ARISTOTLE’S CRITERIA OF VIRTUE AS THEY RELATE TO THE
CHARACTER OF BATMAN

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To all of those near and far who have taught me the true meaning of friendship.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Aristotle's Criteria of Virtue as they Relate to the Character of
Batman
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The goal of this thesis is to examine the link between Aristotle’s view of virtue as a means for achieving happiness, and the role that friendship plays in the virtuous life. According to Aristotle, the happiest and most fulfilled individual will still need friendship in order to achieve his or her goals. Using Batman as an example, I examine Aristotle’s claim that virtue ultimately requires friendship, while also considering Batman as a character of Aristotelian virtue.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The discussion of Aristotelian virtue and friendship is one that has lasted for thousands of years, and it would be difficult to list all its threads in the different discussions. There is a vast body of work that has been published and discussed regarding many aspects of Aristotle’s construction of virtue and friendship. For instance, Lorraine Pangle’s book *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*\(^1\) presents an overview of the role friendship plays in happiness and virtue throughout the writings of select ancient philosophers. Therefore, as a matter of practicality, I will limit this investigation to the ideas and authors found below.

The main body of Aristotle’s work I focus on is *The Nicomachean Ethics*. This book provides the basis for the investigation into virtue and friendship while also providing a foundation for the major inquiry regarding how friendship and independence each play a crucial role in virtue. I alternate between using three translations of *The Nicomachean Ethics*, one translation by Terence Irwin,\(^2\) another by Michael Pakaluk,\(^3\) and lastly an edition by C. C. W. Taylor.\(^4\) In conjunction with these editions, I reference Michael Pakaluk’s *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, an Introduction*\(^5\) in order to supplement Aristotle’s own

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arguments with insights that provide clarity and organization. Relying on all three of these editions rather than just one of them gives a more in depth view into Aristotle’s arguments. Since there is some divergence in how certain words or concepts are translated, I feel that consulting multiple versions of the text can give a better understanding of the source material by providing several ways in which it can be interpreted. In some of the more problematic sections, this multiple viewpoint approach to the material was essential in piecing together a unified comprehension.

In addition to these primary sources, I reference arguments made by other scholars. In the first section on virtue I cite Myles Burnyeat’s “Aristotle on Learning to be Good,”6 and J. O. Urmson’s “Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Mean.”7 These works help to illuminate the discussion surrounding Aristotle’s various arguments about moral education and its importance in creating a virtuous nature. The importance of this discussion hinges on the idea that virtue is not something that is naturally bestowed on us; rather we all have the potentiality for becoming virtuous through individual achievement. These authors shed light on the notion that not only learning, but also learning in a particular way, is essential to acquire virtue. Urmson’s discussion of the mean refines the debate about the proper use of Aristotle’s famous “Doctrine of the Mean.” Urmson’s argument about the ways in which certain actions can be identified with virtues as either extremes or deficiencies is important to the greater discussion about the settled state of character that one must have in order to be

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considered virtuous. Urmson’s view shows how one’s decision or action in a situation will be a choice in relation to the mean that she holds for herself.

The following chapter deals with the phenomenon of friendship in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, primarily in books VIII and IX. Friendship is essential to the overall argument about virtue in that it is a key component to an individual’s attainment of virtue. To supplement the argument, I refer to a number of authors who have written on multiple aspects of friendship in Aristotle’s framework. Laurence Thomas’s “Friendship” and John Cooper’s “Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship” provide explanations for how facets of friendship fit into the scheme of virtue and individuality. Thomas’s account describes three of what he calls “salient features” of friendship. He believes these features to be crucial in any relationship if it is to be categorized as friendship. Cooper’s argument is an important since Cooper’s argument for different levels within the various species of friendship will be referenced ultimately to negate an argument against Batman’s virtue.

Also referenced is Paul Schollmeier’s book *Other Selves* as well as Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett’s “Friendship and the Self” with regards to how friendship interplays with the individual’s conception of herself while participating in the dynamic of being with as well as loving another. Schollmeier demystifies the negative conception of self-love by focusing on the proper direction and education of a virtuous person. If someone is virtuous, Schollmeier’s position is that she will be properly directed to satisfy her desires, and one

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such desire will be friendship since it is a virtuous good itself. Like Cooper’s argument for friendship species, Cocking and Kennett’s view will be integral to the discussion below. It is their belief that a friend is more than a mirror in which one sees a reflection of herself. Rather, there is a positive affect a friend has on her. The result of this “drawing” phenomenon is that a friend not only is similar to how a person sees herself but the friend also directly influences how a person shapes and molds her character. Coupled with Cooper’s view, this idea will help to show how friends can exist within a scheme that varies in degrees of higher and lower virtue.

The final chapters of the discussion will draw heavily from works of film and literature, creating a corollary on Aristotle’s ideas of virtue, friendship, and self-sufficiency. The primary works considered are Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: Year One*. My reason for narrowing my focus to these two primary sources of comic book fiction is that they are definitive works of the Batman lore in the modern era. Miller’s 1989 release of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* is credited with substantively redefining Batman’s appearance both on the page and on the movie screen. Furthermore, as a character of modern literature, Batman himself is a prime example of how morality, right, and wrong can and are applied to each individual. In an interview Miller says, “Here we get into another important aspect of the *Dark Knight* series, and another quality of the super-hero that’s been lost—the hero as a moral force, as a judge, as plainly bigger and greater than normal men, and perfectly willing to pass judgment and administer punishment and make

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Miller’s effort to focus real moral attention on the character of a super-hero is one of the most influential endeavors in modern comic book literature.

I pair Miller’s work on the page with Christopher Nolan’s portrayal of Batman on the movie screen in *Batman Begins*, and *The Dark Knight*. Nolan’s vision of Batman, his relationships with friends and enemies, and even his relationship to the city he is sworn to protect illustrate a complex, post-modern vision of not just Gotham city, but also the world in which the audience member actually lives. Drawing heavily from Miller’s work from decades past, Nolan’s Batman fits the description, “a good character, as compromised as the idea has become, as corrupted by shifting political attitudes […] at least a part of the Batman [character] come[s] from somebody’s reaction to real life, which puts him closer to artistic legitimacy than almost any other super-hero, with the exception of Superman.”

In conjunction with these pieces of artistic representation, I draw in scholarly work by a number of authors in order to illuminate Aristotle’s major themes. As an introduction, I use a selection from Mark White and Robert Arp’s “pop” philosophy book, *Batman and Philosophy: The Dark Knight of the Soul*. While this is a work geared at a non-scholarly audience, the chapter “Batman’s Promise” by Randall Jensen provides an interesting

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17 Miller, “Frank Miller,” 64.


insight into the idea of Batman’s origin, not simply the external events of losing his parents in a violent act but also the internal process by which Bruce Wayne chooses to direct his life.

As a counter-point to my claim about Batman’s being virtuous, I explore Mary Leigh’s assertion in the chapter “Virtue in Gotham” from the book, *Riddle Me This, Batman! Essays on the Universe of the Dark Knight.* Based on a series of incidences of apparent indecision, Leigh makes the assertion that Batman is not in fact truly virtuous. Instead, she puts forward that he is only continent, while it is the character Alfred Pennyworth who is the virtuous hero of *The Dark Knight.*

Other works are cited in the body of the thesis by way of inference. Miller’s follow up to *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, Batman: The Dark Knight Strikes Back* is implicated as having some additional influence on the debate, while not being a true source in the matter. While this work held less critical acclaim than its predecessor, and appears more as an experiment in early computer graphic design, it has some elements that carry some weight for the evolution of Batman’s character and relationships.

Though there are many other sources from which to draw and compare these issues, I believe the ones that I have chosen most accurately parallel the direction of this particular body of work. Furthermore, while I understand that other sources may give a different outlook about my conclusions, I believe that the conclusions I have drawn and the material I use to support them within this work is effective as well as a starting point for future discussion of the matter.

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Finally, there is a drought of serious philosophical discussion regarding comic books, which I hope this thesis begins to address. Kevin Durand and Mary Leigh’s book\(^{21}\) is a step further in the direction in comparison to White and Arp’s mass-market appeal with their entry. Jeff McLaughlin also recently released a collection of essays compiled in the book, *Comics as Philosophy*.\(^{22}\) This collection also seeks to answer philosophical questions with regards to comic book characters and universes, as well as examining the genre as it is developed and shaped by current events. While this is the most substantive work in this particular arena, its lack of focus limits its usefulness for this particular area of investigation.

The remainder of the scholarly work in comic books is primarily in aesthetic philosophy. While there are a number of individuals doing work in this field such as Roy Cook, Henry Pratt, and Aaron Meskin, the scope of their field primarily focuses on the aesthetic composition of comic books rather than whether the content makes any statements about morality or ethics. This is not a discredit to their field of research, however, it is not one that is commensurate with the questions that I am attempting to investigate.

The primary purpose of my thesis will be to find an answer to the question, “How does Aristotle’s concept of virtue balance the need for friendship with the requirement of self-sufficiency?” This question is important because there seems to be an inconsistency within the framework of Aristotle’s idea that warrants further attention. Furthermore, it provides a basis for contemporizing the discussion, using Batman as a modern literary character. This will result in providing an answer to the apparent ambiguity in a context that is fresh and current.

\(^{21}\) Leigh, “Virtue in Gotham.”

As stated above, I have chosen to use Batman as the focus for this discussion because I believe modern literary and philosophical discourse has overlooked comic books as a source for these types of investigations. That being said, another goal of the thesis is to provide a foundation for academic criticism of this genre with the hope that others will pursue tangential lines of reasoning in order to broaden the scope of academic insight into this sort.

The foundation of the analysis will be an examination of the tension that exists between Aristotle’s notions of friendship compared with the idea of self-sufficiency and how there is an apparent need for both in order to be considered a virtuous individual. Initially, the study will focus on Aristotle’s criteria for virtue and friendship in order to set the groundwork for the main question. This is an important part of the study because there is a lot of discussion in past literature about the foundations of Aristotle’s ideas about friendship and how it coincides with virtue. Therefore, it is important to survey these ideas in order to establish the basis for the rest of the argument. In doing so, important features about virtue and friendship will be illuminated. These features will be significant in determining what Aristotle’s message is about the two topics, as well as answering the overarching question that combines facets of both.

Using Batman’s history and relationships, a diagram will emerge that will benefit the reader in understanding how these concepts are actualized and critiqued. Relationships between Batman and other characters such as Alfred, Commissioner Gordon, and Robin will be a key focus because they will give the strongest insight into the type of character traits on which Aristotle bases his arguments. The traits in particular are trust, understanding, and recognition of the other’s contribution to one’s own character development, amongst others.
Juxtaposing Aristotle’s ideal with Batman will help to understand, for a modern hero, how virtue can be expressed, if it is expressed at all.

Ultimately, the work presented will consider the interplay of virtue and vice, and friendship and isolation and put forward a better understanding of how all these subjects involve one another. Synthesizing these seemingly oppositional ideas into a unified concept of Aristotelian virtue in a modern context will be a contribution to a discussion that has lasted for many years. This contribution will be a step in a direction that joins ancient philosophy and modern literature in this particular form in a way that is meaningful and adds to the discourse from a unique perspective.
CHAPTER 2

DISTINGUISHING VIRTUE FROM OTHER CAPACITIES

This chapter will be separated into three main sections focusing on how virtue differs from technical skill, how virtue is influenced by other factors such as pleasure and pain, and how the concept of the Doctrine of the Mean relates to the concept of a stable character. The first section will show how virtue is divergent from other capacities such as carpentry, for example, in order to demonstrate how virtue is engendered through proper education as well as finding a deeper understanding in one’s choices. The second section will examine how moral education and understanding is augmented by the influence of motives like pleasure and pain. Furthermore, this section examines how moral education evolves into fully adopting the virtues into an individual’s beliefs for no other reason than the virtues bring her pleasure, unconditionally. Finally, section three examines Aristotle’s concept of the Doctrine of the Mean. This doctrine is a way to measure the response of an individual to a situation or action and is helpful in determining if she fits Aristotle’s criterion for a settle state of character. The doctrine’s purpose is not to tell each person what she must do in every situation; rather it is a way to measure a chosen response against a range of potentials.

The goal of the chapter is briefly to explain Aristotle’s account of virtue in The Nicomachean Ethics. My purpose so that later I can more deeply explain his account of friendship as a particular virtue, and then use this account to view how the friendships and relationships in Batman’s life have helped, and continue to direct his virtue. It is not my goal, nor is it crucial for this work, that I synthesize a distinctive or original position of Aristotle’s
account of virtue, and I will only be addressing some of the perceived difficulties with this
take on the subject in order to provide the reader with a path to further direct his or her own
inquiries. Explaining the generally accepted view of Aristotle’s virtue is an important step on
the path to answering the ultimate question I wish to examine here (i.e., “How does
Aristotle’s concept of virtue balance the need for friendship with the requirement of self-
sufficiency?”), and the answer will rely heavily on how he formulates the idea of virtue in the
early books.

SECTION 1: DIFFERENTIATING VIRTUE FROM
TECHNICAL SKILL

In book II of his *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines virtue as “Virtue, then, is
a state that decides, consisting in a mean, the mean relative to us, which is defined by
reference to reason, that is to say, to the reason by reference to which the prudent person
would define it.” Aristotle defines virtue in the *Eudemian Ethics* as “Virtue, therefore, is the sort of disposition which is produced by the best process to do with the soul, and from which
are done the best functions of the soul and its best affections; and it is by the same things that it is, in one
manner, produced, and in another destroyed, and its employment has to do with the same things as those by
which it is promoted and destroyed: those in relation to which it disposes things in the best way.” Aristotle,
*Eudemian Ethics*, trans. Michael Woods (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 1220a. There are some
clear similarities as well as distinctions in these two definitions, however, for the sake of this investigation, I
focus on the definition provided in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

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23 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107a. Aristotle defines virtue in the *Eudemian Ethics* as “Virtue,
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clear similarities as well as distinctions in these two definitions, however, for the sake of this investigation, I
focus on the definition provided in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. 
One particular way in which Aristotle describes the difference between the two concepts is by showing how the outcomes of technical skills and virtues are viewed differently. He says:

The products of technical skills determine in themselves whether their producer has done well; it is enough that an output of a certain kind is produced. But in the case of the virtues it is not the case that if the output is of a certain kind, the action is performed justly or temperately, but also if the agent is in a certain condition when he acts, first if he acts knowingly, secondly if he acts from choice and choice of these things for their own sake, and thirdly if he acts from a stable and unchangeable state of character.  

The basis for this argument comes from definition of virtue above. He later defines knowledge of craftsmanship as, “A craft, then, as we have said, is a state involving true reason concerned with production. Lack of craft is the contrary state involving false reason and concerned with production.” Since the final end of craftsmanship is directed towards creating things, excellence in these skills is achieved if their goods are produced. For instance, if Batman’s batarang is considered good based on how effectively it fulfills the purpose of disarming or disabling his enemies. If they fly where aimed and take out their intended mark, it can be said that the result of his craftsmanship is excellent. Proficiency in these skills comes from proper teaching, practice and familiarity so that one’s experience is forged over an extended period of time like a student learning to play an instrument from the teachings and lessons of an experienced instructor. Whereas the final end of virtuous action is wellbeing, and achieving this end needs practice and instruction as well, it also requires habit, which comes from a deeper understanding of one’s actions.

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25 Ibid., 1140a.
Aristotle makes a distinction between virtues and skills and abilities only granted by nature. At 1102b he gives the example of a stone, which cannot, no matter how many attempts, be habituated not to fall downward when thrown in the air. The emphasis is that there are those things that have no capacity to acquire a skill or a habit; they will only act in a way that represents their naturally provided abilities. He goes on to say, “for what one has to learn to do, we learn by doing […] every excellence is created and destroyed by the same source and the same means and similarly every skill […]. If this were not so, there would have been no need of a teacher, but everyone would have been born either good or bad.”

States of character and skill are either improved, or degraded, by association with another who exemplifies and teaches them. A student can learn to play the piano poorly if her teacher does not properly train her, or if the teacher himself is not properly trained. Similarly, Batman could have learned to fight poorly if he had not found the proper trainers. And once the student has learned enough for a proper foundation, she may continue to develop her skills on her own. This is also occurs with virtue. Aristotle is making the case that the development of a skill and a natural talent are related to the way in which one is properly, or improperly, exposed as well as being subsequently directed in the skill or attribute. He says,

"[I]t is by their actions in relation with others that some of us become just and others unjust […]. To sum up, states arise from similar acts. Therefore one must ensure that one’s acts are of such a kind; for one’s states follow according to the differences of the acts. So one’s being habituated one way or another from youth upwards makes no small difference, but an enormous one, or rather it makes all the difference."

Therefore, it is clear that one’s actions must be guided from a young age in a particular way in order to create the desired effect. Similar to a young fighter learning the proper techniques

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26 Ibid., 1103a-b.
27 Ibid., 1103b.
in judo or karate, a person who is pursuing virtue must have the correct training and guidance in order to acquire the proper state for obtaining virtue in the future.

Aristotle maintains a distinction between learning a skill and acquiring a habit. An example would be the difference between a house builder and a brave soldier. A builder is a trade or skill that one learns through years of practice and presumably acquiring the relevant skills from an experienced engineer. After years of practicing and honing his craft, the builder will master the skill of construction, the final end of this ability being house raising or boat shaping—something other than wellbeing. Similarly, it will be through the guidance of an accomplished general that one will become a proficient soldier. However, the training will be different than some one learning construction. It might be through simulating battles or subjecting the conscript to perilous activities, but the result will be that the soldier will not only know what to do to be a soldier qua soldier, but he will also possess the qualities of bravery that are cultivated from facing danger and overcoming his fears. The difference is that both men know how to practically perform their jobs, however the soldier’s training will prepare him to perform his acts in a particular state i.e. bravely, which is different than building well or performing drills capably. Similarly, Batman early on learns techniques such as fighting styles, acrobatics and sciences, which improve his ability to combat his enemies. But it is through other forms of training, the lessons learned about what constitutes justice and goodness in Gotham that he comes to champion these causes while also using the skills he has learned. The question can be raised, what separates the brave man from the house builder?

