered the island on which they created the alien. Blake understood Adrian's plan, and even though he was under the impression that it was necessary to prevent a certain nuclear holocaust, Adrian knew that his plan demanded absolute secrecy to succeed. He felt the need to remove all who could potentially pose a threat, which is why he murdered the Comedian in his apartment. Additionally, Adrian hired Manhattan's ex-coworkers and exposed them to radiation, causing them to develop cancer and started a rumor that Manhattan was the source of this development. This led Manhattan to exile himself, which meant that neither he could pose a threat for the plan. Furthermore, Adrian orchestrated an assassination attempt on his own life in order to make him free of suspicion from Rorschach's investigation on Edward Blake's murder. To further hinder Rorschach's investigation, Adrian also murders the former villain, Moloch, framing Rorschach for this crime. This ends with Rorschach being sent to prison, and no one can stop Adrian from achieving his goal. The only thing which can stop Adrian is Rorschach's journal which he mails to the *New Frontiersman* before he and the Nite Owl goes to confront Adrian on the base in Antarctica. We never learn whether the journal is ever published or not, leaving us to speculate if the plan's original intent prevailed.

Adrian's actions are, like all characters, inspired by his goal. The goal, which is to unite humanity, stop a pending nuclear holocaust, and end the Cold War, will promote the most amount of pleasure for the general population, making it a utilitarian goal. The principle of utility states that an action is good insofar as it generates the most amount of pleasure for the general population. For Adrian's goal the general population will involve the entire population of Earth, as his actions will affect everyone. If Adrian never does anything to unite the superpowers, it seems evident that the tension between the United States and the Soviet Union will end with an eventual nuclear war. The ramifications of a full-scale nuclear war

between the two largest superpowers in the world can only have one outcome, mutual destruction. However, Adrian's actions are all questionable as they all generate the sensation of pain. He promotes the sensation of pain in everyone who has the opportunity to stop him, nonetheless, this only generate pain for a limited number of people. It is only the big event, teleporting the alien to New York, where the generation of pain affects a larger number of people. It is estimated that around 3 million people dies from the initial explosion, and many more are driven mad by the sensory overload from the psychic brain. In light of this, the action seems evil, but what is the alternative? This I will argue, is perhaps the most central point to utilitarianism, as it presents itself as unbiased. Adrian does murder a lot of people, but the alternative is potentially significantly more devastating. If the nukes start flying, billions will die, and the world will become uninhabitable. From a utilitarian point of view, Adrian's actions are good in the sense that the general pleasure of billions outweigh the general pain of 3 million.

To summarize, Adrian Veidt is a character, who in many ways, resembles Thanos. They are both inspired by a utilitarian goal, of which they go to extreme lengths to achieve. The difference lies in what is achieved, and not what they intend to achieve. As I previously stated, the principle of utility is unbiased in the sense that its only concern lies in the generation of pain or pleasure in the general population. Thanos' goal, although seemingly justifiable from a utilitarian point of view, is in fact pure evil, as its tendency towards pain heavily outweighs the tendency of pleasure in every aspect. Adrian's goal, however, have a general tendency towards pleasure which heavily outweighs the tendency of pain. Both are recognized as villains of their respective stories, but in Adrian's case, the title of villain seems more misplaced. Although he performs actions which falls under the definition of evil, such as murder, it is all done to promote pleasure for the general population. His actions are justified from a utilitarian perspective making this villainous figure good in the context to the principle of utility.

4.3.2 – Rorschach

Watchmen's protagonist is the character of Rorschach. As a criterion for protagonists, Robert McKee states that "The PROTAGONIST must be empathetic, he may or may not be sympathetic" (McKee, 1999, p. 141). In *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, *empathetic* is defined

as “someone who is able to understand how somebody else feels because you can imagine what it is like to be that person” (Dictionaries, Oxford Learners, 2022). While *sympathetic* is defined as “someone who is kind to somebody who is hurt or sad; showing that you understand and care about their problems” (Dictionaries, Oxford Learner's, 2022). Rorschach fits these criteria in the sense that he is empathetic and not sympathetic. This will become evident in the following discussion of the character.