In the notes to Terrence Irwin’s edition of The Nicomachean Ethics, Irwin points out that “The activities of virtues […] must be practiced, if we are to acquire the right STATE of
character. Habituation is needed because we need more than just the learning of instructions, nonrational desires must also be trained.” Irwin identifies the difference between instruction and habituation is not simply that one is versed in the process of achieving a goal or solving a problem. It is in fact that one fully understands his actions and incorporates the proper intent into them. Irwin concludes, “We do not learn simply to repeat the actions until they become automatic or ‘second nature’ […]. We must also acquire the virtuous person’s state and motive […]. Hence habituation must include more than simply becoming accustomed to a type of action.” Thus, the soldier acts according to how a good soldier performs and this is how he learns to be a good soldier. Similarly, a builder builds in the fashion of good builders, and so he to comes to understand how to be a good builder, first by instruction and then by mimicking another who displays excellent building. In this way, too, a person seeking virtue comes to know what and how it is acquired. Batman forms his virtue by having others in his life whose virtue preceded his own. By initially imitating someone who already possesses virtue, the student will first see what should be done, and eventually come to understand what should be done particularly in her own case.

In Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics: An Introduction, Michael Pakaluk links this idea with the desire to follow rules. According to Pakaluk, rules, laws, and guidelines are what begin to teach an individual how to act in a correct manner. Pakaluk says, “the first step in acquiring a virtue is typically that someone perform actions like those of people who have the virtue because he is directed to do so by some discipline or rule. This rule will attach

29 Ibid.
rewards to observance and punishments to infractions.”\textsuperscript{30} Batman begins his career following lessons of his father, a generous and moral citizen of Gotham. However, as Pakaluk points out, “if we have indeed acquired the relevant character-related virtue […] then as regards the performing of this action we would have no divided affections—there would be nothing within us which would rather not perform \textit{that action}. Thus the attitude of someone who has the relevant virtue, toward the action, is unalloyed liking.”\textsuperscript{31} For Batman, what began as a child’s adherence to his father’s lessons turns into a personal mission to restore his city to order and justice. His observance of his father’s code converts his learned skills to habit that is instilled in his own reason.

Understanding habit in this way, it is now important that the criteria of virtuous action are also understood. There are three measures that determine if a person fits Aristotle’s understanding of virtue, and they can be summarized as follows: First, that she knows, or is aware, of her actions. Second, that she chooses the action for its own sake. Finally, that the choice comes from a settled state of character.\textsuperscript{32} For example, does finding a wallet and returning it to the owner simply mean that she is considered an honest person? For Aristotle, simply returning the wallet is not sufficient. The act itself may be the right thing to do, but virtue would require that she thought about it, decided to act, and acted without feelings of displeasure from not having chosen the alternative. However, considering this example and the position as a whole produces some problematic questions.

\textsuperscript{30} Pakaluk, \textit{Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics}, 102.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{32} Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics Books II-IV}, 1105a-b.
The first step is to determine what Aristotle means by knowledge, and then seeing why that becomes important to the overall idea of virtue. Similar to technical knowledge, knowledge of an action doesn’t mean that a person is merely aware of it. Bruce Wayne may know that when he pushes a button an event happens, for example a light comes on or a motor starts running. He may not, however, fully understand what about that particular button makes that particular light run. He just knows that when he does A, B occurs, and that is enough. Aristotle says, “These [three criteria] are not included among the conditions for having the others, i.e. the technical skills, except that of knowing; but in the case of the virtues knowing has little or no effect.”

Proper knowledge is when Wayne is pushing the button, he knows why it turns on that particular light (i.e., it is attached to a certain circuit, or a fundamental understanding of electrical systems), and also why he must push the button in the first place. However, knowledge for knowledge’s sake will be insufficient. Once proper knowledge of virtue is established, a person must then choose to act and to choose that action for its own sake. Myles Burnyeat gives an account of Aristotle’s moral education. He illustrates how Aristotle’s view is to be distinguished between learning and habit. He says, “It turns out that Aristotle is not simply giving us a bland reminder that virtue takes practice. Rather, the practice has cognitive powers, in that it is the way we learn what is noble or just.”

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33 Ibid., 1105b.
34 Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning,” 73.
Burnyeat is clarifying the difference between learning that something is good simply because an instructor has informed him that it is good or noble, and learning that it is good for himself through repeated performance of that action, which forms a unique awareness of the goodness of the action. If a boy is learning to play the piano, his teacher may tell him that playing the notes in a certain arrangement will produce good music. However, only after the boy has spent time tinkering with the piano on his own will he understand independently why the music sounds good. Burnyeat goes on to say,

You need good upbringing not simply in order that you may have someone around to tell you what is noble and just—you do need that [...] but you need also to be guided in your conduct so that by doing the things you are told are noble and just you will discover that what you have been told is true. What you may begin by taking on trust you can come to know for yourself. This is not yet to know why it is true, but it is to have learned that it is true in the sense of having made the judgment your own, second nature to you [...]. Nor is it yet to have acquired any of the virtues, for which practical wisdom is required [...] that understanding of “the because” which alone can accomplish the final correcting and perfecting of your perception of “the that”. But it is to have made a beginning.35

Burnyeat’s view is that the role of education, initially, is to instill in the student that there are concepts and capacities in the world, known as virtues, which are worthy of pursuit. This will be the foundation for the student’s development and helping the student to identify for herself what is true. For Bruce Wayne, his father’s lessons he learns as a child give him an understanding of what it means to be a good citizen; generosity and humbleness for example. The guidance a teacher gives directs the course of the student’s development along the road so that she may be able to cultivate these ideas not simply because she has been told about them, but also because she hopes to find out that she enjoys them for herself. Proper education, therefore, is the first step to gaining a fundamental understanding of virtue.

35 Ibid., 74.
There is, however, a need to refine what it is to learn that something is good. Burnyeat clarifies what it is to learn in what he calls a “weak” and a “strong” sense. He says, “we need to eliminate the weak sense of learn, the sense in which to have learned that skiing is enjoyable is simply to have acquired the information, regardless of personal experience. In the strong sense I learn that skiing is enjoyable only by trying it for myself and then come to enjoy it. The growth of enjoyment goes hand in hand with internalization of knowledge.”

Learning in the strong sense is the conduit to habituation. Only through actual working knowledge of a concept like virtue, justice, or the other virtuous capacities, will the student be able to realize why she should pursue them for herself, rather than because she has been instructed to do so. This is similar to learning a technical skill in that one only gains real knowledge of the action or technique after having spent enough time doing it for herself. However, the two concepts differ in their final aims. Technical skill aims at producing material ends (i.e., houses, cars, shoes etc.). Virtue, on the other hand, as defined by Aristotle, is aimed at arriving at a state of character, rather than a material end, that can only be achieved if the agent can perform her actions in a certain way. This particular way of acting will be addressed below when discussing choice and motivation.

This opening section focuses defining virtue in Aristotle’s terms and then understanding the components that he uses to support his claim. A key element to virtue is education. Education’s role in virtue is paramount because Aristotle demonstrates how a

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36 Ibid., 76.
person’s virtue is not achieved through nature or pure luck. Instead it is cultivated and directed by instructors who have gone through similar training and are therefore qualified to impart the knowledge and skills on their students. Having a proper mentor ensures that the direction that the student gets is beneficial in actually directing her to form her own understanding of the lesson. This is crucial for virtue because learning skills or memorizing techniques is not sufficient in determining virtue, those skills and techniques must become an intuitive part of the student in order to establish them as habits. Habit, then, is only achieved after a student has accepted that her lessons eventually guide her actions automatically. This understanding of habit and virtue will help to inform the discussion in a way that shows how Batman’s relationships and actions fit in with Aristotle’s criteria of virtue.

SECTION 2: PLEASURE AND PAIN AS MOTIVATORS FOR VIRTUE

The discussion above dealt with the division between excelling in technical skills and achieving a virtuous state of character. Both require that the individual be provided with the proper guidance and education. The difference between them rests with the fact that technical skill is determined either good or bad solely based on the outcome of the individual’s efforts. However, excellence in virtue is determined not just by outcomes but also by performing an action from a proper state of character. In the following section, I address the question, what does Aristotle mean by “choice of these things for their own sake”?37 An examination of key motivators that influence a person’s virtuous development will be done in order to answer this question. Some crucial influences are the effect that pleasure and pain have on an agent choosing her actions and how she perceives those actions as a part of her character. I will

concentrate on Burnyeat’s discussion of how moral education leads an individual to find pleasure in her decisions.

Comprehending this distinction between technical skills and virtues is vital because of the impact that pleasure and pain will contribute to the discussion of Aristotle’s notions of instruction and habit. These two factors are increasingly significant because he sees them as key incentives an individual has while forming his or her habits. Initially a person will perform an action in accordance with the stated law because the law will grant a reward or punishment, causing either pleasure or pain. At first this will lead to liking the reward or hating the punishment and will be the main reason for her to continue this type of action. Ideally, she will eventually prefer to act in accordance with the law without the consideration of receiving a reward or avoiding harm.

This is the foundation for what will be Aristotle’s claims about the character of the truly virtuous person. Pleasure, pain, and habituation feature prominently in his characterization of virtue. Making a “choice for its own sake” is the question of what motivates the agent to make the decision she has. Does she return the wallet with money inside because she fears retribution or because she possesses the virtue of honesty?

The need to learn by experience and then coming to enjoy that experience unites the idea of virtuous learning to Aristotle’s idea of pleasure as a motivator for achieving virtue. It also helps to clarify how one goes from learning that a certain action is good to choosing that action for its own sake. A key component to learning properly virtuous action and thus making it second nature is to learn to be able to enjoy the action in the proper way. Batman would be ill-directed in his enjoyment of crime fighting if he were to patrol the streets looking for someone to beat up because he simply liked inflicting pain on others, but he
justified his actions by only targeting suspected criminals. His reasoning would not be properly aligned with what is the overarching idea of why one should or should not engage in virtuous activities.

Without proper education, pleasure and distress will be twisted. However, when properly in synch, one will choose freely what is good and just because she will have been instructed to do so, and found, through experience, that she enjoys those things that are considered just and good for their own sake. Aristotle concludes,

It will be clear also from the following that they are to do with these same things: since there are three objects of choice, the fine, the advantageous, and the pleasant, and three opposed objects of avoidance, the disgraceful, the harmful, and the unpleasant, the good person is the one who gets it right in all these respects and the bad the one who goes wrong, above all with regard to pleasure, which is common to all animals, and characteristic of all objects of choice, since the fine and the advantageous seem pleasant.38

Burnyeat echoes this idea when he says, “To understand and appreciate the value that makes [the virtues] enjoyable in themselves I must learn for myself to enjoy them, and that does take time and practice—in short, habituation.”39 To “know,” therefore, is to have an understanding of what action to take or not take, and eventually through repeated practice, to understand why it is important to do so. It is a multi-faceted concept requiring that the agent has a full understanding of her actions when doing them, which is only acquired in a certain way.

To sum up, the idea of performing an action for its own sake is a complex notion rooted both in nature and without. It is within the natural capacities of an individual to acquire the virtues. However, it is only those individuals with the proper education and moral

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38 Ibid., 1104b-1105a.
guidance who will come to know what the virtues are. However, simply knowing how to choose the proper virtuous actions in a given situation will be insufficient. Instead it is an initial step towards an action being considered a true virtuous deed. One must also find enjoyment in the performance of the correct types of deeds and enjoyment in the correct way. This will involve both knowledge of the virtue as well as experience performing the action in order to steer a person to the right form of enjoyment that will be both pleasurable and noble. At this junction, a person will have the virtue and choose it for its own sake—that is, choose it for the pleasure of achieving those virtuous acts in themselves as opposed to receiving some ancillary recognition or enjoyment. If the woman who returns the wallet does so because she enjoys honest deeds, then she has the proper alignment of knowledge and motivation.

Incentives like pleasure and pain influence the decisions of an agent based on her understanding of virtue and how she is properly or improperly directed towards certain actions. As Burnyeat demonstrates, if she chooses to act honestly or bravely for no other reason than she finds satisfaction in doing so, she is said to have acted virtuously in that particular capacity. However, if her actions are dictated by avoidance of pain or seeking secondary affections, she may be doing the right thing, but not for the right reasons, and therefore she will not have acted virtuously. This state of character is important in the discussion in the next section regarding the Doctrine of the Mean. Aristotle uses this idea to show how a person with a properly arranged state of character will act with respect to the median between two extreme alternatives.
SECTION 3: THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

This leads to Aristotle’s final criterion for virtuous action; action in accordance with the Mean. In order to understand what a settled state of character would look like, the idea of Aristotle’s “Mean” must be examined. Having an understanding of this and how Aristotle makes use of it ultimately sheds light on how a person’s character can be measured as stable. As it will be shown, the mean will be the target at which one, whose character is considered settled, will be directed. I incorporate J. O. Urmson’s and Michael Pakaluk’s views of the mean to lend precision to the idea of when and why the mean will be considered, if it will be considered at all.

Aristotle says, “As there are three dispositions, two of them vices, one of excess and the other of deficiency, and one a virtue, the mean, all of them are in a way opposed to each other. For the extremes are opposite both to the mean and to one another, and the mean to the extremes.” ⁴⁰ Put simply, for most activities, for instance eating, there will be an amount of eating that is considered too much and leads to health risks, an amount that is deficient like those with disordered eating habits, and an amount that falls in the middle that is sufficient for the body to continue to function while not becoming sick. The relationship that Aristotle has arranged between both of the vices of deficiency and excess, and between the vices with relation to the mean, is confined in the ideas of practical knowledge and experience that he has already addressed. Also, by classifying the mean as being virtuous and the other two, vices, he is delineating whom he believes are even able to comprehend this concept.

Using the arguments discussed above, it is apparent that one must first be in a certain state of awareness and knowledge before one can know what the mean is in relation to her

self. Without the proper training and education, it would be hard for an individual to gain understanding of the appropriate mean for her actions because she will have no frame of reference other than her own experiences. And furthermore, knowing what the mean is and being able to achieve it are not entirely in accord. It requires proper training and practice resulting in the proper habituation in that particular virtue, which will give rise to the particular mean for an individual. This particular mean is not going to be the same for each individual. Instead, each party based on her specific character will define the mean. For herself consequently, the mean will not be a set standard or an absolute goal. Rather, it will be a floating target that changes its parameters with relation to the individual pursuing the virtue. For example, Superman’s abilities are god-like compared to Batman. Therefore, Batman’s approach to crime fighting utilizing covert action to confuse his enemies is much different than Superman because Superman’s abilities do not make him vulnerable to the same perils that Batman must face.

On this subject, Aristotle says,

If […] ten are many and two are few, we take six as intermediate in the object […] . This is what is intermediate by numerical proportion. But that is not how we must take the intermediate that is relative to us. For if ten pounds [of food…] are a lot for someone to eat, and two pounds a little, it does not follow that the trainer will prescribe six, since this might also be either a little or a lot for the person who is to take it […] in this way every scientific expert avoids excess and deficiency and seeks and chooses what is intermediate—but intermediate relative to us, not in the object.41

Aristotle is making the simple comparison using food as a measurement for relative sufficiency. In short, what is good for the goose may not always be good for the gander. Rather, it is through careful inquiry that a proper prescription of diet is agreed upon. Pakaluk

41 Ibid., 1106a-b.
argues, “the Doctrine of the Mean is not itself meant to give advice; rather, the Doctrine is a schema which shows the general form that advice involving character-related virtue needs to take.” Instead of being a defined, absolutist idea, Aristotle’s mean is aimed at finding a reasonable measure of action or emotion as it pertains to every individual. This is what he means in his definition by “a mean relative to us.”

But should there be only one vice corresponding to each virtue? This is an interesting question because it posits the idea that the virtues and vices are distinct in their occurrence. However, as others such as J. O. Urmson point out, certain situations may cross boundaries of emotions and actions while still others will require none at all. Urmson questions the notion that every instance will necessitate an appropriate reaction in every aspect of the emotional spectrum. He says, “If one takes the doctrine of the mean to claim that one should always feel and exhibit a moderate, though […] not a mathematically fixed quantity of a given emotion, the doctrine is plainly absurd.” The reasoning he gives is that in many cases, it will be ridiculous to expect to register an emotional reaction of certain types; the situation simply will not call for it. He says, “Let us suppose that in a normal context you invite me to dinner with you; how much anger, fear, pity, and confidence should I exhibit as my reaction? Plainly, in normal circumstances, none.” In other words, there will be times when it is clearly not necessary to register certain emotions at all—in fact, doing so may be considered inappropriate.

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44 Ibid.
Furthermore, at 1107a, Aristotle gives an argument that Urmson summarizes as, “There is no emotion that one should never exhibit.” Urmson believes that Aristotle’s argument about the mean relative to an individual includes certain emotions and actions that may, at first glance, seem unworthy of ever being demonstrated. As a result, there is no mean state or circumstance for them. Urmson says, “[Aristotle] considers emotions and actions that are alleged always to be wrong and claims that this is because they are in fact cases of excessive emotion, of which it would be proper to exhibit a proper amount.” According to Urmson’s interpretation, actions such as killing or infidelity (infidelity can otherwise be viewed as aberrant sexual behavior, which would otherwise be seen as normal), and emotions such as shamelessness and envy, are not simply examples of irredeemable behavior and emotion. Instead, they are themselves instantiations of an excess or deficiency with respect to a mean. It is his position that these are failings of emotions or actions that are otherwise guided by the schema of the Doctrine of the Mean. Instead of creating a classification for these actions outside the scope of the doctrine, it is more appropriate to investigate which emotion they are most closely related and viewing them as a grotesque variance of it.

Urmson’s insight serves to give a better understanding of the type of character requirements that Aristotle is attempting to distinguish when describing the type of person who will ultimately abide by the mean in the correct way. This is important because Aristotle’s third criterion for virtue is that the person chooses to act from a “settled state of character.” The Doctrine of the Mean is the gauge by which she will evaluate her choice. By using the Doctrine as a basis for measuring emotional responses and their subsequent actions,

45 Ibid., 226.
46 Ibid.
she will demonstrate how her character is indeed settled and her actions are appropriate for the situation. And from the choice she makes relative to her own personal mean, the severity of an action (or lack there-of) as well as a number of other factors will help to determine the state of her character.

As Urmson points out,

For intellectual excellence is also a settled state, and so is badness of character. What distinguishes excellence of character from all other settled states is, in [Aristotle’s] own words, that it is ‘concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e., the mean relative to us, this being determined by the rational procedures by which a wise man […] would determine it.’ Like badness of character, but unlike intellectual excellence, it is a settled state concerned with choice; unlike all other states, it is in a mean relative to us.47

“Excellence of character” is therefore akin to badness because of the choices one must make when she is confronted with multiple, possible outcomes. Those with settled states (either badness or excellent) will use the Doctrine of the Mean in order to make a choice that best represents her individual character.

The mean is a function of the proper conditioning of a virtuous person. Not straying towards either excessiveness or deficiency will be a product of whether that person has been educated correctly as to what the right decision is, and whether she is gratified by choosing it for no other reason. If these factors are correctly in place, the mean will always be what is chosen. As Pakaluk shows, the mean will not be prescriptive in and of itself. Instead it will be the inevitable result once a person who is properly directed chooses to act, in certain situations. I will use the idea of the mean that is expanded on here as a tool in discussing how Batman’s virtue is demonstrated in his choosing the path of the masked vigilante. In order to understand how a man would choose this particular course of action will require an

47 Ibid., 223.
understanding that certain actions, for some people, are the necessary action for him. Therefore the mean as it relates to Batman will demonstrate why it is appropriate for him to masquerade as a crime fighter in the first place.

**SECTION 4: CHAPTER 2 CONCLUSION**

It should be clear how Aristotle’s three criteria of virtuous action are not just about deeds or attitude; rather they are a combination of both. In the first section, I show how an agent must be brought up with the proper education in order to become aware of what a virtuous act entails. Using Aristotle’s definition of virtue, and comparing it with his definition of technical skill, a picture begins to emerge that shows how the two concepts differ in how each becomes engrained in an individual. To help clarify this point, I fold in Terrence Irwin’s, Michael Pakaluk’s, and Myles Burnyeat’s accounts of moral education as a foundation for shaping an individual’s understanding of, and eventually, internalizing of these ethical principles. This will forge her character into one that is capable of pursuing virtue for its own sake.

The second section focuses on the influences such as pleasure and pain to show how one begins to make the transition from a student of virtue into a virtuous agent in her own right. These two contributing factors help to direct how she will initially be directed towards certain actions, having knowledge of their goodness (or badness), but not yet fully being aware of why that is so for her in particular. She will therefore be ordered towards pursuing virtue as a directive, with the hope that she would come to choose the correct path on her own, given time. Returning again to Burnyeat and Pakaluk, a position emerges that shows how an agent will begin to choose actions in accord with how her own beliefs are aligning with proper virtue.
Finally, the third section discusses Aristotle’s Mean as an operation whose result will be determined by the state of the actor’s character. In other words, if some one chooses an action, it will be placed relative to the mean based on how well her character has been directed and developed. If she has the proper education and experience, combined with the appropriate internalization of her experiences, her actions will adhere closely to the proper mean in each particular case. J. O. Urmson and Pakaluk again highlight how Aristotle uses the mean to show how a settled state will be driven to act in a certain manner.

Understanding these three sections is crucial to the overall discussion about the balance of friendship and self-sufficiency in Aristotle’s argument. They help show the steps needed in order to determine what type of person is being considered and from there how we may judge the types of relationships that she has with others. In order to find out how Aristotle considers what appears to be a contradiction between needing friends as the highest of all goods with the necessity of self-sufficiency for the fully realized virtuous person, steps must first be made to see how they are deemed virtuous in the first place. At that point, friendship as a particular virtue may be examined with more depth. The sections above create that platform.
CHAPTER 3

FRIENDSHIP AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Integral to Aristotle’s treatment of virtue is the role that friendship plays in the life of a person, especially one who is considered to be fully virtuous. The importance that friendship carries is evident because Aristotle does not count it as ancillary to another virtue such as generosity or wit. Instead, Aristotle considers friendship to be its own virtue, deeming it worthy of two full books in *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, along with the importance of friendship in the lives of those he deems virtuous, there also seems to be a tension or a strain caused by the notion that the truly virtuous person has no requirement of anything outside herself, friendship (possibly) least of all.

It is evident from statements Aristotle makes in Books VIII and IX that he holds friendship not only to be a contributing factor for a person’s happiness but that it is essential for a person to achieve the greatest level of happiness. The focus in this chapter will be on three key elements of how friendship leads to a more fulfilled and ultimately virtuous life. First, the types of friendships that exist, since there are very different ways in which one can be friends with another and not all of them produce the same result in the person’s life. These varieties include use, pleasure, and goodness and are tied to ideas such as family, status, and age, to name a few. The second section will focus on the idea of the Self in a friendship, self-sufficiency, and what it means to be an individual that also requires another to improve her life. Finally, the third section will highlight the possible dilemma that the truly happy person has a life that lacks nothing. From one understanding this includes never having need of companionship, since the happy person has all of her needs met without reliance on any
other. However, Aristotle also holds the belief that no life worth choosing would be devoid of close companionship. The third section will address these apparently conflicting positions.

As in chapter one, the goal of this chapter will be to give a clear and concise account of how friendship is involved with the virtuous life, its purpose, benefits, and pitfalls. This chapter will not put forth a unique point of view. Instead, my goal is to provide an account of friendship, which I will make use of later in the discussion of how friendship and virtue are conveyed by one who seems to operate almost necessarily single-handedly ultimately providing an answer to the question, “Can a person be truly virtuous and also be alone?” will be crucial in refocusing the discussion to the character of the tragic hero, the lone vigilante, the solitary avenger, and crusader for justice.

SECTION 1: THE TYPES AND COMPONENTS OF FRIENDSHIPS

Section one focuses on the three types of friendship that Aristotle delineates in book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. His position is that there is not simply one version of friendship that functions the same in every situation. Instead, he discusses multiple forms of friendship, each being reminiscent of the ultimate form in its own way. This section examines how each of these forms of friendship relates to one another as pieces of a unifying concept of friendship. I utilize Nancy Sherman’s article, “Aristotle on Friendship and the Shared Life,” in order to help illustrate the idea that even friendships of the lesser form are beneficial in their own ways. Also, I examine the features by which friendship is composed

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from Laurence Thomas’s account in “Friendship.”\textsuperscript{49} Finally, I utilize John Cooper’s account of the species of friendship as a foundational premise in discussing the varying degrees of virtue friendship. It is his position that since friendships of use and pleasure express degrees of strength within their particular species, so too does a friendship of virtue. This idea becomes very important later on because it allows for an understanding of virtue amongst friends that does not necessarily rely on each partner’s being precisely equivalent in virtue in order for the friendship to maintain itself. This will guide the discussion into Section Two, which will focus on how the idea of the Self manifests itself within this definition of friendship.

At the outset of Chapter Two in Book VIII, Aristotle differentiates the perceptions about what is loveable into three categories: what is loveable is good, pleasant, or useful. Using these distinctions, he says, “friendship has three species, corresponding to the three objects of love [good, pleasant, or useful]. For each object of love has a corresponding type of mutual loving, combined with awareness of it.”\textsuperscript{50} These distinctions are important for a number of reasons. One reason is that Aristotle shows how these states are, though not always, oftentimes age-dependant. Age relates to the idea of proper education and training, in its own way. Education has a taming effect on a person’s appetites and impulses. As indicated in the discussion above about acquiring virtue, if a person is not properly instructed in her training, she will not make the proper choices as they relate to a virtuous development. Therefore, she will most likely choose actions that satisfy basic impulses, and some of these choices will be the reasons for which she forms her friendships, often seeking friendships,

\textsuperscript{49} Thomas, “Friendship.”

\textsuperscript{50} Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics Books VIII and IX}, 1156a.
which cannot and will not reach the highest species. The distinctions he makes show the
difficulty in forming the right type of lasting and virtuous friendship.

Two of the species of friendships, use and pleasure, are not the types that Aristotle
believes are built on sturdy foundations. Instead, they are a formed as a matter of
convenience and will dissolve soon after being fulfilled. He says, “those who love each other
on account of usefulness do not love each other in their own right, but rather in so far as
something good comes to them from the other. So too those who love on account of
pleasure.”51 He compares these two types of friendships for their ease with which one enters
and exits them. Both friendships of use and pleasure serve to fulfill a person’s present and
imminent desires. Aristotle maintains that once those desires are satiated, they will cease to
exist.

However, it is important to note that these types of friendships can be important as
well as valuable. As Nancy Sherman points out, “With regard to ethical virtue, ends of
character must be realized and implemented in action. But for this, the proper resources and
opportunities must be at hand. Among these resources or external goods are friends.”52
Sherman explains that even though Aristotle does not believe that these types of friendships
are lasting, he does believe that they are necessary because an individual is not self-
sustaining. For example, Batman often forms alliances with a number of other heroes that
never develop further than pursuing a certain criminal or stopping some impending disaster.
After their goal is accomplished, the two heroes simply part ways.53 Alliances such as these

51 Ibid.


53 A quick reference of a few interesting “crossovers” can be found at: Adrian Beiting, “The 5 Coolest and
prove beneficial for both parties, each time requiring both individual’s particular talents to combat their foe or foes. However, very little is lost when the partnership dissolves, and neither feels any great sense of pain or displeasure.

It is critical not to discount these types of friendship outright. Rather, it is more likely that a person has more friends of these sorts rather than the last form of friendship, referred to by different writers as full or companion friendship, henceforth referred to as virtue or virtuous friendship. Unlike the former types of friendships, virtue friendship is something that Aristotle considers to be few and far between. The reason for this connects with the previous idea that the virtuous person herself is a rarity. The process by which one cultivates a proper virtue friendship is long and difficult. Aristotle says,

One should expect such friendships to be rare […] it requires […] time and familiarity […] They cannot accept each other as friends, then, or be friends, until each is plainly seen by the other to be lovable and gains the other’s trust. Those who quickly do for each other things characteristic of friendship, though they wish to be friends, in fact are not, unless they are furthermore lovable, and they know this. For although the wish for friendship comes about quickly, friendship does not.54

Like the virtuous person, achieving the virtuous friendship will require many things that are external from the friends. Simply acting in a certain way will not translate directly into being friends. There are a number of factors to consider: similarity, time, growth, respect, and recognition are a few. In his essay, “Friendship,” Laurence Thomas considers what he calls the “Salient features of friendship.”55 He lists them as “(1) Companion friendships are a manifestation of a choice on the part of the parties involved. (2) Neither

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party to the relationship is under the authority of the other [...]. (3) There is an enormous bond of mutual trust between such friends.”

The first point Thomas makes is critical because it resonates with Aristotle’s criteria in that having free will while entering the relationship is paramount for the virtuous person. However, it is a confusing prospect that we choose our friendships on a conscious level akin to the level of consciousness that the virtuous person chooses his actions. This phenomenon may be explained by examining the circumstances by which a friendship is first introduced and then cultured. Aristotle says, “For every friendship is either on account of good or on account of pleasure, either without qualification or to the lover, and in accordance with some likeness.” It could be that a friendship is at first the recognition of another’s finding something mutually pleasurable. Batman is more likely to find someone with whom he can have a friendly relationship while fighting crime, people like Jim Gordon or Harvey Dent, who share his passion and mission. These individuals have a higher likelihood of becoming acquainted because of their mutual interest than would Batman and someone who’s sole mission was painting or photography simply because their spheres of contact would have less of a chance of interacting.

Thomas goes on to say, “Though we have no control over a person’s doing or saying things that so move us [to experience feelings that may lead to forming a friendship or a romantic relationship], what we do upon having experienced such feelings is another matter entirely. That is up to us. This is where the element of choice in friendships and romantic

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56 Ibid.
love comes into the picture.” In other words, after Batman and Gordon first meet, it becomes a choice whether to solidify their alliance. An individual does not choose the friend in the same sense that she chooses her particular outfit or which showing of an opera to attend. Rather, she chooses a set of circumstances that have the highest likelihood of attracting a person with whom she may find a common bond.

Thomas’s second point addresses the problem of friendship as it relates to friends with differing levels of worth or merit. According to Aristotle, friendship amongst unequals results in a discrepancy in the way in which one demonstrates her love for another. An example is the relationship of Batman and Robin. After witnessing Dick Grayson’s parents’ brutal death, Batman adopts Grayson as his ward and assumes both the role of instructor and father figure, eventually molding Grayson into Robin. The father is supposed to provide the necessities for his son to live and grow, and the son returns his affection with the proper fidelity and deference expected. But it is clear that the son and father are not loving the other equally, since the son could not continue (or continue painlessly) to strive for his goals and interests without the father, while the father could most likely be able to continue his individual personal desires without the son’s deference. Batman and Robin’s case shows how this tension plays out in that their relationship is constantly strained by a tension that reflects Aristotle’s notion that one man owes more love or esteem to the other than what he receives.

Aristotle says, “In all friendships that rest on superiority, the loving must also be proportional; for instance, the better person, and the more beneficial […] must be loved more

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58 Thomas, “Friendship,” 221.
59 This bond is explored further in Chapter 3, but the example is relevant to this topic as well.
This is how Aristotle believes equality will be achieved in this type of relationship. By balancing status discrepancies with proportionate love based on individual value, the son can achieve equality because his love will make up for his lack of merit compared to his father. He later says, “friends whose love accords with the worth of their friends are enduring friends and have an enduring friendship. This above all is how unequals as well as equals can be friends, since this is how they can be equalized.” So in order to have a lasting friendship with Batman, Robin will have to love more because in a free exchange of emotions, his will be considered “cheaper” than Batman’s, and he therefore will be required to give proportionally more in order to balance the scales. This is important because in order for the two to remain friends, one cannot not be jealous or harbor feelings of insufficiency with regards to the other.

Thomas’s final point is that there will be “an enormous bond of trust between such friends and that this bond is cemented by voluntary self-disclosure.” Trust is a key component to the idea of friendship. Thomas links trust to a public versus private perception of an individual as it pertains to the information she decides to share with the outside world. What she demonstrates through her routine actions and what her internal motives are may be very separate things. Thomas says, “the extent to which a person is willing to reveal to us private information about himself which he is not willing to reveal to most others is the most significant measure we can have of a person’s willingness to trust us, where the trust in

\[60\] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1158b.

\[61\] Ibid., 1159b.

\[62\] Thomas, “Friendship,” 223.
question implies considerably more than that the person takes us to be of unquestionable moral character.”

Trust in another allows her to share her intimate motivations with that person and, critically, expect that the other share similarly personal and intimate information with her. This is an especially important factor in Batman’s world because he necessarily trusts so few individuals that only those with whom he shares his deepest bonds are entrusted with his private information. All others are kept at a distance in order to maintain the façade he has created to maintain his secret identity. This is the type of trust that entails believing the other to be a certain type of character, trustworthy, as the basis that precedes any disclosure, and vice versa. The reciprocation is the tie that binds the two closer and combines with the other two components to eventually become the type of friend in Thomas’s companion friendship.

Thomas’s criteria bring up a number of important points regarding the types of friendships. However, there is a different interpretation of virtue friendship that John Cooper advances that widens the parameters for this particular type. By the above reading, accomplishing this type of virtuous friendship is difficult and rare. It will not often be the case that one finds another so closely related to her and achieve all three of the criteria listed above. However, by Cooper’s understanding, virtue-friendships arise more often, similar in fashion to the pleasure-friend or utility-friend. The result is a grasp of the concept of virtue friendship that allows for more membership than other perceptions of the topic.

In his article, “Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship,” Cooper says, “At the center of Aristotle’s analysis of philia in the Nicomachean Ethics stands his theory that there are three basic kinds or species […] of friendship, depending on what it is that attracts and binds the

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63 Ibid., 224.
one person to another.”64 This is almost exactly similar to previous readings, except that Cooper uses the idea of “species” of friendships in a different way. In a footnote he points out, “Aristotle thinks that the central case, by comparison with which the others are to be understood, is friendship based on the recognition of moral goodness,”65 and he goes on to say, “[Owen] relies on a looser connection by resemblance […] holding that the derivative relationships count as friendships by reason of resembling the central case.”66 Using these two examples together, Cooper connects the idea that the three types of friendship that Aristotle posits earlier are not hard and fast rules of friendship; rather they all maintain gradients within their own species.

For instance, when Batman first meets Jim Gordon, their relationship is delicate because the two men have not spent time together in order to strengthen their bond. It is an early friendship of use, and therefore it is not strictly constrained in its formation by conditions such as time, trust, and intimacy. Furthermore, entering multiple relationships such as these will differ in their levels of utility for each friend. Batman and Gordon’s meeting differs from Batman and Superman’s meeting because what each can offer the relationship informs the strength and utility of their alliance. Both start as use-friendships of a sort but differ in how robust the bond appears to be.

Gradation in the lesser forms of friendships can be numerated ad nauseam. This, as Cooper views it, is cause to believe that there could also be the same type of gradation in the highest form of friendship. He says,

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64 Cooper, “Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship,” 623.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 623, 9 n.
If Aristotle holds both that pleasure-and advantage-friends are wholly self-centered, and that only perfectly virtuous persons are capable of having friendships of any other type, he will be adopting an extremely harsh view of the psychological capabilities of almost everyone. For, clearly enough, there are few or no paragons of virtue in the world, and if only such paragons can have friendships of the basic kind, then most people including virtually all of Aristotle’s readers, will be declared incapable of anything but thoroughly self-centered associations. This would be a depressing result.67

While Thomas and others like him make good points about the method to acquiring these types of relationships, Cooper’s insight does indeed point to the dreary reality of the previous interpretations: that only certain champions of virtue would be able to achieve a type of friendship that would regard anyone but themselves. Otherwise most people would rarely move past their own selfish desires in order to form a meaningful bond with anyone else.

However, on Cooper’s reading, this need not be the case. A moving scale opens the top tier of friendship to those who possess a solid moral foundation while not needing fully to exemplify virtue. He says,

Aristotle does not make friendship of the central kind the exclusive preserve of moral heroes, and that he does not maintain that friendships of the derivative kinds are wholly self-centered: pleasure-and advantage-friendships are instead a complex and subtle mixture of self-seeking and unself-interested well-wishing and well-doing.68

Cooper makes this distinction by highlighting what it is that makes the pleasure-friendship pleasurable or the useful-friendship useful. He says, “The friends need not be thought to be pleasant or advantageous in every way or every context, but only in some, in order for the friendship to exist.”69 Batman need not establish connections with Gordon or

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67 Ibid., 626.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 627.
Superman in order to fulfill every aspect of his life or his goals. Instead, the friends he finds need only provide support in a fraction of what he endeavors to accomplish. This connection is enough to establish a friendship of the useful-friend species.