Walter Joseph Kovacs became a costumed adventurer in 1964 as a result of a news article concerning a young girl, Kitty Genovese, which stated that she had been raped and tortured outside her home. Bystanders had been watching the incident take place, however, they neither intervened nor called the police. The article made Kovacs realize what people were behind the evasion and self-deception. Ashamed of humanity, he created a new face, a mask from the remnants of a dress, a face which he “could bear to look at in the mirror” and subsequently became Rorschach. The name originates from the Rorschach test, created by the Swiss psychologist Herman Rorschach. The Rorschach test presents a person with different inkblots and the psychologist record and analyze what the subject sees when looking at the different patterns. It is used by psychologists to examine a person’s characteristics and emotional functions to detect underlying thought disorder (Wikipedia, 2022). Rorschach’s mask resembles a Rorschach test which is why he adopted the name. Additionally, it illustrates that Rorschach is a character with a dark and pessimistic world view, as we learn that he only sees terrible things when presented with the inkblots.

In the following years, Rorschach became part of a group of costumed adventurers called the Crimebusters which included the second Nite Owl, the Comedian, Doctor Manhattan, Ozymandias, the second Silk Spectre, and himself. When the Keen Act was passed in 1977, all the costumed adventurers were forced into retirement, with the exception of Ozymandias who had left the vigilante life two years prior. The Comedian and Doctor Manhattan remained under government control, while Nite Owl and Silk Spectre obeyed the act. Rorschach, however, did not and remained as an outlaw.

In 1985, Rorschach starts investigating Edward Blake’s murder. He quickly discovers that Blake was his former colleague, the Comedian, and starts to think the murder is part of a conspiracy to kill former costumed adventurers. Breaking into the apartment of his former friend and partner, Daniel Dreiberg, Rorschach informs him that he believes all former masks are in danger. Daniel is more reasonable and suggests that the murder might have been a

robbery or perhaps have a political motive as the Comedian was working for the government. Rorschach remains unconvinced and leaves Daniel's apartment. Making his way to a bar commonly used by the city's criminals. Rorschach demonstrates how far he is willing to go in order to solve the murder. He needlessly breaks a man's fingers, questioning the entire bar for information. Realizing that no one knows anything, he leaves, and goes to warn Adrian Veidt. Rorschach is indifferent towards the person he caused harm, as he has convinced himself of the truth that all criminals must be punished. In Rorschach's mind, it does not matter that this person was not guilty of this particular crime as he is sure to be guilty of something else, "evil must be punished".

After his visit at the bar, Rorschach goes to warn Adrian in his office. Adrian seems convinced that the murder was political, supporting Daniel's theory, however, Rorschach believes that since Doctor Manhattan exists, and his existence has "the Reds running scared", meaning that the Soviet's would never dare to attack any public American figure, the murder must be unrelated to politics. Moving on, Rorschach goes to warn Doctor Manhattan and Laurie Juspezyk at the Rockefeller Military Research Center. Upsetting Laurie by describing the Comedian's action of raping Laurie's mother as moral lapses, he is teleported out by Manhattan. Rorschach respected and admired the Comedian, which might explain why he is this persistent in the investigation. The Comedian understood, like Rorschach, man's capacity for horrors. That when you have seen the worst the world has to offer, you can never turn your back to it. This also explains why Rorschach never quit after the Keen Act, as he is unable to look the other way, he does not do it because it is permitted, but because he has to, because he is compelled.

Observing Blake's funeral, Rorschach notices the former villain of Moloch in the crowd. Questioning Moloch's reason for attending the funeral of his arch enemy, Rorschach breaks into his home to interrogate him. Moloch reveals that Blake broke into his home a week earlier, not wearing his mask which is why he knew who Blake was. As Moloch was unable to make sense of Blake's rambling, Rorschach concludes that he does not know anything and leaves. When Manhattan disappears, Rorschach pays another visit to Daniel, throwing him a paper with the headline of "Dr. Manhattan Leaves Earth", and makes another argument for his mask-killer conspiracy. Later, Rorschach learns of the assassination attempt on Adrian, which further strengthens his suspicions.

When Rorschach gets framed for Moloch's murder and ends up in prison. A psychiatrist tries to identify a "masked vigilante syndrome". The psychiatrist spends a lot of time with Rorschach, and eventually starts to share Rorschach's twisted view of the world. The other prisoners try to murder Rorschach during his time in prison, and when Nite Owl and Silk Spectre breaks him out, Rorschach gets his revenge and kills those who tried to kill him. The murder of these other prisoners goes back to Rorschach's view of the world, and of how people who are guilty of evil must be punished. Additionally, Rorschach's ability to influence the psychiatrist is also interesting in the sense that he manages to convince him of his world view. Originally, the psychiatrist is optimistic about the world, however, after Rorschach shares his experiences of how dark the world truly is, he can no longer see anything but empty meaningless blackness.

Daniel and Rorschach continue the investigation and when Rorschach accuses Daniel of "lazing" because he does not do enough, Daniel expresses how hard it is to be Rorschach's friend. This leads to a rare moment of empathy where Rorschach acknowledges how difficult he is to be around. Through their investigation, they reach the conclusion that Adrian is behind everything and goes to his base in Antarctica to confront him. Unsure of how everything will end, Rorschach mails his journal with every detail of the investigation to the *New Frontiersman* before they depart. Rorschach does not know how this will end, and by sending his journal to the *New Frontiersman* he ensures that the truth can come out. In Antarctica, Adrian subdues them both and reveals his plan. Manhattan and Laurie also arrive, however, when they learn that Adrian's plan has already succeeded, Manhattan, Laurie, and Daniel agree to keep it a secret, ensuring Adrian's new utopian world. Rorschach stays true to his black and white view, refusing to compromise in the face of evil. Manhattan kills Rorschach as a result, as Rorschach cannot be allowed to tell anyone the truth. This illustrates how Rorschach is empathetic and how he is not sympathetic. He can empathize with Daniel, as he understands that it can be hard to be his friend, and that he is difficult to deal with. He is, however, unable to sympathize with Adrian in the sense that he cannot understand nor accept his actions. He is unable to see the world from a different point of view. This is what causes Manhattan to kill him in the end, as Manhattan neither condemn nor condone Adrian's actions, but view them as how it is supposed to be, something Rorschach can never accept.

Contrary to Adrian Veidt's utilitarian morality, Rorschach follows a more consequent form of morality described by Rafaela Hillerbrand and Anders Sandburg in *Supervillains and Philosophy: Sometimes, Evil Is Its Own Reward* as deontological ethics from the Greek word

of duty (*deon*). The famous deontological ethical system was formulated by Immanuel Kant, who would probably not have approved of Rorschach, but would have agreed that some duties can never be compromised (Hillerbrand & Sandburg, 2009, p. 105). Rorschach will never compromise, not even in the face of Armageddon. In his mind, there is good and there is evil, nothing in between. Compromising an evil act, no matter how evil or what the outcome of the action is, the action will stand as evil, therefore, it must be punished. To Rorschach, it does not matter that Adrian has created world peace because he murdered millions to achieve it. He cannot sympathize with Adrian, meaning that he cannot understand his point of view. It is Rorschach's duty to punish all evil actions. Although the general pleasure outweighs the general pain in the general population as a result of Adrian's actions, Rorschach cannot deny the pain, the evil.

Summarized, Rorschach has no other goal than to fight evil wherever he observes it. His goal is based on a sense of duty, as he cannot sit and watch a world full of injustice. He must act on the injustice and do everything he can to fight evil. Far from a utilitarian, Rorschach views the world as completely black and white. There is nothing which can defend an evil action because evil is evil. The general pain and pleasure are of no interest to him as he only sees pure pain and pure pleasure. He fails to see the "bigger picture" in the sense that he does not believe there is one. He is a hero in the sense that he fights evil, however, he could also be described as a villain in the sense that he is willing to let evil exist. What I mean by this is that he is trying to protect people, fight the injustice and overcome the forces of evil, but he is also willing to expose Adrian's plan to the world. Adrian's plan had an obvious upside which caused the Cold War to end and prevented a nuclear war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. If Rorschach gets his way, all of this is undone, and the 3 million people who died in New York, will have died for nothing. The action of revealing Adrian's plan is nothing short of evil because its potential outcome is the end of the world. Rorschach's inability to compromise will only lead to chaos, death, and destruction. He is not a hero, and fortunately for the world, he never gets the chance to become a villain.

4.3.3 – The Uncanny

The previous chapters have presented a distinct similarity between superheroes and supervillains in the form of the uncanny. Although *Watchmen* is a book where the standard

superhero narrative is challenged, and the only true superhero is a god like entity created in a thermodynamic accident. Its other characters are inspired by the standard superhero, making them wear costumes to change or hide their appearances. In the following, I will present three of the story's main characters and investigate how the characters can be described as uncanny.