Similarly, then, a connection can be established for the species of virtue-friendship. Cooper says, “Some virtue-friendships might involve the recognition of complete and perfect virtue […] other friendships of the same type might be based, not on the recognition by each of perfect virtue in the other, but just some morally good qualities that he possesses.”  

He goes on to say, “such a friendship would belong to the type, virtue-friendship, because it would be based on the conception of the other person as morally good […] even though the person does not have, and is not thought to have, a perfectly virtuous character—just as a pleasure-friend need not be, or be thought to be, perfectly pleasant or pleasant in every way.”  

In other words, a person need not completely embody another’s sense of pleasure or usefulness to establish a relationship; she need only portray any use or pleasure at all in order to form a friendship of one of these sorts.

Cooper’s conclusion on this topic is especially powerful because it will help to illuminate the answers to some questions such as if Aristotle requires that full virtue need be achieved with help from friends, how is one supposed to form the type of relationship that will facilitate this process? By the initial interpretation, which is that this type of friendship is only reserved for the top pillars of virtue and character, the argument is mired in circularity. However, this allows for one who may possess some moral good that is recognizable to another to continue to develop and flourish within this type of relationship.

70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
Much has been said about the types of relationships that Aristotle holds to be the major influences in determining the goodness and virtuousness of a person’s life. However, the insights made above give an idea as to the depth of the discussion and the complexity that it provides. An understanding of pleasure and use friendship can be that each has their own higher and lower forms within their particular species. From this understanding, examining the varied matrix of a person’s friendships may yield an almost innumerable amount of combinations of virtue, use, and pleasurable friendships. And while all of these might not be of the highest and purest form, they may combine to form a full and gratifying life that is flourishing, happy, and filled with people with whom one may call friends of many different sorts. The discussion above will help to structure an understanding in Section Two about how a person’s perception of the self as an individual factors into a relationship with another. The role the self plays in virtue and friendship is important because the interaction between the self and the perception of the self in the eyes of the other is essential in the development of the friendship.

SECTION 2: THE SELF WITHIN A FRIENDSHIP

Moving now to the idea of the “self” in friendship and the part that self-sufficiency plays in Aristotle’s ethics, to talk about the self in friendship is, in some cases, to talk about two distinct persons. That is, Aristotle’s view of the self presents the idea that a person will begin to see the self as being reflected and directed by another. It is critical to have an understanding of the self in both cases because how one sees the self in relation to another will be a critical factor in determining the depth and quality of her friendships. The purpose of this section is to develop a more complete understanding of the role the self plays in a friendship. Why and how this is important will grant more insight into a person’s virtue
because the understanding of the role the self plays is inextricably liked with Aristotle’s definition of virtue. I return again to Michael Pakaluk, who raises the position that anyone who is a friend to anyone else, must love herself more than she love any other. This broaches the subject of self-love, which I believe comes to terms in Paul Schollmeier’s book *Other Selves: Aristotle on Personal and Political Friendships*. Schollmeier’s perspective is that the term “self-love” gets a negative connotation, being grouped in with being selfish or covetous. Instead, it is Schollmeier’s position that self-loving is good because it indicates proper virtuous training and understanding. By examining the self within friendship, the role of the virtuous hero in the world continues to emerge and form a more complete figure for the discussion.

Beginning in Book IX Chapter 4, Aristotle juxtaposes the idea of the individual with friendship and what it means to be a friend to another. He does this in order to show the unity that a person forms with another by becoming a friend. He gives a definition of friendship with another, saying amongst other things, “For people claim that a friend is anyone who wishes and does good things, or what appear to be good things, for that person’s sake.”72 His points go on to include choosing to spend time with the other and do similar activities and choosing similar things as the friend. He concludes saying, “It is by one or other of these characteristics that people in fact define friendship.”73 This definition is how he is going to argue for the bond that friendship creates later on.

The main crux of the argument is rooted in what he views as self-interest. In referring to his earlier definition for friendship, Aristotle says, “But for each of these belongs to a good

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73 Ibid.
person in relation to himself.” 74 He goes on to say, “For he agrees with himself and desires
the same things with his entire soul. Hence, he wishes for himself both good things and
things that appear to be good, and acts [...] for the sake of himself.” 75 Thus the argument is:

1. If Batman is a friend of Robin, then Batman wishes good things for the sake of Robin.
   1a. He does wish good things for Robin;
2. Therefore he is a friend to Robin; 1, 1a.
3. Also, Batman wishes all these good things for himself.

It is at this point that Aristotle lists numerous key features for a flourishing selfinterested life. The list is extensive, possibly not exhaustive, but gives the impression that
this is the type of singular lifestyle that the person described above as a virtuous individual
would strive to live for. His conclusion for this is the critical statement, “Hence, because each
of these belongs to a good person in relation to himself, and he is related to his friend just as
he is to himself—for a friend is another self—friendship also is thought to be one or other of
these, and friends those to whom these things belong.” 76 So given 3,

4. Batman is a friend to himself; 1-2.

5. If 2 and 4, then 2=4; 1-4 by transitivity.

So if Batman wants for another what he wants for himself, for the sake of that person,
then he is a friend to him. However, there are some components to this dynamic that must be
addressed. Pakaluk says, “If friends love their friends in the way that they love themselves,
and if they should do so, and friendship is something good, then it would apparently follow

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
that self-love is something good as well [...]. In fact it is unavoidable, Aristotle thinks, not simply that a good person love himself, but also that he love himself more than he loves anyone else.  

This brings about the question whether a person can have friends and care for them without regard to her own desires? In other words, can Batman really want Robin for Robin’s sake or simply to fulfill Batman’s needs?

The problem with the notion of self-love above all others arises because it can be confused with selfishness or avarice. Schollmeier says, “Because most men are greedy, the term ‘self-love’ usually has a reproachful sense [...]. We do not usually apply the term ‘self-love’ to other people who love themselves. But because they are good, these people most deserve the epithet in a laudatory sense.”  

Schollmeier grants the moniker of a self-lover to the virtuous person as opposed to vicious people because of the difference in intention that she has with someone who is simply greedy. If a person has allowed herself to become greedy or covetous, then she has failed in her virtuous training; she would not be able to determine that which is chiefly important to her flourishing. Aristotle says,

That most people tend to use the word ‘self-lover’ for those who allot such things to themselves is clear enough. For if someone happened to be always eager that he, above all others, did just actions, or temperate actions, or any of the other actions in accordance with the virtues [...] no one would call him a self-lover [...]. Yet such a person would seem to be more of a self-lover [...] he gratifies the supreme element in himself and complies with it in everything.

If a person is always striving to live according to virtue because her training has directed her to do so, then she in fact would be a “self-lover” because she would always

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78 Schollmeier, *Other Selves*, 49.
desire to live in agreement with her desires. It is by intention and focus on the virtues that one distinguishes a proper self-lover from one who is improperly directed in her desires.

If, through proper upbringing and moral education, she has learned to strive above all else to satisfy her need to increase her virtue by doing right action, she is appropriately adjusted. And one such deed that the virtuous person will actively try to satisfy is friendship. Schollmeier points out, “One activity in accordance with virtue is friendship itself. To wish and to do what is good for the sake of another is an activity that follows from a habit lying on a mean. That is, good friends engage in an activity that follows from the moral virtue of friendship.”

Self-love will not only be distinguished from greed, but it can and should in fact be applied to the virtuous person. Given the proper education and development, a virtuous person will actively strive to satiate her continuing need to sustain virtue for its own good. And since a good friend is shown to be like another self, she will actively pursue friendships of these sorts because if she is seen as good, then another self will be just as good to her.

Identifying the self as another worthy of love is a notion that draws straight from Aristotle’s definition of virtue. Understanding the weight that the self carries in a relationship is helpful in understanding why and how one becomes friends with another. There is a common saying that “you can’t love somebody unless you love yourself,” and the arguments made above prove why this is the case. Being friends with another requires that a person understand her own motivations because in the end, acting from one’s motives will result in seeking others with whom she can share these endeavors. But before she can share with someone else, she has to know what and why she chooses such a thing.

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80 Schollmeier, Other Selves, 49.
SECTION 3: SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND THE NEED FOR FRIENDS

Section 3 will raise a question about the idea that self-sufficiency plays in the life of a virtuous person. This is different from the idea of the “self” because self-sufficiency enters the discussion of virtue with regards to the idea that the self possibly no longer requires any other like it to maintain its happiness. But, simultaneously, Aristotle maintains a sequence of reasoning that seems to contradict what the notion of self-sufficiency appears to cultivate. The question then will be, “How does Aristotle balance the requirement of self-sufficiency for ultimate happiness with the view that everyone necessarily needs another close companion to maintain that very same happiness?” To answer this question, I look at Aristotle’s definitions of self-sufficiency and compare that with the viewpoint put forth in John Cooper’s essay, “Friendship and the Good in Aristotle,”81 that individuals find a deeper meaning, even in their most private interests, when they are aware that others share in the same endeavor. I also look to Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett’s essay, “Friendship and the Self,”82 because they provide a positive account of the influence friendship has in changing an individual. It is their belief that rather than the accepted theory of a friend’s being a “mirror” in which someone merely sees the self, similar to Cooper’s point, Cocking and Kennett believe that she not only sees herself in her friend, but she is moved to develop by how she perceives herself perceiving her friend. They call this phenomenon “drawing.” This notion along with Cooper’s position on the shared interest will be investigated to


82 Cocking and Kennett, “Friendship.”
provide an account for the need of friends, even in the happiest, most self-sufficient individuals.

One question remains about whether a happy person would in fact have need of a friend. For happiness, according to Aristotle, is indicated in part by not lacking the means to fulfill one’s own happiness. So when a person reaches the epitome of virtue through moral excellence and right action, he will come to have no need for anyone else to continue to make him happy. For if this is the goal of all individuals, when the goal has been achieved, why would she have need of the company of anyone else? And yet, Aristotle says, “For no one would choose to live without friends, even if he had every other good thing.” What is it about friendship that would cause a person to want it when all other goals are achieved?

Aristotle gives an early definition of self-sufficiency that starts to illustrate the interplay between friendship and companionship and being on one’s own. He says:

The same conclusion [that happiness is complete] also appears to follow from self-sufficiency. For the complete good seems to be self-sufficient. What we count as self-sufficient is not what suffices for a solitary person by himself, living an isolated life, but what suffices also for parents, children wife, and, in general, for friends and fellow citizens, since a human being is a naturally political [animal] [...]. Anyhow, we regard something as self-sufficient when all by itself it makes a life choiceworthy and lacking nothing; and that is what we think happiness does. Moreover, we think happiness is most choiceworthy of all goods, [since] it is not counted as one good among many. [...] Happiness, then, is apparently something complete and self-sufficient, since it is the end of the things achievable in action.

This definition is interesting for a number of reasons. First, the fact that self-sufficiency is apparently not reserved only for the solitary individual but also for some very specific types of interpersonal relationships. Aristotle is establishing early on that happiness,

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for human beings, is also rooted in a natural state of being a “political animal.” He is acknowledging that humans will naturally gravitate towards being with one another and happiness will emerge from somewhere within these types of interactions.

Another key concept is the idea stated at 1097b, which is that something is considered self-sufficient when it “makes a life choiceworthy and lacking nothing.” This can be interpreted a number of ways. For instance, if Batman chose instead to pursue a life of model shipbuilding, which brings him great fulfillment, he may need no one else to accomplish his task other than the people who help to provide him materials. His relationship with his vendors may be cursory at best, and therefore he has made a choice that leaves him mostly isolated, but ultimately it is a choice that leaves him wanting for nothing else but the pursuit of his hobby. This could be something that is understood as self-sufficient happiness, since it fulfills the criteria of being both choiceworthy for Batman and he lacks nothing else. However, it would violate Aristotle’s conception of the nature of humans as being “naturally political.” Based on Aristotle’s view, the life of an isolated pursuit of a goal may not in fact be choiceworthy because it would deny the tenet that humans naturally seek to be with other humans.

Aristotle does give a basis as to why friendship is naturally important. He shows how a certain type of friendship arises even in animals for their young and towards similar species. For the young, it is to “avoid error,” and for men in their premier age, it is a way to “think and act with greater power.” It is the latter point that will be of concern here. It has already been shown that friendships of utility may help to increase a person’s goals and may

85 Ibid., 1155a.
86 Ibid.
be the only way they can achieve some of them. A friend’s use shows how striving to achieve moral excellence will require friends to succeed. However, if one has fulfilled all the criteria for virtue, will any type of friendship still be necessary, or will self-sufficiency be enough at this point? It seems that friendship will always be required for a number of reasons.

One important indication of the essential nature of friendship to the virtuous life no matter how accomplished is the fact that a person’s continued existence is perceived through that person’s actions. Aristotle says, “existing is, for everyone, worth choosing and lovable; but this is by our actuality that we exist, since we exist by living and acting; but the work is, in some sense, its maker in actuality; hence he is fond of his work—for the reason that he loves existing.”\textsuperscript{87} While this point is made in regards to the relationship of benefactors to beneficiaries, it raises an important point: that a person exists and chooses to continue to exist because to continue is more lovable than not. And her existence is amplified by the fact that she continues to perpetuate her existence through her actions and work. Batman defines himself by the amount of good he does in Gotham while fighting crime. When he chooses to quit crime fighting and everyone stops perceiving him as a hero, he ceases to exists as Batman (an issue explored later in \textit{Batman: The Dark Knight Returns}). He cannot be the thing that he no longer actually strives to achieve.

Therefore, happiness for a human must be a choice that would involve the participation of others besides one’s own actions in some direct capacity. Cooper makes the point that even a person’s independent pursuit of her own solitary goal is reinforced by the knowledge that others share in her endeavor. He says, “Aristotle may be thinking that living in isolation causes one to lose the capacity to be actively interested in things. Even if the

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 1167b.
activity that delights one most is something that can be enjoyed by a solitary person […] it
tends not to be pursued with freshness and interest by someone living cut off from others.”
Even if she understands this concept implicitly, presumably by knowing simply that others
also share in her chosen hobby, a stronger feeling of pleasure and happiness will come from
hands-on knowledge that some one else appreciates her work. It is this continued cycle of
existing and working that creates a continued need for friendship. This point gives clarity to
the idea that even one who finds joy in lone pursuits needs others to help her continually
keep her enthusiasm for the activity strong. For example, if Bruce Wayne were an artist
living in the woods, he may simply tire of creating works of art that absolutely no one will
see or otherwise engage in artistic pursuits viz. discussing art related topics. Boredom and
lack of renewed engagement with another artist may cause him simply no longer to care to
remain an artist.

Cooper also believes that it is only through another’s perception of one’s work that
she sees the full value of what she is doing. He says, “It seems not unreasonable to suggest
[…] that the sort of confirmation of the worth of one’s endeavors and pursuits that is so
valuable, perhaps necessary, to a human being if he is to sustain his interests is hardly
available outside of the context of a shared activity.” It may be the case that there exists an
individual who believes so much in what she is doing that she has no need for outside
confirmation. However, it will most likely be the case that one may find joy in an activity,

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88 Cooper, “Friendship,” 303.
89 Ibid., 306.
90 This possibility will be looked at in regards to the action of Batman and if he is truly acting from choice,
or if he is a victim of some sort of compulsion or addiction-like syndrome.
but this joy will be either bolstered or dissolved partly because of how others who share in the activity give it value.

Aristotle says, “For it is said that blessed happy and self-sufficient people have no need of friends. For they already have all the goods, and hence, being self-sufficient, need nothing added. But your friend, since he is another yourself, supplies what your own efforts cannot supply.” Even if what a friend supplies is simply an acknowledgment of his actions and efforts, this is necessary for him in order for continuing to find value in what he chooses to do. Therefore, even the most solitary pursuit will have need of independent vindication. Otherwise, it may be too hard or too tedious to continue alone. If Bruce Wayne has been patrolling the streets as Batman, it may be only through interaction with external contacts that he comes to realize that his effort is providing any real good as opposed to simply his personal fulfillment. Outlets like the newspaper and interactions with other like-minded people like Gordon affirm his own beliefs that fighting injustice is actually doing some good and his pursuit is independently validated. And by associating with others like him, Batman continues to grow his own capabilities as a crime fighter, and consequently he deepens his commitment to his pursuit.

Cocking and Kennett give an alternate view of the effect of friendship. Their belief is that a friend is not simply a mirror reflection of another. Rather, the friendship itself has creative qualities for each individual’s faculties. They write, “As a close friend of another, one is characteristically and distinctively receptive to being directed and interpreted and so in these ways drawn by the other.” It is their belief that, given the nature of friends and how

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one is perceived and also perceives being perceived, the friendship will have what they call a “drawing” effect, or an influence on how one observes herself in virtue of the way she perceives her friends observing her. Batman’s meetings with other characters like Gordon have an influence on how he shapes and directs his mission. People like Gordon and Alfred help to dictate the type of hero he will eventually become because their character shows him a path to the hero he wants to be. This topic will be further explored in Chapter 4, but the idea remains that the meetings he has with other individuals shapes how he is perceived by the other as well as himself. Drawing is a crucial part of friendship because each friend will continually benefit from the friendship and therefore remain interested and active in their shared interest.

A last point that Cooper makes is that oftentimes these activities will span farther and larger than a single individual can achieve on his own. For example, early on in his development, Batman realizes he cannot achieve solving Gotham’s crime problem on his own. He therefore enlists those whom he believes share in his ideas and ideals. His cause is therefore bolstered by the inclusion of others, and his dedication is by connecting with those whom he feels are comparable with his beliefs. Instances such as these are illustrations of another insight Cooper makes. He says, “where an activity is shared each of the participants finds himself engaged in a number of different ways and at a number of different points: to be sure, he participates directly only in parts of the enterprise to which it falls to himself to contribute, but indirectly he is, in principle, involved in every stage of the process.”93 Cooper’s point is that the agent need not be acting directly to influence progress or

93 Cooper, “Friendship,” 306.
proliferation of a goal. Batman can begin to feel satisfied by the achievements of others who share his cause, even when he may not have been directly involved in their accomplishments.

The collective success becomes associated with the individual as much as the individual is associated with the group. Cooper concludes, “One’s involvement in what one is doing is thus much broader in a shared activity than it is in the case of a completely private one.” The solitary life will not be enough to sustain and grow an individual’s sense of fulfillment. Anything from lifting a heavy object to feeling like she is a part of a larger community striving to achieve a collective goal, friendship will be necessary in order to engage in an individual’s world in new and consistently appealing ways.

Self-sufficiency is a concept that requires a deep understanding in order to see how it fits in with Aristotle’s view of friendship. Initially, it presents as a notion that someone who has achieved the highest virtue no longer has a need for anyone else. However, a closer inspection of how Aristotle categorizes “self-sufficiency” puts forward a different understanding of what the term entails. For instance, self-sufficiency can relate to a system of selves, like a family. In this way, self-sufficiency means that the group is directed toward a unified goal and is able to accomplish this from within. This means that isolation is not a necessary factor of self-sufficiency because people are naturally inclined to want to co-exist with one another. This inclination to co-exist has the power to influence how a person’s own goals will be viewed and subsequently inspired by another. As Cooper explains, working with or amongst like-minded individuals grants purpose and validation to one’s tasks. And as Cocking and Kennett showed, the drawing effect another has on the individual has the power to direct and change her efforts. Self-sufficiency, then, is not a state of seclusion where a

94 Ibid.
person needs never to interact with others to remain happy. The next step is to look at how happiness is construed in Books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There is a deep and rich source of discussion on the topic, however, for the purpose of this thesis, I focus on Aristotle’s idea about reflexive perception. This notion, which draws from the above discussion about self-sufficiency, helps complete the picture of how the virtuous person exists amongst those whom she finds to be alike in their virtue in relation to her own.

**SECTION 4: HAPPINESS**

The role of happiness in virtue according to Aristotle is central for much of his theory of friendship. The opening sentence of Book VIII is “Friendship would be the next thing to discuss, since it is a particular virtue, or it involves virtue; furthermore, it is something most necessary for life.”


96 Ibid., 1169b.

It can be ventured that what he means here is “most necessary for a happy life” based on the way that he ties friendship to the highest forms of virtue. Aristotle goes on to say, “Yet it seems absurd, when attributing every good thing to the happy person, not to assign him friends, which are considered the greatest external goods.” As discussed above, his argument for this stems from the fact that humans by nature are inclined to live amongst each other. By the characteristics of a good person, one will want to treat others well and give them good things. Therefore, a good man living in a city amongst others will seek to confer his benefits on them. So why wouldn’t this man want to do so for people he cares about rather than complete strangers or chance acquaintances? An investigation into happiness, insofar as it relates to friendship at this point will show how a person at the height of his virtue, will choose to live amongst others, and how this affects his own continual
virtuous development. By acquainting with those who share his interests, a person’s happiness will continue to grow and flourish by providing new and evermore interesting ways to relate to his own activity.

From the arguments stated above in Section 3, it is understood that a good person who has achieved the highest moral virtue will in fact need friends with whom he may share his virtue and spend his life. Aristotle goes on to tell us, “For at the start we said that happiness is a certain activity; and activity clearly comes to be and does not belong to us like some sort of possession.”97 Aristotle’s argument for this position is interesting because it revolves around the idea of perception: self-perception, perception of another, and perceiving that other as perceiving yourself. The argument’s conclusion sheds an important light on how friends interact in a way to promote each other’s happiness. That happiness is continually perceived to be doing what one has chosen to do that makes her life choiceworthy to her in itself.

Suppose there is a man named Scott and Scott is a good and virtuous person. Scott will know things about himself such as how he sees, hears, tastes, touches, and smells external things. And it is not just that he does these actions, but that he knows he does these actions. Even more, Scott knows that he thinks about things, which leads him to sense his own existence because while thinking, he is also aware that he is performing the act of thinking. This is pleasing to Scott because he likes living, even more so because he is a good and virtuous person, based on his habits and actions relative to the mean appropriate for him. And having a sense about his own existence brings him pleasure because he knows his existence is good and thinking about it fills him with good feelings. Now say there is another

97 Ibid.
person named Sarah, who is also a good and virtuous person. Sarah has the same perceptions about herself that Scott has and is similarly filled with good feelings about living.

On the occasion that Scott and Sarah meet, they find similarities that draw them together and they become close companions, having spent ample time talking, living and discussing with one another. Something will occur during this relationship where Scott, who is perceiving his own pleasant existence, will start to perceive Sarah as a good person for her own sake, not just for the interesting companionship she offers him. Sarah, also perceiving her own existence, will reciprocally perceive Scott in the way he perceives her. Furthermore, they will each begin to perceive the other perceiving him or her in this way, and each will choose the other because of his or her respective goodness. Because they choose their own existence due to the goodness and pleasure it brings, and seeing in the other a similar goodness, Scott and Sarah will be inclined to choose that as well. Finally, since each are fully good and virtuous people who perceive the other’s actions as similarly good (both in quality and relation to their own self), then Scott’s actions are seen as a good for Sarah and vice versa; and if Sarah is happy and Sarah is good and Scott is the same, then Sarah needs Scott as a friend and Scott conversely needs Sarah.

This argument is complex, but the crux of it reduces to if one person is truly good, she will require close friends because the friend’s goodness will be perceived as her own, or near to hers, and being good means having that which is good for herself. Having a friend, especially a particularly close one, will be crucial for an individual not only to enjoy her own life but also to maintain the sort of lifestyle that one who has achieved the pinnacle of virtue
will seek to pursue. While there is much debate about Aristotle’s meaning of happiness, the point remains here that as long as a virtuous person remains so, he will require close friends in order to satisfy the requirement that he not have any needs that are not fulfilled from within. This will guarantee him lasting happiness as a virtuous person because the actions of others, who are alike in virtue, will be viewed as good works akin to his own. Therefore, they will benefit his happiness as well.

This discussion of happiness shows how happiness, and more importantly, continued happiness comes from a person’s recognition of another as being like herself. The result of this is a continued interest in pursuing her goals because she now has another with whom she can share experiences, learn from, and in general find more enjoyment in the shared activity. Therefore, happiness is a state where one recognizes her own existence is a good thing that she wants to continue. But continuing this existence on her own will not be as choiceworthy, so happiness then is finding another with whom she can share her existence and in whose existence she is able to share. Rather than the idea that happiness is a solitary road, it is best and more fully experienced by finding that other person with whom sharing enriches how she experiences that which made her virtuous in the first place.

**SECTION 5: CHAPTER 3 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, it is important to provide an overview of Aristotle’s idea of friendship and to unite it with the earlier discussion on virtue before moving forwards. The discussion focused on four main points. The first touched on the three main classifications of friendship:

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98 A good overview of this debate can be found in: Gary Gurtler, “The Activity of Happiness in Aristotle’s Ethics,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 54, no. 4 (June 2003): 801-834. However, it is not my goal here to sift out the conflict between the different thoughts on the topic. Rather, I am only exploring the idea in this section as it relates to the discussion of friendship in books VIII and IX.
use, pleasure and virtue friendship. The conclusion reached here is that each category of friendship provides its own scale. Even the highest form, virtue friendship, can be parsed into different levels of realization, and this allows Aristotle’s ideal to be applied more broadly. Along with Aristotle’s definition of the types of friendships, I drew from Nancy Sherman’s argument about the benefits of the lesser forms of friendships in an individual’s life. Also, to form a more cohesive understanding of the structure of friendship, I explored Laurence Thomas’s three features of friendship in order to determine some basic measures of how a friend is considered as such and what makes a relationship either significant or trivial. Finally, I turned to John Cooper’s understanding of the types of friendships, which differs from some traditional comprehensions because his argument illustrates how all three types of friendships that Aristotle expresses have many different degrees of strength. Using this reasoning, Cooper explains how each friend need not be exactly equivalent in character as his friend. This allows for friendships of virtue to be more of a common occurrence between two individuals who may express qualities of virtue to different degrees.

The next portion focused on the idea of the self as it relates to another in friendship. The goal was to filter the ideas that simultaneously identify a person as distinct and finite from the idea that a friend is considered, at the highest level, another self. In order to accomplish this, I turned to Michael Pakaluk’s understanding of Aristotle, which shows that love for another must first begin with loving oneself. I connected this with Paul Schollmeier’s positive understanding of the term “self-lover,” which he believes unnecessarily gets categorized as negative. Instead, it is Schollmeier’s stance that self-love is a proper indication of virtuous upbringing. Section 3 explored this further by looking at how self-sufficiency according to Aristotle actually refers to a life where groups of friends
actually contribute to each other’s happiness. I turned again to Cooper, who provided the point of view that an individual’s interests are amplified when they have even the smallest connection to others who share those interests. I also focused on Dean Cocking and Jeannette Kennett’s position that friendship has the effect of shaping how an individual perceives herself.

Finally, the last section investigated the role happiness plays in friendship. Happiness, according to Aristotle, is the highest thing that one strives for in life for its own sake. And friendship is the vessel through which this can ultimately be realized. Having a close friend helps to influence how a person sees herself, and this reflexive perception by the friends increases how they individually pursue their own happiness. By finding a friend alike in character, one gets to understand better her goals and even learns to improve her life. This results in a deeper and longer lasting sense of happiness.

This in depth exploration of friendship is an important component to understanding if a vigilante like Batman can be considered virtuous. Unlike some of his colleagues and contemporaries, Batman’s methods require him to be a loner (compared to Superman for instance whose public persona as Clark Kent connects him with the public in both a broad and a focused manner). The challenges that Batman faces in his development and throughout his adventures concern the way in which he is capable of forming lasting and meaningful relationships. The next chapter explores how his friendships with key individuals directs his life in both positive and negative ways and explores whether choosing the life that he has chosen can be integrated into Aristotle’s framework of virtue. The objective of Chapter 4 will be to understand the nature of the vigilante as a necessarily isolated entity pursuing a greater good yet at odds with the law and operating outside of society.
CHAPTER 4

THE VIRTUE OF THE VIGILANTE

This chapter turns to the idea of the vigilante as a virtuous agent who, by requirement, also relies heavily on being self-sufficient. Batman as a character of modern literature is oftentimes presented as a solitary figure, huddled in his cave, absorbed almost entirely by his individual pursuit to bring justice to Gotham City. However, as is often shown to be the case, he must rely, and rely heavily (even mortally) on others whose causes align with his own. Furthermore, this reliance often results in the formation of deep and meaningful friendships. The question for this chapter is “Can someone like Batman, who necessarily exists within a level of isolation, also epitomize virtue and virtuous friendship?”

Section one gives an argument to help cope with the problem that being a vigilante makes for the idea of acting outside of the law. In other words, if Batman is constantly breaking the law, can he still be deemed virtuous? The problem rests in the fact that city officials constantly brand Batman an enemy of the establishment. His very existence challenges the leadership’s authority because it tells ordinary citizens that if they are dissatisfied with the status quo, then they are justified in taking up arms against it. According to Frank Miller, everything Batman does is illegal. However, as Aristotle explains, there are instances where doing what is strictly legal is not always just. There may be occasions when acting outside of the law helps to rectify an injustice. This is what Aristotle claims to be decent. Even if Batman’s actions are oftentimes illegal, in the strict sense, his intention is to help to remedy injustice and is therefore decent in his actions, rather than vicious or unjust.
Section two delves into Batman’s past in order to determine if what he does is done virtuously in accord with Aristotle’s definition. Batman’s virtue can be viewed in how his actions fit in accordance with a mean that is relative to him and how he makes the decisions he does. Aristotle’s mean plays an interesting role as it pertains to Batman’s actions because it seems that his very appearance would be so extreme that there could be no other corresponding vice of excess. Why would anyone dress up and attempt to fight the whole criminal element in a city? A question like this highlights how radical of a choice it is for Wayne to make. However, in the case of Gotham city, dressing up as the Batman in order to fight criminals is in fact one of the only sensible steps available to Wayne. Randall Jensen’s description of Batman’s wish helps illustrate how a desire can inform a decision and direct a course of action throughout a man’s life. Batman’s choice to pursue justice in his unique fashion illustrates a level of understanding not just of his goal and mission but also of the city itself. Unlike the Bat-imposters in *The Dark Knight*, who have not experienced the same training nor have access to the same resources, the mean for Batman illustrates how virtue is exercised in the individual by adhering to a course of action that correctly targets a proper action.

Section three views critical relationships that Batman has with Commissioner Gordon and Alfred Pennyworth in order to exemplify Aristotle’s discussion of the influence friendships have on a virtuous hero. Using Cooper’s and Cocking and Kennett’s positions developed above, this section highlights the important effect having serious relationships has in developing a person’s character into one that typifies virtue. The importance that Gordon and Alfred have on Bruce Wayne’s development into Batman and his mission for justice shows in the fact that he relies on them to help achieve his goals, and they on him. This
chapter ties in the concepts in Aristotle’s work explored above with the insight into Batman as a particular case in order to articulate virtue in a demonstrable sense. Using Batman as an example helps the reader to apply familiar examples to Aristotle’s work, which creates the link from Aristotle’s theoretical treatise to a defined instance.

A note about source material: because the Batman universe is so extensive, having numerous authors and contributors and hundreds of storylines over seven decades, I have chosen to narrow the line of examination to Frank Miller’s *Batman: Year One* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. In addition, I will also be referencing the most recent movies directed by Christopher Nolan, *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*. I have chosen these as the primary sources because Miller is attributed with revitalizing the Batman mythos when he released *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* in 1989, which has had major influences on the modern perception of the Batman character. It is the point where Batman was brought out of the “campy” 1960’s-era version and contextualized in a reality that more closely resembled current times. Nolan’s on-screen imagining continues that trend and draws heavily from Miller and therefore presents direct correlations between the Batman from the books and the one on the screen.99 This is important to the discussion because even though Aristotle’s philosophy is ancient, it is my goal to show its contemporary relevance. And in order to contemporize Aristotle, a modern-day character is required whose current actions can be viewed from this ancient perspective.

These works are also essential for the comparison in the next chapter between Batman and Rorschach in Alan Moore’s *Watchmen* for multiple reasons. First, Moore’s and

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99 At the time I am writing this, the ultimate episode in Nolan’s trilogy is not yet released. If Miller’s three books can be viewed as a trilogy, some extrapolations to Nolan’s may exist, however, this work may, and probably should, be revisited after the final installment has been released.
Miller’s respective works were released almost simultaneously, resulting in a dual impact in the comic book market and sharing the credit for jumpstarting an ailing industry. Critics and commentators therefore view both works as foils for one another in style and implication. Furthermore, both characters share binary qualities such as a sense of individual righteousness and purpose, which highlight a looming problem faced by those alike in virtue and activity. The end result will be a view that shows how virtue and isolation may exist but teeter on the precipice of falling victim to either the vice of complete cruelty or total remoteness.

SECTION 1: DECENCY AND THE VIGILANTE

Before the majority of the discussion on friendship and virtue is commenced, one idea warrants addressing because it highlights a real concern within the framework of virtue and individual actions. There is an inherent problem with the notion of the vigilante in that oftentimes he or she is acting outside of, and often opposed to, the written law. This can be a problem when discussing virtue because one could ask, “How can anyone who routinely breaks the law also be a just, virtuous person?” While the purpose of this investigation is not to parse the complexities of this particular issue, consideration of the matter will briefly be addressed in order to preempt some of the concerns with this issue.

An argument can be made that Batman is never truly virtuous because what he does is illegal, an illegal act goes against justice (in a sense), and therefore he does not possess the proper alignment of justice in his character to be qualified as virtuous. Miller himself states that “everything Batman does is in fact illegal.” 100 Miller’s statement encapsulates the fact

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100 Miller, “Frank Miller,” 67.
that Batman’s very existence is an affront to the order of law in Gotham. However, does the illegality of his actions necessarily mean he is not also acting virtuously?

Aristotle addresses the puzzle of what it is considered decent versus what is strictly just. He begins by saying, “What is just will be both what is lawful and what is fair, and what is unjust will be both what is lawless and what is unfair.”101 This is a broad generalization about justice as fairness and equality, and Aristotle gives an account of proper distribution to the self and to others, constituting the difference between what is just and lawful. However, he goes on to give an explanation of doing what is right that may be in conflict with lawfulness, and as a result, with what is perceived as justice. These occasions will be instances of decency.

He says, “What is decent is just, but is not what is legally just, but a rectification of it. The reason is that all law is universal, but in some areas no universal rule can be correct.”102 In the line between what is legal and what is just, Aristotle believes that there are occurrences where the law cannot prescribe a rule of action for all possibilities, which can lead to a lawful, yet unjust, consequence. On such occasions it must be up to an individual to reform the system, which has failed to provide the right action in certain cases. Because laws are necessarily broad, there will be instances where acting in accordance with one of them will not be the right course of action for that particular case. In this moment, what is decent will be breaking the law in order to preserve what is really just, according to the intent of the law.

It is almost always the case that Batman’s actions are illegal because he chooses to act outside of the scope of the justice system. In many situations, he is pursued by the police

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102 Ibid., 1137b.
and other officials and branded a menace in the public arena. However, in a city like Gotham, what is lawful and what is truly just don’t seem always to be in accord with one another. For example, in *Batman: Year One*, the heads of Gotham’s legislature are shown enjoying a fancy dinner party with the heads of Gotham’s organized crime, while discussing their intent to maintain their personal stakes in Gotham’s status quo. In many cases, the ones charged with upholding the laws are constantly manipulating it for their own gain, with the exception of a few individuals. Therefore, injustice is allowed to run almost unhindered and is often even supported by the ruling officials. This is a situation where Aristotle believes the universality of the law against vigilante action does not apply to the particular state of affairs, and Batman’s actions can be seen as being decent.

Aristotle’s definition of decency allows for this sort of vigilantism since his actions are aimed at a good end, namely justice for the innocents who are unable to protect themselves. Batman is viewed in a way that is more favorable than someone’s acting justly at every possible moment according to the written law. He says, “what is decent is just, and better than a certain way of being just—not better than what is unconditionally just, but better than the error resulting from the omission of any condition in the rule.” Therefore, it is better to be decent, in some cases, when it becomes clear that what would strictly be just (that is, lawful) would bring harm to the innocent.