The obvious example for the uncanny in this story is Doctor Manhattan. After the accident where he was created, Manhattan reformed himself into a man of thermodynamic structure. While being blue in color, Manhattan has the ability to become a giant. In similarity to Thanos, this gives Manhattan a monstrous appearance as everything about him is unnaturally large. By this factor alone, Manhattan presents the form of anthropomorphism where a monster is given human attributes. He still resembles a normal man in every aspect, however, the fact that he can tower over everyone and turn monstrous in size makes us question everything about him. The uncertainty of what we look at when he takes this giant form is what generates the uncanny feeling. He is frighteningly large, and his power is obviously something much greater than that of an ordinary man. Additionally, Manhattan has the ability to duplicate himself, making us see him at more places than one at the same time. Seeing multiple figures of the same person doing different things is strange and unsettling, which again will cause an uncanny feeling. It falls under the form that Bennet and Royle describe as repetition as he creates an idea of the double or doppelgänger. Manhattan's powers are all uncanny as every one of them are of god-like proportions. Manhattan is a being which is nothing short of a god, which questions every logical aspect of the character. He is uncanny in the sense that he exists, as one way to describe him would be to say that everything about him is strange and unfamiliar, while at the same time, he is strangely familiar because he at the same time takes the shape of a man.

Rorschach is also uncanny because he is challenging the logical and familiar features of a human face. Rorschach's costume is that of a detective. He wears a trenchcoat and a fedora hat, making him familiar, however, the mask is what makes him unfamiliar. The mask is what gives Rorschach his name, as the pattern resembles that of a Rorschach-test. The test shows images which can be perceived in different ways in the sense that one person might see a butterfly, while another sees a decapitated head. We become uncertain of what we are looking at, as we expect that the man in the trenchcoat and fedora to be an ordinary man, however, we cannot see his face, and the face we do see is always changing and open for interpretations. His appearance or costume, similar to The Joker, Batman, and Iron Man, is

what generates the uncanny feeling. The mask frightens us because we do not understand what we are looking at, making the character of Rorschach uncanny.

Adrian Veidt is not uncanny in himself. For a majority of the story, he is just an ordinary man. However, when he presents himself as his alter-ego Ozymandias, he is uncanny in the same way as Batman is uncanny. As Ozymandias, Adrian wears a cape, which in similarity to Batman, gives him a sense of sublime authority. Additionally, Ozymandias also wears a mask which hides his face. Unlike Batman and Rorschach's mask, Ozymandias' mask does not change anything in his face from its normal human form, however, it still creates this false front where we become uncertain of who or what we are looking at. It works as intended in the sense that it hides a part of his face. Not being able to fully understand what it is we see is what creates the uncanny feeling. The mask makes the familiar into something unfamiliar, a face is no longer just a face.

To summarize, the uncanny seems to always be present in the way superheroes and supervillains present themselves. Even though this story lacks a clear supervillain, the concept of a supervillain is insignificant as a superhero and supervillain both want to achieve the same thing with their costumes. It is the costumes, or how the characters choose to present themselves which is the basis for the uncanny aspects of these characters. Superheroes and supervillains all want to be depicted as something more than the ordinary. It does not matter who or what they are, what matters is what we see and how we respond to it. In this context it would not matter if The Joker turned out to be the hero of *The Dark Knight* and Batman turned out to be the villain, they would both still be considered as uncanny characters. The same is, therefore, true with the character of Ozymandias. It does not matter if he is the hero of the story or the villain, as it is insignificant when he presents himself with a cape and mask, which both makes him uncanny. The same is true for Rorschach and Manhattan as well, as it is the way they are perceived which creates the uncanny feeling, and not whether they do evil or good deeds.

4.4 – Conclusion

Watchmen challenges the standard superhero narrative in several aspects, however, the most distinct difference from the standard narrative is that there is no clear hero nor villain. By creating a story based in a similar world to our own, Moore and Gibbons has created an image

of what might happen if we suddenly were exposed to real superpowers and if ordinary people take on the role of superheroes themselves. It depicts ordinary people who try their best to make the world better, and like ordinary people, they have different opinions and world views which dictates how they act to achieve their goals. I will, therefore, argue that Rorschach and Adrian are characters who sees themselves as heroes, and they will both view the other as the villain. It comes down to how one views the world, and if one thinks that it sometimes might be necessary to do evil in order to achieve good.