This maintains Batman’s virtue because his recognition of the need for justice supersedes the letter of the law. Even though many perceive him to be a vicious person acting unjustly, his actions are intended to, and often result in, just outcomes. The truth of the

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103 Miller, *Batman: Year One*, 37.
matter is that Gotham city represents a situation where those whose job it is to protect and provide for the citizens act instead to profit and prosper at the expense of the populace. Therefore, there is an imbalance in what the law says and what the law in fact does. This being the case, Batman’s actions are aimed at equalizing the playing field so that those who would suffer under the rule of the legal system can instead aspire to live a safe and flourishing life of their own.

In conclusion, decency, according to Aristotle, exists when another recourse must be taken in order to account for an imbalance that can occur when the rule of law is insufficient in all cases. In Gotham City, Batman’s decency leads him to be isolated in his endeavors because he must necessarily exist almost exclusively outside the legal realm, which is to say outside the embrace of the rest of society. However, since there are other like-minded individuals who share in Batman’s pursuit (such as Jim Gordon), his valor is reaffirmed by others’ actions, and a bond of kinship is formed as well. While pure isolation may be the outcome for the truly vicious or unlawful person, the decent person will be rewarded for his actions and will likely find those who believe and act as he does. This leads to the next discussion about the depth and source of Batman’s virtue. The next section will evaluate the source and impetus for declaring whether or not Batman can be counted as one of Aristotle’s virtuous heroes. This will be the foundation for an examination into his relationships and the question of whether some character traits (or flaws) may find him to be some other type of person rather than virtuous.

**SECTION 2: VIRTUE AND BATMAN**

This section will focus on addressing the issue of the possible nature of Batman as a virtuous agent. The purpose is to shape how Batman’s wish to rid Gotham of the crime and
corruption that has permeated its core ultimately takes him on a path that instills him with the foundation of the very type of virtue Aristotle believes exists in some heroic figures. It is by understanding the need for guidance, education, development, and overall excellence that Batman’s ascendency to virtuous hero is distinguished from either being characterized as simply brave or resilient. And it is through his constant self-reflection and methodical investigations that ensure his path remain virtuous. However, as Wayne is made aware of early in his adventuring career, his goals cannot be achieved while acting alone. The question will then become, “Can an individual who is striving to achieve virtue accomplish the journey on his own?” Furthermore, “The instant that a virtuous hero reaches out for help, does that negate his virtue? Because if the truly virtuous are supposed to want for nothing, will they be diminished by forming alliances or friendships?” This section will attempt to answer these questions by using Aristotle’s definition of virtue stated in Chapter one and comparing it to examples of Batman’s history and development provided in the selected works. The chapter will lay the groundwork for a further analysis of his friendships to determine the types and depths of relationships he is able to cultivate as a measure of his virtue. In addition to the graphic novels and movies selected, I also cite the introduction to Mark White and Robert Arp’s book *Batman and Philosophy: The Dark Knight of the Soul*, as well as another chapter in the same book written by Randall Jensen titled, “Batman’s Promise.”

In the earlier discussion on virtue, emphasis was placed on Aristotle’s criteria at 1105a of how to judge a person’s actions as virtuous. When Aristotle writes about virtue, he

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105 White and Arp, *Batman and Philosophy*.
106 Jensen, “Batman’s Promise.”
is writing about a set of parameters where a person’s actions may be viewed as either virtuous or vicious or somewhere in between the two. The question for Batman is, can a man who is so flawed and struggles with inner demons achieve the highest form of virtue that Aristotle believes is reserved for only a few?

To answer this question, it is important to consider Batman’s training and origin in order to discover the source of what might be considered his virtue. In the introduction to their book, Mark White and Robert Arp’s comment that “One reason Batman appeals to so many people around the world is that he is ‘just’ a human being.”107 Being “just” human is important to this discussion because, unlike a character such as Superman, Batman is not ordained with any special gifts that set him ahead of every other person (some could argue that his vast financial worth would be equivalent to Superman’s natural abilities, however, there are a number of reasons why this shouldn’t be held as equivalent. First, it is not a natural gift like Superman’s ability to use yellow sunlight to power the abilities that he is capable of from birth. Second, Batman’s wealth is not something that is granted solely to him; other characters like Lex Luther share in immense wealth but not virtue). Aristotle says, “So the virtues do not come to us either by nature or contrary to nature, but it is natural to us to be receptive of them, and we are perfected in them through habit.”108 Bruce Wayne has had to practice and hone his skills in martial arts, criminal and forensic investigation, and science rather than gaining them naturally, by exposure to the sun’s rays for example. This practice and self-development, combined with the lessons he learned from his family, can be viewed as the starting point for the development of his virtuous character.

The extent to which he has excelled at this training is demonstrated in *Batman: Year One* where a young Bruce is shown chopping through bricks and kicking down trees.¹⁰⁹ This exhibition of skill and training is juxtaposed in this scene with the thought boxes of Wayne saying, “I have the means, the skill—but not the method.”¹¹⁰ In the beginning, Wayne is cognizant that his skills are exemplary but that he is lacking the right approach to realizing his goal of bringing justice to Gotham. In *Batman Begins*, Wayne travels the world learning fighting and investigative techniques, ultimately locating the clandestine group, The League of Shadows, in a remote mountain, and Ra’s Al Ghoul, his final teacher. In each of these instances of Wayne’s development into Batman, even though he does not fully understand what he must do or how he should proceed, he is aware of a goal that he is trying to attain. This goal can ultimately be interpreted as a form of Aristotle’s virtue.

As to Aristotle’s first criterion of acting from knowledge, there are two ways to perceive this. First, there is the knowledge of having a goal at which one is aiming, like training to finish in the top position in a marathon or studying for a test to get an A. Secondly, there is knowing the right way to achieve that goal, like beginning to run only a few miles at first, instead of attempting to run the entire marathon as fast as possible on the first attempt. In Batman’s case, saying that he is fighting to bring justice back to Gotham amidst violence crime and corruption can summarize his goal. What makes Batman a difficult and complex character are the circumstances that caused him to generate this particular goal. As a child, an assailant gunned down Bruce Wayne’s parents in front of his

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¹¹⁰ Ibid.
eyes. Wayne’s childhood trauma is the catalyst for forming his ultimate end. This can be a problematic foundation for the development of his virtuous character.

In Randall Jensen’s essay, “Batman’s Promise,” Jensen says, “the rest of the Batman genesis is built upon a boy’s extravagant and seemingly foolish promise to his murdered parents that he’ll cleanse Gotham City of crime.” ¹¹¹ He goes on to say, “What’s distinctive of the Batman origin story is that the why precedes the how.” ¹¹² This relates to Aristotle’s ideas of wish and choice in that he believes these two notions are connected, but must remain distinct. Aristotle says,

One cannot choose impossible things, and someone who said that he chose such things would seem silly, but one can wish for impossible things […] And one can also wish for things which could never be brought about through one’s own efforts […] but no one chooses things like that, but rather things that one thinks would come about through one’s own agency. And wish is rather for the end, but choice is of the things which contribute to the end.¹¹³

According to Jensen, a young Bruce Wayne made a wish: to rid Gotham City of crime in order to get retribution for the death of his parents. Presumably, a young boy around seven or eight years old would not know what such a wish would require, but the choice to pursue a life involving justice is fully within young Wayne’s grasp. As Jensen says, “Unlike so many others, Bruce Wayne doesn’t become a superhero by accident, but rather through sheer force of will.”¹¹⁴ Even while he makes this promise as a naïve boy, he eventually succeeds in fashioning himself into a force against evil, corruption, and vice.

¹¹¹ Jensen, “Batman’s Promise,” 85-86.
¹¹² Ibid.
¹¹³ Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics Books II-IV, 1111b.
¹¹⁴ Jensen, “Batman’s Promise,” 86.
Looking again at the early panels in *Batman: Year One* and the training scenes in *Batman Begins*, Bruce Wayne is driven by his desire to fight Gotham’s criminal underworld. But, is this because of a wish or a choice? While Wayne’s wish may be to rid Gotham of crime and injustice, it is through his choice of pursuing it in this exact fashion rather than through other means (possibly becoming a legitimate police officer or an attorney for example). This choice leads to a series of other choices that he makes: learning martial arts, detective and scientific techniques to name a few, and each choice is in pursuit of the end of justice in Gotham.

The final question that remains is whether Bruce has what Aristotle calls “a stable and unchangeable state of character.”\(^\text{115}\) Some may question whether witnessing his parents’ murder is a proper starting point for a virtuous hero. Young Bruce’s wish is one “born out of blood” in the sense that it is tainted by feelings of vengeance and rage. Critics may ask, “Is this person capable of acting from a stable frame of mind, as Aristotle dictates is necessary to be ultimately virtuous?” However, as will be shown, there are influences in Wayne’s life such as his relationships and friendships that give him proper direction for fulfilling his goal.

It could be easily argued that Batman’s character is not one that would be considered stable. There is evidence that Batman is troubled by inner demons that pull on his conscience and cause him great distress. He is often portrayed both in the films and in the graphic novels as experiencing painful recollections of childhood traumas. However, it is this very turmoil that helps to drive him to make certain decisions that ultimately lead to the path of virtue. It may be the case that he starts his journey as a wounded and fractured child, and ultimately carries that wound with him in his adventures as an adult. Yet, the fact remains that he has

cultivated the right types of relationships in order to balance these feelings with the valor and virtue. Rather than leading to inclinations of vengeance and viciousness, the motivations he develops lead him to pursue justice in its truest form. As a note, this is not an investigation in psychology, which is a realm that can be explored by others with expertise in that field. However, there is evidence in Aristotle’s writings that provide answers to the types of questions being raised here.

A solution may be found in Aristotle’s discussion on deliberation, which in fact yields two answers. One question is whether Batman’s actions are chosen for their sake. In other words, when he goes on patrol or beats up a thug to deter a mugging, is he doing this in furtherance of his final goal or for some other reason? An answer could be that he is doing this constantly to avenge the murder of his parents or to exercise a boyhood fantasy of playing hero. However, through Aristotle’s insight on deliberation, it is clear that Wayne’s actions are in fact aligned with the type of reason that Aristotle believes virtuous people possess.

Aristotle says, “Now no one deliberates about things that are eternally so, such as about the cosmos or the incommensurability of the side and the diagonal.”116 He goes on to say, “but we deliberate about things that are up to us and can be done: that is, the remainder when those are excluded.”117 Aristotle is answering a question about what people spend their time considering. No person (presuming he is not a “silly” person) would deliberate about truths such as two plus two equaling four, as an example. One might consider how to arrive at the formula mathematically (like Pythagoras considering a right triangle). However, it is

116 Ibid., 1112a.
117 Ibid.
Aristotle’s position that to deliberate about such matters would be silly at the least and psychotic in its worst form.

In Batman’s case, his deliberation is about his own abilities and methods. In *Batman: Year One*, Bruce is shown in a sitting room, injured after a premature venture into crime fighting. At this moment, near death, he questions his purpose and means. He asks, “How do I do it? What do I use […] to make them afraid?” Bruce is not deliberating on the roots of evil or bravery or supernatural matters. Rather, he is questioning what is within his grasp to accomplish. The loftiness of his goal of ridding Gotham of injustice aside, he struggles to find the way to achieve what he has come to understand is within his abilities.

This is the proper way to deliberate: understanding the scope of one’s abilities and proceeding from there. And it shows that he is properly directed in his mission. Aristotle says, “Deliberation occurs in the sphere of things which hold for the most part, where it is unclear how they will turn out, and in which there is an indefinite element.” Deliberation will always be present in Batman’s world because it is a world full of uncertainty. He is aware of his goal, and he has chosen it himself, but it is the path that presents the most uncertainty. It would seem though that his ability to understand his own limitations while trying to achieve his goal is a good demonstration of his stable character. In Batman’s case, this would be the mean that is relative to his self. As stated earlier, a mean is not some abstract goal that is the same for every person. Instead, it is a relational target that informs individuals as to whether their actions are excessive, deficient, or appropriate as they concern only them. What might be excessive for one may actually be deficient for another. So for

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118 Miller, *Batman: Year One*, 20.
Batman to consider what options he has in fighting injustice in Gotham based on his background and training, the right action for him given his circumstances and resources available is to dress in a costume and patrol the city, fighting criminals.

Understanding Batman as a virtuous character is a complex idea because so much of his motivation is rooted in a difficult and damaged past. In order to use Aristotle’s definition of virtue, Batman’s early history has to be scrutinized in order to find out if he still possesses the capacity for cultivating virtue. As seen in *Batman: Year One* and *Batman Begins*, Bruce Wayne does suffer from the damage of the trauma in his childhood. However, in accordance with Aristotle’s beliefs about proper education leading to habituation of good actions, as well as his stance about the affect a wish can have on a person’s choosing a course of action, Batman’s virtue becomes apparent. The strength of Wayne’s will directs his education and leads to a virtuous mean.

Exploring this path of virtue also brings up the matter of the types of relationships that he has with other characters. There is an uncertainty that Batman can truly have friends in Aristotle’s highest sense, being as he must constantly maintain a guarded façade. The next section will address the types of relationships he has with characters such as Alfred, Commissioner Gordon, and others in order to determine if the urge for meaningful friendship as discussed earlier, conflicts with the need to pursue his agenda in such a way that leaves him isolated.

**SECTION 3: BATMAN AND FRIENDSHIP**

Batman’s struggle to achieve his goal through the means at his disposal highlights the problem that virtue and isolation create: that one who strives to live a virtuous or fulfilled life may not, and probably won’t be able to achieve that on his own. So he must look outward in
order to realize that which he has undertaken. What role, then, does friendship play in Batman’s pursuit? And why are his relationships crucial for a man whose efficacy is essentially tied to wearing a mask(s) and obscuring his identity from almost everyone?

These questions will be answered in the following section by exploring numerous relationships that are integral to the Batman symbol. One key figure is the Wayne family butler, Alfred Pennyworth. Alfred’s role in Wayne’s development is one of the most important because, among other reasons, the duration of their relationship and the varied functions that Alfred maintains. Because of the nature that Alfred possesses, the friendship between the two men evolves into a model for Cooper’s analysis of the species of virtue friendship. Also among the critical relationships is the one he develops with Commissioner James Gordon. This relationship differs from the one he shares with Alfred because from its inception, the two men appear to be on equal footing with one another. The result is a form of the drawing dynamic that Cocking and Kennett put forward. The conclusion of this section will show how Batman fits with Cooper’s and Cocking and Kennett’s arguments, illustrating how his particular virtuous pursuit is capable of achieving deep and serious friendships, as well as Thomas’s discussion of trust that allows friendships like these to develop overtime. As a result, he is able ultimately to achieve more in his enterprise than he would ever be capable of achieving on his own.

In the early pages of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, there is a scene depicting an elderly Bruce Wayne and Jim Gordon sharing a drink and reminiscing about the “good” old days. On one hand, the scene provides the reader with an understanding about how the relationship between the two men has progressed in the intervening years. It also confers an
understanding about the Batman’s friendships over time, that his relationships were not only of use or convenience, but some transformed into real and lasting friendships.

In the scene from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Wayne and Gordon, now old men, rehash old times with a sense of both relief and regret. In their old age, they have an understanding of each other and the part that each played in the other’s life. They celebrate the anniversary of Batman’s retirement, the first panel showing two hands cheering glasses, as business partners would after a successful venture. And in many cases, it was through their partnership that Batman was able to achieve a measure of justice in Gotham during his time.

Juxtaposing this image with one from *Batman: Year One*, it is evident that this friendship did not always occupy the same level of understanding. The initial meeting between Wayne and Gordon is almost a panel-by-panel facsimile of the scene Gordon and Wayne are reminiscing about in the former. 120 Their relationship is initially adversarial, but by the end of the book, the dynamic has changed. Gordon’s last thoughts are of a new “friend” on his way to help investigate the threat of a new villain. His face is twisted into a smirk that shows his real understanding of the importance of this new collaboration. 121

At the end of *Batman: Year One*, the bond of the use-relationship is formed. And it is critical that this relationship is created because each man knows that this is the only way in which he can achieve the goal that he has set out to accomplish independently. Each realizes that his goal is one that is insurmountable alone; but together they are able to achieve much more. Aristotle says, “Equality—and likeness—is friendship, and especially the likeness of

120 Miller, *Batman: Year One*, 80.
121 Ibid., 96.
those alike in virtue.”\textsuperscript{122} Though not yet declaring both men fully virtuous, as a matter of fact they both are shown to be imperfect models of heroism, and it is their shared goal of justice that unites them. They are equal in that both recognize and contribute to the other’s position, while never trying to exert superiority over one another. In other words, it behooves Batman for Gordon to be successful because Gordon will allow Batman to continue his quest. In \textit{Batman Begins}, their initial meeting is concluded by Gordon’s saying, “You’re just one man,” to which a masked Wayne responds, “Now we’re two.”\textsuperscript{123} It is the pivotal moment where the men with the same idea are, at the outset, drawn together by necessity.

Their budding relationship has the externality that they not only want the other to be successful, but they actively strive to enable their new partner. Cooper talks about this dynamic when he says, “an advantage friend would want and be willing to try to secure what his friend needed, in order that his friend might continue to be in a position, or be better able, to see to his needs in due course.”\textsuperscript{124} This position is confirmed time and again with Gordon and Batman, each looking out for the other in his own way. And this, in turn, binds the men closer because now the other’s interests are internalized in a way that becomes his as well. In \textit{The Dark Knight}, Batman is providing Gordon with irradiated bills to allow Gordon to track the mob’s money and make arrests. This not only assists Gordon with making more meaningful arrests, bolstering his standing in the law enforcement community, but it also creates a tacit arrangement that allows Batman to work without interference from the police.

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\item \textsuperscript{122} Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics Books VIII and IX}, 1159a.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Nolan and Goyer, \textit{Batman Begins}, Chap. 16, 55 min.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Cooper, “Aristotle,” 631.
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who should be pursuing Batman’s arrest as well. Both men are benefited as they continue to form an understanding and relationship.