Adrian and Rorschach are similar in the sense that they both commit evil actions. There is no denying that murder is evil, and that Adrian's plan requires evil actions. The interesting thing about Adrian, however, is that in relation to the principle of utility, his actions can also be considered good. With Thanos' actions, this is not possible, as the result still has a tendency towards pain. His goal does not achieve any tendency of pleasure, which means that none of his evil actions can be justified. With Adrian, this is the other way around. His actions end the Cold War and unites the world. Instead of a world ending in a nuclear holocaust, the world unites to a utopia of peace. The cost is great, and the actions did generate a lot of pain for the population, however, the pleasure gained is much greater. By looking at Adrian's actions from a utilitarian point of view, the actions are justifiable, and therefore, also good. Rorschach does not act to achieve any utilitarian based goal. The evil he performs is justified in his mind by the fact that he executes evil actions towards those he thinks deserve it. It is never clear if his actions generate the sensation of pleasure, or pain, for the general population. He often murders when he feels that the victim deserves it, an action which relates to the sensation of pain. The ones he murders are people who do bad things, and the pleasure gained from removing them from society, might generate a tendency towards pleasure. However, the main reason people lost faith in the costumed adventurers was because Rorschach used too much force, like murder, which indicates that the general tendency of these actions all favors pain. This is interesting, as it shows that in context to utilitarianism Rorschach is evil, and Adrian is good.

It is evident that these characters are also similar because they are all uncanny. The uncanny does not reflect upon actions, but on how things are perceived. This chapter illustrates that there is no difference between superheroes and supervillains when we discuss the uncanny, as the uncanny will always present itself in these types of characters.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to prove that superheroes and supervillains might be more similar than we tend to think. The thesis questioned the idea of superheroes being pure and good characters who always fight evil, and that supervillains are foul and evil characters whose mission in life is to promote evil. Thus, challenging the “good guy / bad guy”- narrative, which has been shown to be inadequate to understand these types of characters. Additionally, the thesis investigated the uncanny nature of these characters to discover other similarities than what is shown through their actions. Through the use of Jeremy Bentham’s principle of utility, this thesis discovered that it is more common for the superhero to do evil than it is for the supervillain to do good. This is evident as the protagonists Batman, the Avengers, and Rorschach, all commit actions which correlates to the sensation of pain, a sensation inflicted by evil actions. These types of situations often occur when there is a choice of dilemma, as the hero is put in a situation where there is no pleasurable outcome. In a situation like this the hero chooses the action which best reflect his or her overall goal, usually resulting in the lesser evil action. However, Rorschach acknowledges that it is necessary to do evil in order to defeat evil. He is not facing a choice of dilemma, but rather chooses to do evil even though there are better options. Furthermore, the villains rarely do anything in correspondence with the sensation of pleasure, a sensation inflicted by good actions. The only example of a villain with a pleasurable goal is Adrian Veidt, or Ozymandias. Even though his actions towards the goal is evil, he manages to save humanity from a nuclear holocaust and unites the world into a peaceful utopia. The Joker and Thanos are both examples of purely evil villains. The difference between them is that The Joker never hides the fact that he is evil and all he wants is chaos. Thanos justifies his actions by presenting an idea where the outcome seems good. However, it is evident when analyzing his actions through Bentham’s principle of utility, that all his actions are rooted in evil.

This thesis also sought out to prove the necessity of controlling and regulating superheroes. The Sokovia Accords and the Keen Act are both examples of how the authorities tries to exceed some control over superheroes and limit their powers. It is important that the society feels safe, and by giving too much freedom to superheroes, this safety is threatened. The reasoning for the need of regulation and control stems from the argument that superheroes not always exercise the correct judgement in every situation. The authorities need

to assert a sense of control to make the public feel safe. Limited freedom becomes the price superheroes must pay for a safe society.

Finally, this thesis suggests that superheroes and supervillains are uncanny. The uncanny shows us that they are similar in nature, that superheroes and supervillains will always present uncanny aspects. It becomes irrelevant whether they are heroes or villains because they all present us with something we do not understand. Masks, capes, monstrous alter-egos, the ability to fly, human-formed suits, all uncanny and none exclusively subjected to either hero or villain. We do not understand these characters and it causes a feeling of uncertainty in what we are looking at. This uncertainty is linked to fear, as we fear that what we do not understand. The difference is how this fear is used, as supervillains use the fear to promote evil, while the superheroes use the fear to promote good. Fear is linked to power, as fear provides power over those who fear you. Batman for example, uses fear to get power over Gotham City's underworld, while The Joker uses the fear to obtain power over the population. It all comes back to the character's goal, and what they seek to achieve. This is the true difference between superheroes and supervillains. What this thesis suggest is that superheroes and supervillains are neither good nor bad just because they are deemed heroes or villains, but that their goal is the motivation, and that the goal decides whether they are the hero or the villain.

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