This type of useful friendship is just one sort of bond that Batman has. It is a crucial part of who he becomes because, in many ways, Gordon is the person who Batman cannot be. He is public, he is legitimate, and he is transparent. Batman by his very nature has to be private, and Wayne always has to remain opaque. It is his secrecy that provides his particular brand of justice, but that means Batman must remain officially an outsider. By affiliating with Gordon he is able to realize his external goal of making Gotham a safer place, as well as fulfilling an internal need for peer-companionship. And it is often the case that Gordon becomes a beacon of reason for Batman. This adds to Batman’s virtuous development because it is through others that his own excellence is continually shaped and directed. This is not because he is lacking some crucial moral understanding but because developing into a fully virtuous hero alone is extremely difficult. Virtue needs an individual force of will such as Wayne’s drive to learn and acquire the necessary skills and education. But eventually a time may come where the individual cannot achieve the next step on her own. While forming an alliance with Gordon may have been handy in helping Batman initially, ultimately it is a vehicle to become the hero that he wished he could be when he was a young boy. And the relationship transcends the superficiality of convenience where it began, turning into an essential bond in both men’s pursuit. The result is the picture in Batman: The Dark Knight Returns where the two men are united in the accomplishments of their shared history.

When examining Batman’s other relationships, many will point at the bond that Batman has with his butler, Alfred Pennyworth, as the most critical relationship in his life. The dynamic between Alfred and Batman is vital to the Batman story because Alfred plays
so many different roles. He is everything from a surrogate parent to a field medic to a constant alibi. This presents an interesting perspective in the Aristotelian framework because classifying Alfred as just one type of relationship would result in denying the full depth of the character. How would Aristotle classify the relationship between Alfred and Batman? Do they represent the parent/child relation? Even though not technically a blood relative, Alfred is responsible for raising Bruce from a time when he was only seven or eight years old. Or is it more like the teacher and student, akin to Socrates and his students in Plato’s dialogs, where Alfred helps Wayne develop an intellectual and moral foundation? And when it comes to morality, is Alfred the true expression of excellence while Batman only represents a lower understanding of virtue? The answers to these questions are not cut-and-dried; instead they reveal a deep, rich history that the men share, which lends itself to a complex understanding of the responsibility friends wield with regards to virtue. Ultimately, the answers will reveal that virtue is achieved by the actions of a few individuals rather than a single person.

In *Batman Begins*, Alfred’s relationship is portrayed as a parallel to the relationship Bruce has with his father. In a flashback, young Bruce lies in the bottom of a well as his father is lowered down to rescue him. As the older Wayne carries Bruce back to the house, it is Alfred at Thomas Wayne’s side carrying the rope used to haul Bruce to safety; the two men here seem more like partners rather than employer/employee, both caring deeply for the safe return of the child. Later, as Wayne Manor burns above them, it is Alfred’s steadfastness that reinforces Bruce’s courage as he repeats Thomas Wayne’s lesson learned on the day he
was rescued from the well, “Why do we fall, sir? So that we can learn to pick ourselves up.”

The definition of Alfred’s vocation presents a peculiar dynamic for the Aristotelian framework of friendship. First, being a butler is by classification a subservient position. Aristotle describes this dynamic saying,

A different species of friendship is the one that rests on superiority—of a father toward his son, […] and in general of an older person toward a younger, […] and any sort of ruler toward the one he rules. These friendships also differ from each other. For friendship of parents to children is not the same as that of rulers to ruled; nor is friendship of father to son the same as that of son to father. […] For each of these friends has a different virtue and a different function, and there are different causes of love. Hence the ways of loving are different, and so are the friendships.

Aristotle is laying the framework for a discussion about the ways in which individuals of unequal rank may enter and grow a friendship. He lists numerous types of relationships, illuminating the notion that there are a variety of ways in which parties interact. What is critical with regards to Alfred is that at any time his relationship with Wayne can resemble any one of those cataloged above.

In the scene described earlier, Alfred is portrayed as the father figure, which should afford him a level of deference from Wayne that supersedes his job title. Alfred encourages Wayne, as well as castigates him like a father would his own child. It is also because of Alfred’s experience not only in his long tenure with the Wayne family but in life that Batman consults with the butler (different sources describe Alfred’s past as a stage actor, a military man, a royal servant, and even a private investigator on his own in later years). This establishes Alfred not only as a parental figure but also as the type of teacher and role model

125 Nolan and Goyer, Batman Begins, Chap. 32, 111 min.
126 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1158b.
Aristotle believes is crucial for imparting a youth with proper virtuous knowledge. Like the apprentice house builder, Wayne required someone who possessed virtue already in order for him to be directed properly as a child. This is a crucial function that Alfred provides because Batman is routinely exposed to vicious enemies and scenarios that threaten the development and direction of his character.

Understanding the relationship between Batman and Alfred as the fullest form of virtue friendship is made difficult, in part, by the varying ways in which Alfred is depicted. He is the closest person to Wayne, however, a distinction in status exists that makes it difficult to classify the two men as being true friends, most pointedly in respect to Thomas’s second criterion that “Neither party to the relationship is under the authority of the other.” It is often the case where Alfred is technically under Wayne’s authority, which makes their relationship difficult to be ruled unequivocally as virtuous. In spite of this, their friendship does maintain qualities of virtue that Aristotle believes must be present in the highest form.

Time is a fundamental aspect to the Aristotelian friendship. Aristotle claims, “they need time as well, to grow accustomed to each other; for, as the proverb says, they cannot know each other before they have shared their salt as often as it says, and they cannot accept each other or be friends until each appears lovable to the other and gains the other’s confidence.” In the earlier scenes from *Batman Begins*, the audience is shown Alfred’s concern for Wayne, as a father would be concerned for his own child. However, later, as well, as complementary scenes from *The Dark Knight* show, Wayne and Alfred joke as old friends, most pointedly the moment where Wayne and Alfred discuss Wayne’s turning

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127 Thomas, “Friendship,” 217.
himself in to the authorities. Both men share a laugh over whose idea Batman was in the first place. At this moment, there is no veil of secrecy, no charade of butler/wealthy socialite. They are simply two men who, because of a complex and intricate history with each other, spend a moment of togetherness that does not exist in either’s life outside this instant.

What stands out most importantly about their friendship, which elevates it above the lower forms, is the amount of trust each puts in the other. This trust differs from the type of trust that Batman has in Gordon. That trust is the kind derived from recognizing the type of person the other is and therefore predicting that he will perform in the correct way when the time is right. For example, in *The Dark Knight*, Gordon fakes his death and reappears just in time to apprehend the Joker and save Harvey Dent, sparing Batman from having to reveal his true identity and thus failing in his mission. All three men, Gordon, Dent, and Batman, trust in the others implicitly. It is not because they had coordinated ahead of time but because each recognizes the character of the other men as being like his. However, the trust that Batman and Alfred share is something that runs much, much deeper.

Because of the time that they have spent with one another, Wayne and Alfred know certain information about the other man. Thomas says, “The bond of trust between deep friends is cemented by the equal self-disclosure of intimate information.”\(^{129}\) The most obvious example of this is that Alfred is frequently the only one who not only knows Batman’s true identity but also is the only other person with a full understanding of Batman’s plans and motives. Even though there are others who are let in on the secret identity of Batman, Alfred is frequently the only person with whom Batman will confer about how to proceed tactically. Furthermore, it is only by coordinating with Alfred that Batman is able to

\(^{129}\) Thomas, “Friendship,” 223.
pull off some of his more extravagant feats such as retrieving the mob accountant, Lau, from his office in China, or his elaborate pseudo-death and cover-up in the conclusion to *The Dark Knight Returns*. Batman only confides his deepest and often most imperative plans in Alfred. The level of trust he instills in their relationship far surpasses any other.

So what does Alfred share with Batman? It is hard to see how the relationship goes both ways in this instance. Often it seems that Batman is constantly asking of Alfred, while Alfred doesn’t seem to entrust explicitly him with any of his own secrets; at least no secret that he hasn’t presumably shared with old army friends or other acquaintances. However, after examining the roots of their relationship, it is apparent that Alfred does indeed entrust Wayne with critical information. Alfred’s other important function that precedes his duties to Wayne is to be the keeper of the Wayne legacy until a day when Wayne can fully realize the position himself. In many ways, Alfred is the sole keeper of the Wayne tradition since Wayne was such a young child when his family was murdered. He must therefore guard this tradition and make sure that it eventually is carried on with Wayne.

In *Batman Begins*, flashbacks show young Bruce’s interacting with his parents on a few occasions, and he learns of some of the contributions his father has given to the city. However, it is later that he learns from Alfred how important his father’s legacy really was. On his flight back to America from his travels, it is Alfred who greets him and explains how dire the conditions in Gotham have gotten without the influence of a Wayne guiding it. And it is also important to note that it is Alfred who is named beneficiary of the family stake in their corporation in Bruce’s absence. While the world may see a butler on the outside, inside Alfred knows he has a much more sacred charge, and there is only one other with whom he
can share this. Thus, one of Alfred’s main ends is to see that the Wayne legacy proceed in the correct way.

Of the two characters, Alfred and Commissioner Gordon, Batman’s relationship with Alfred most resembles the friendship of virtue. However, both men provide a significant benefit for Batman, as he does for them. What their actions combine to achieve are the types of relationships that Cooper and Cocking and Kennett explore in their respective inquiries. The power of friendship in this case is not only so that each man can enjoy his life more fully, as if it were a superfluous upgrade that would not be missed had it never been introduced in the first place. For Batman and his companions, friendship is a realization of individual and mutual goals as well as a counter-balance to the negative influences of those they are fighting against.

In his dealings with the criminal underworld, Batman is often confronted by the fact that he walks a very fine line separating himself from what he strives to eradicate. By relying on people like Alfred and Gordon, he is constantly reminded of the strength bestowed by virtue. In *The Dark Knight*, Alfred explains to the furious Rachel Dawes that “Batman stands for something more important than the whims of a terrorist.”\(^\text{130}\) Alfred’s understanding of virtue is critical in grounding Batman’s pursuit of justice in a framework that does not cross the line to villainy. Referring to Cocking and Kennett’s position from above, Alfred is the primary person from whose perspective Batman envisions himself. By relying chiefly on Alfred’s counsel, he is constantly shaping how he wants to be perceived by the public. Alfred is the mirror for drawing himself as Batman thinks he should appear.

\(^{130}\) Nolan and Nolan, *The Dark Knight*, Chap. 19, 1 min., 13 sec.
The relationship he has with Gordon is one of similarity. Rather than seeing a potential future version of himself, as is the case with Alfred, Batman and Gordon’s relationship benefits each man by having another like-minded individual working in tandem. Like two jazz musicians improvising a song, one man sees what the other has done, and learns and adapts his own actions, and vice versa. Batman and Gordon are constantly pushing each other to higher acts of heroism, and while they may not share intimate information as closely as Batman and Alfred, their like-mindedness and shared ambition is the bridge for their partnership to flourish into a strong and lasting friendship.

By examining the roots and development of two of Batman’s most influential relationships, we are able to see how friendship develops alongside and often in support of virtue. As a vital component to his training, Batman relies on Alfred and Gordon to provide support and guidance as he trudges through the difficulty and hardship associated with fighting injustice and becoming the epitome of virtue. Though his chosen undertaking requires a vast amount of isolation and subterfuge, he also needs people who are close and with whom he can trust and confide in. Gordon is a key component to his cause because both men recognize a need for extraordinary methods in order to save Gotham from the villainy that pollutes it. Their mutual recognition of the other as a means to achieve this goal is the first step in creating a bond that grows into a profound relationship that helps each achieve his individual objectives, as well as their joint ambition. Alfred’s position is more complex because of the different roles he plays in Wayne’s life. As a surrogate father and teacher, Alfred is essential in providing Wayne with his basic understanding of virtue and justice. In his later years, Alfred continues to help guide Batman in his efforts and judgments as Batman’s most trusted confidants. These two relationships demonstrate how achieving
Aristotle’s pinnacle of friendship can be difficult and often resemble different versions of friendship. However, through effort, time, and trust, virtuous friendship is accomplished.

**SECTION 4: CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this chapter shows how Aristotle’s position on the importance of friendship in virtuous living is exemplified by a modern literary character. Batman is an enduring example of many of the virtues Aristotle highlights, which makes him an optimal choice for pursuing an in depth investigation about the important role friendship plays in virtue. Using these relationships as a foundation for understanding the root of his virtue, the character of Batman can be used to comprehend how virtue is critically linked with friendships of every type that Aristotle describes.

The first section focused on how decency fits in with justice and virtue, providing a conception of how a vigilante who acts outside of the law is not necessarily a vicious person. This is important for this thesis because Batman’s actions are almost always considered to be illegal by the ruling establishment of Gotham. However, using examples from *Batman Begins* and *Batman: Year One* showing how the ruling class is acting only to serve itself while Batman is actually acting in concord with justice for the general public that cannot protect itself, it becomes clear that Batman’s actions outside of the strict rule of law actually serve the higher good of rectifying injustices suffered by the people whom the law fails to protect.

Section two is inquiry into the roots of Batman’s virtue, and the causes and effects experiences from his childhood play in whether he is able to acquire the proper faculties for achieving virtue. Using Aristotle’s view of what constitutes a choice and what constitutes a wish, an analysis of Batman’s beginning as shown in *Batman Begins* and *Batman: Year One*
provide an understanding of how Bruce Wayne’s force of will is directed toward his goal of fighting injustice. This is also important for dispelling the idea that the trauma of Wayne’s early childhood could result in an improper motivation for his quest, which would in turn jeopardize his virtue. However, this dilemma is assuaged by focusing on how the early education he receives from people like Alfred help to mold his impulse into one that resembles virtue.

The final section of this chapter focuses on the profound relationships in Batman’s life, using Cooper’s and Cocking and Kennett’s perspectives that have been examined above. Concentrating on the key relationships that Batman has with Gordon and Alfred is crucial to this thesis because these two men above all others are integral to guiding Batman’s development as a virtuous hero along the path that Aristotle has described. Using the theories presented above, it becomes clear how Batman is able to achieve his endeavor only with the help of those relationships that are closest and strongest. This is not only because of the sheer magnitude of his task requiring additional personnel to take up arms with him but also because they provide incredibly valuable advice and perspective and each has his own set of talents and authorities, which combine to make Batman the hero he is. In the end, it is through these relationships that he is able to channel his desire into becoming a hero for justice.

The next chapter will examine another side of friendship, namely what types of relationships vicious people are able to maintain and what happens when friendship fails. Batman has examples of both instances in his life, and they are important in shedding light on how the elements of friendship can often fail to evolve into higher forms. Also, the chapter will show how self-sufficiency in an extreme form can lead to isolation, a state that
can not only jeopardize virtue but also imperil the agent who falls into this dilemma.

Friendship, then, is not only something to be sought in order to help bolster one’s enjoyment of his activities but more importantly, in order to help create and sustain a life worth living at all.
CHAPTER 5

THE FRAGILITY OF VIRTUE AND FRIENDSHIP

As shown above, achieving virtue requires skill, determination, effort, and time. With proper direction and practice, an individual like Batman can become a champion of virtuous standards through the connections he forms with friends and loved ones, even if he has not yet achieved the ultimate virtuous character. His relationships with men like Gordon and Alfred help to formulate and direct his character into one that exemplifies the pursuit of justice in a city that is plagued by crime and inequality. However, remaining virtuous and maintaining these types of relationships are not both guaranteed once an individual has achieved a virtuous character.

This chapter explores the problem with preserving virtue once it has been established amongst friends. Section one considers why and how Aristotle believes friendships dissolve and the impact that changes or fluctuations in individual character affects the stability and growth of friendships. I examine the relationships that Batman has with the various incarnations of Robin as an example of how relationships, which have grown particularly strong in ways Aristotle believes can create the highest level of friendship, can ultimately be disrupted in a number of ways. Furthermore, section one focuses on the relationship that Batman and his archenemy, Joker, share. As his archenemy, Joker’s portrayal in Nolan’s The Dark Knight and Miller’s Batman: The Dark Knight Returns reveals how Batman’s character easily may have just as easily turned vicious instead of the virtuous character he is. This further speaks to the importance of friendships and proper direction as a key factor of an individual’s virtuous character.
Section two responds to the position taken by Mary Leigh in the book, *Riddle Me This, Batman! Essays on the Universe of the Dark Knight*. In the chapter “Virtue in Gotham,” Leigh takes the position that Batman is not actually the virtuous hero that Aristotle describes. She arrives at this conclusion by comparing his actions and reflections to Alfred’s, showing how Alfred’s lack of hesitation proves him to be virtuous, while Batman’s apparent inability to understand fully all of the scenarios shows that he does not fit all of Aristotle’s criteria for virtue. However, using the arguments stated above, I show how Batman’s virtue is intact, even when it seems that he does not act knowingly at all times.

Section three turns to the challenge of isolation in the virtuous individual’s pursuits. In order to illustrate this problem, I juxtapose Batman with Alan Moore’s character, Rorschach, another comic book character whose goals and interests are similar to Batman’s. Being a contemporary character of Miller’s version of Batman in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Rorschach provides a complementary, as well as a critical look at the potential result of each man’s quest. The radical consequence of Rorschach’s conclusion about the right course of action demonstrates how a champion of virtue ultimately cannot survive or succeed on his or her own.

Taken as a whole, this chapter shows that virtue is not without its own set of difficulties. Achieving virtue and maintaining it are incredibly difficult for their own reasons. While acquiring the proper virtuous character requires proper education, force of will, and learning in the appropriate way, sustaining virtue and avoiding vice have their own set of requirements. Exploring these concepts helps to illustrate a major aspect of the thesis in that they highlight the complex nature of Aristotle’s construction of friendship as well as opening

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131 Leigh, “Virtue in Gotham.”
up the notion of self-sufficiency as both a necessary component of virtue, as well as a potentially dangerous and destructive force.

**SECTION 1: LOSS, REDEMPTION, AND THE TENUOUS NATURE OF FRIENDSHIP AND VIRTUE**

In Batman’s world, two characters play such an essential part in his journey, yet they are also so opposite of each other that they are almost incommensurate. However, a closer investigation reveals that not only are each fundamental to Batman for how they respectively shape his character, but they are also tied to each other in a way that is important and telling. The Joker is often characterized as the “archenemy” of Batman; always at odds and oftentimes proving to be an equal match. The other character is Batman’s longtime sidekick Robin, whose presence lends itself to the discussion of virtue. While it may be the case that Robin’s station would entail a level of fealty, the relationship that he and Batman share over time proves one of Aristotle’s tenets of friendship that is crucial to sustaining a friendship in the long term.

This section focuses on the two characters, Joker and Robin, as examples of the fragile nature that is evident in friendship and how virtue and vice can stem from similar roots. Even friendships that last over long stretches of time can suffer from pitfalls that lead to their collapse. Friendships that last do so because both individuals are able to regularly adapt to changes they see in the other as well as themselves. Viciousness occupies an interesting place in Aristotle’s concept of friendship in that he questions whether it is at all possible for a vicious person to be with anyone else on a deep level. Furthermore, this section will explore how vice may narrowly have been avoided in Batman’s life and the role friendship played in directing his character away from this end.
There are not many examples to draw from for either character in the chosen sources. Robin plays a part in only one work, while the Joker appears on only two occasions (although he is hinted at in the other two). However, both characters necessitate exploration because they maintain critical positions in the Batman mythos, and any exploration of his virtue would not be complete without some mention of these central characters. Each is linked to Batman because both represent potential parts of him. Like the Ghosts of Christmas Past and Future, Robin and Joker represent how Batman’s own morality may have and undoubtedly has been molded by the events in his life.

Aristotle asks the question, “does friendship arise among all sorts of people, or can people not be friends if they are vicious?”132 If ever there were an example of viciousness, Joker is its epitome. He represents only death, destruction, anarchy, and chaos. Joker’s particular case of viciousness is reflective of Batman’s virtues. Batman is an expert in criminology, forensics, martial arts, and technology. Joker is a criminal mastermind, expertly cunning in his deceptive clues, and plans crimes like a seasoned general on a battlefield. Every move Batman makes is mirrored by the Joker’s own actions and reactions. He is often seen as a criminally insane and fundamentally flawed villain completely beyond redemption. At the outset, this may seem contrary to virtue and therefore not warrant discussion except to explore the question, “is it possible for a vicious person to have friends?” While this is an intriguing line of questioning, its exploration will be foregone for the most part here. Instead, attention will be paid to how, if at all, a vicious person may reinforce the virtue of another.

In The Dark Knight, the Joker repeatedly comments on the link that he and Batman share. After refusing to kill him, the Joker tells Batman, “I think you and I are destined to do

this forever.” To which Batman responds, “You’ll be in a padded cell forever.” 133 This very scenario is illustrated in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. A catatonic Joker has been on ice in a mental ward (presumably with padded walls) for the exact duration of Batman’s retirement. However, in this scene, as the news of Batman’s reemergence is released to the public, the Joker’s signature smile simultaneously twitches back to life. 134 Their link persists, as one man is no longer capable of functioning without the other.

Since no backstory of any validity is provided, pinpointing the particular cause of Joker’s viciousness is difficult. However, it is not a great leap to connect Batman’s origin to a character similar to the Joker’s. One can imagine that at the moment of his parents’ death, Bruce Wayne’s life could have gone two ways. One way is, with the help of his friends and those that loved him, that he channels the anger and uses that energy and those bonds to pursue justice for those who cannot do so on their own. However, it would not be unthinkable for a person in a similar position to be overcome by the feelings of hatred and anger and only seek to inflict that harm on others.

In a sense, Batman and Joker’s constant struggle is a battle of extremes. The Joker’s viciousness threatens to pull Batman, as well as Gotham itself, down to his level of deficiency (or excess depending on how his viciousness is described, i.e., excess of anger versus deficiency of a compassion or empathy). Joker repeatedly tests Batman’s resolve, but what consistently keeps him from falling into the same pit of vice is that Batman has meaningful relationships with people like Gordon, Alfred, and Robin. These friendships serve not only to amplify his talent and increase the efficacy of his mission but also to remind

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133 Nolan and Nolan, *The Dark Knight*, Chap. 36, 2 min., 14 sec.
134 Miller, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, 41.
him that he need not fall victim to depravity. He is constantly reassured in his mission by those around him whom he affiliates with in both action and sentiment. He is saved from the fate of a vicious soul because of the ones he loves.

Robin presents a different point of view of virtue. Historically speaking, there are numerous incarnations of the character throughout Batman’s history, however, due to the limited examples of Robin in these works, this will primarily focus on the impact of Robin in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. In reality, there are three Robins “present” in this work. Dick Grayson, the original Robin, Jason Todd who replaces Grayson and is killed by the Joker, and this most recent version filled by Carrie Kelly, a teenager neglected by her parents who joins the fight with Batman. Dick and Jason are only figuratively present, as their names and impacts are only mentioned.

It is apparent from the beginning of this story that the subject of Robin causes Batman a lot of pain. During their reunion, Gordon asks, “Spoken to Dick lately?” to which Wayne responds, “not for seven years, Jim. You know that.” Gordon replies, “Still huh? I’m damn sorry about that. Especially with what happened to Jason.”\(^{135}\) The conversation ends abruptly at this point. There is a sense of loss that hangs in the air as the two men depart on such a sore subject. But what is the cause of this feeling of sadness and loss?

Aristotle gives three accounts of how one might dissolve a friendship. The first reason may be that the fondness between the two friends was only apparent, either because one friend deceived herself into believing that the other was something more while the other was only invested in the friendship for its use or pleasure, or because the other pretended to love her character while really he was only interested in her for alternate reasons. The second case

\(^{135}\) Ibid., 12.
occurs when she has accepted her friend for his virtue, however, that virtue turns vicious. This brings about a cause for consideration on how to approach that person in the future, as a former friend. Finally one may lose a friend when both have accepted each other for their virtue, however, one friend’s virtue continues to grow and flourish while the other’s remains at its starting place from when they initially met.

From the limited information given in this book, it would be difficult to reason that the schism between Batman and the original Robin was due to either of the first two examples. With regards to the first, Aristotle says, “the majority of disagreements among friends arise when the way they think they are friends is not like the way they are friends.”\(^\text{136}\) The issue would have to have been as if Batman believed Dick Grayson to be a type of friend of a lesser form, like use or pleasure, while Grayson believed their friendship to be deeper. To make an argument for this, one would have to suppose that Batman was simply deriving something base from his relationship with Grayson. This would be hard to believe since Grayson, like Alfred, shared in Batman’s most intimate secrets, plans, and motivations.\(^\text{137}\) Furthermore, the kinship between the two men, stemming from the similar tragedies in each man’s childhood, is a bond that unites them closer than a homebuilder and a particularly adept barista, for example. The brutal death of Batman’s and Grayson’s respective parents is a key component in the relationship and joins the two men tightly.

The division that does exist seems to more closely resemble the final cause that Aristotle offers. He says, “If one friend were to remain the same, but the other were to


\(^{137}\) At this point the chosen material does not provide any sources to draw from, and I am relying on my knowledge of the history of the two men that is only inferred at by way of mentioning Grayson. However, I believe it is an important point that needs making in order to illustrate the factors of their break.
become better, and greatly different in virtue, should the latter keep his friend? Or is this not possible?”

Aristotle is questioning whether it would be possible that two long-time friends remain as close even after one changes significantly for the better while the other stagnates. He gives an example of childhood friends that is not difficult to find examples from one’s own life of childhood friends who are said to have simply “grown apart.” In effect what that says is one or both have grown in directions that are no longer adequate for maintaining the friendship. However, in Batman and Robin’s case, the problem may also be about perception.

It may be the case that the friendship the men did share never reached its total capacity as a full friendship of character. Initially it would resemble a friendship similar to the early relationship young Bruce shared with Alfred; Wayne came on as Dick’s guardian and instructor. Over time this relationship would develop a depth of trust and loyalty that would supersede the normal paternal or pedagogical relations. However, unlike Alfred, Batman’s perception of Grayson never changes over time. Instead of recognizing his growth and letting that guide the development of their relationship, Batman’s refusal to see Grayson as an equal leads to their disbanding.

Aristotle says, “For when the friendly affection corresponds to worth, then an equality is achieved in some way, as seems indeed to be characteristic of friendship.” Equality corresponds to position and status. Put another way, equality is achieved between a father and son not by giving exactly the same amount of love and affection to the other quantitatively, but the quality that would most befit their relative positions. For example, since Batman has taken Grayson under his care and trains him to be Robin, he would expect

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138 Ibid., 1165b.
139 Ibid., 1158b.
that Grayson show him a certain amount of reverence. The attitude is justified as long as the
two men remain in this early dynamic. However, when that relationship changes and one
begins to view the other not as a parent would a child or how a child reveres a parent, but
instead as one peer to another, then a fracturing may occur if the other does not reciprocate.

Thomas says,

[T]here is the presumption that the child should defer to the authoritative
assessments, which the parents make of their behavior. It is this fact about parents
which explains why parents and children rarely form companion friendships.
Parents generally take this presumption for granted; children spend a lifetime
calling it into question. Even after a child has become an adult and has acquired a
defensible version of his own good, this presumption tends to linger on the part of
the child’s parents. Consequently, the bond of trust that is indispensable to deep
friendships is rarely formed. For in examining our lives with another, it is of the
utmost importance that we be able to do so without there being any sense, on the
part of either party, that the hearer is entitled to make authoritative assessments of
the speaker’s life and is entitled to the speaker’s deference with respect to those
assessments.\footnote{Thomas, “Friendship,” 222.}

As Thomas points out, the parent/child friendship is often made difficult by the fact
that the parent will almost always perceive her child as someone who must be directed, while
the child will eventually start to push against this control. If the parent never relinquishes the
power of control, it will inhibit her child’s ability to form a bond of trust and she never will
be able to envision the child as a decision-maker in his own life.

If Batman were unable to regard Robin in this way, it would force the two men to
become the type of friends Aristotle foretold in his third example, in a certain sense. In
Aristotle’s version, Batman and Robin would have met while of similar age, but eventually
Robin would grow in virtue beyond Batman, who remained unchanged after a number of
years. Instead the case is that Batman was of a much higher virtue when initially meeting
Robin. However, as Robin’s virtue and talents grew, Batman’s inability to recognize the growth causes their friendship to dissolve beyond reparation.

The introduction of Carrie in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* is a means for Batman to resolve this problem. Carrie’s arrival differs from the other Robins’ since she is not chosen or “rescued” by Batman. Instead, Carrie chooses to dress up like Robin and patrol the streets on her own. In fact, her first interaction with Batman comes at a time where *she* rescues *him*. This is in sharp contrast to the previous initial encounters between the two, and it presents a different quality to their relationship. Robin is shown as being outgoing and headstrong from the outset, often defying Batman’s commands, or otherwise taking action in her own hands. The result is that this final incarnation achieves a level of equality early on that exercises the sentiment that disintegrated the former relationships. By demonstrating a level of individuality early in their relationship, Batman and the newest Robin achieve the level of trust that is required of companion friendship. Without the disparity of equality between the two, friendship is allowed to grow and evolve through time spent with one another.

This section explores the impact that two important characters to the Batman mythos play in distinguishing virtue from his other qualities. Robin and the Joker are essential to Batman’s character because they are so fundamentally entrenched in who he is and what he strives to achieve. The Joker is the evil against which Batman is constantly struggling, and Robin is the redemption that he sees for himself and Gotham. They are also important figures

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141 Though not discussed in this work, Miller’s follow up to *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *The Dark Knight Strikes Back* features Carrie no longer in the Robin suit but taking on her own persona as Catgirl. This solidifies her evolution into an independent agent acting in tandem, rather than as an apprentice of Batman. Frank Miller, *Batman: The Dark Knight Strikes Back* (New York: DC Comics, 2004).
in the Aristotelian sense because their relationships with Batman affect if he is viewed as either a character of virtue or something lesser. In the case of the Joker, someone who is so clearly vicious also demonstrates some of the characteristics that Aristotle claims are within the virtuous hero.

Joker’s madness often registers as genius and his ability to rationalize his methods has the potential to sway the minds of those who seem to be good (a prime example would be the scene in *The Dark Knight* where Joker convinces Harvey Dent that it was not he but Gotham’s ruling class who is to blame for his deformity and loss[^142]). His viciousness is used to underscore a type of vice that is potentially present in every person, should he choose to accept its presence. It is this reality that the hero must struggle against on his way to achieving true virtue. Robin is fundamental because each incarnation has the potential to be the type of relationship that a fully happy person may seek out in order to continue to bring happiness and fulfillment to his life. Robin offers the chance for Batman to achieve more, share his goals, and see himself in a way that inspires self-improvement. However, Robin also shows how the relationship of this sort requires constant reflection and more importantly, accepting the other as both part of himself and as someone separate. Referring again to Thomas, an indication is given that helps to understand how Batman may have been remiss in his past about the way in which he viewed the development of each Robin into his own virtuous self, a mistake which he is able to remedy with the introduction of the final incarnation of Robin. Without this realization that Thomas makes, the relationship may be doomed to failure.

[^142]: Nolan and Nolan, *The Dark Knight*, Chap. 29, 1 min., 47 sec.
SECTION 2: VIRTUE OR CONTINENCE?

Aristotle’s first definition of virtue stated at 1107a, procedurally speaking, is saying that his theory of virtue ethics is not simply focused on outcomes; rather, it requires certain conditions to be met before the action is deemed either right or wrong, and the title of “hero” be conferred. In other words, a man cannot avert a hostage standoff by tripping on his shoelace and knocking the assailant over by accident and still be called virtuous. If he didn’t intend to perform the action or wasn’t aiming at that particular outcome, his actions may be deemed “right” for the situation, but that is as far as it goes. But what happens if knowing how to do the right thing isn’t always clear? It seems that Aristotle’s belief in knowing the process rather than simply focusing on the outcomes may be a good rule to live by, in general. But what if you’re faced with decisions every day where finding the right answer is never clear? For instance, what if the man knows that stopping a robbery is the right thing to do, but the only ways he knows are either dangerous or evil? Or worse, what if he doesn’t know how at all? Is an action still virtuous if he has to ask for help? What if he needs others to help achieve his goal?

The following section focuses on Mary Leigh’s assertion in Riddle Me This, Batman! Essays on the Universe of the Dark Knight that Batman cannot in fact be deemed virtuous. Her reasoning for this conclusion is that he is not always aware of what the right course of action is for every situation. Because he must defer to other characters for counseling or direction, it is Leigh’s belief that he fits what Aristotle calls the continent man rather than the truly virtuous. I put forth a different conclusion that the nature of friendship, with regards to

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143 Leigh, “Virtue in Gotham.”
Cooper’s explanation of species, allows for one friend to provide help when the other seems to need assistance, and they can both still be called virtuous.

Mary Leigh gives an account of Batman’s actions that she believes shows that Batman is not, in fact, a virtuous hero primarily because his actions are not always dictated by an understanding of the final end. Leigh arrives at this position by showing a set of scenarios where Batman seems to be acting from a place shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding. Because he, at times, cannot see through the fog to his proper course, Leigh diagnoses him as continent rather than virtuous. His downgrade, though not condemning, is enough to call into question the nature of his heroism. However, I believe that there are other factors at work that rescue him from his degradation and preserve his higher status.

Leigh categorizes Aristotelian virtue as:

Simply put, virtue is doing the right thing at the right time in the right way and for the right reasons, and the application of the Golden Mean to the particular situation will enable the agent to perform those virtuous actions. Reasoning excellently about each situation to determine all of these “rights” will lead a person to habituation the sort of character that will always act in such ways, or to virtue. In order to reach the level of true virtue, all of these things must be second nature to the individual.  

Leigh’s summarization of Aristotle’s principle highlights certain aspects, such as all these qualities “must be second nature” to the virtuous hero. She points to the scene in The Dark Knight where Batman rescues some bat-imposters and answers their inquiry about rights to be vigilantes with “I’m not wearing hockey pads.” Leigh’s position is that Batman’s response simultaneously discredit’s the imposters’ rights to be vigilantes as well as

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144 Ibid., 18.
145 Nolan and Nolan, The Dark Knight, Chap. 2, 0 sec.
his own since he is, in essence, wearing “glorified hockey pads.” Furthermore, his inability to justify his actions in any meaningful sense “demonstrates that any virtue Batman has is not yet second nature nor is it completely clear that he is fully aware of what virtue is composed.”

Referencing the climactic scene where Batman appears to waver on whether he should let Joker die makes Leigh’s ultimate point. Her conclusion is that:

Batmann cannot make the decision to kill the Joker because he is unable to accept the guilt that his overactive sense of self-righteousness causes. From this, one can determine that Batman is continent rather than virtuous. He is often hesitant in making moral decisions and has not yet developed the ability to act from right reasons. His actions are almost always motivated by external reasons […]. Doing the right thing when motivated by emotion and care for reputation makes one continent, not virtuous. Thus, Batman is certainly on the path to virtue, but he still has much to learn.

According to Leigh, Batman’s sense of self-righteousness is what causes him to balk when facing the option to kill the Joker or not. An action he knows will prevent further harm and death is arrested by his belief that killing in any situation is wrong. It is this paralyzing dilemma that gives Leigh cause to say Batman is, while on the path to virtue, only continent.

It is important here to investigate Aristotle’s view of continence in order to see how Batman may or may not be counted as such. Aristotle’s account centers on the idea that, when faced with certain decisions regarding pleasure or pain, three key factors are at play. First, is what he thinks is the right thing to do; second is what he feels like doing (impulse); and finally is what he actually does. While the virtuous man will be correctly in line with all three of these factors, the continent man will falter on the second. Aristotle says, “For the

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147 Ibid.
148 Ibid., 21.
continent and the temperate person are both the sort to do nothing against reason because of bodily pleasures, but the continent person has base appetites, whereas the temperate person lacks them." An illustration of the difference would be that Scott saw Sarah drop her wallet and Scott decides to return it to her with all of her possessions and money. If Scott does so without ever considering taking her money, then Scott has virtue. However, if he returns the wallet with all of Sarah’s possessions intact only after he considers theft and his better reasoning prevails, then he is simply continent.

Continence is a measure of self-control that accounts for those whose reason and actions are in correct line with virtue but whose compulsions may stray out of accord with their other faculties. To say that Batman is continent is to say that there is a flaw in his character that allows impulses of vice to enter the equation, even if he acts in accordance with virtue on most or all occasions. Leigh’s accusation then rests on the fact that the instance of Batman’s hesitation to let Joker die is a matter of his impulses to act one way or the other having some value of either virtuous or vicious. In other words, Batman’s letting Joker live is either considered necessarily good or necessarily bad. Therefore, Batman’s impulse to kill him is somehow seen as out of accord with his reasoning for what is right.

This notion is problematic because it suggests that killing him would be somehow essentially vicious, though many would believe that this would not be the case (for example, a utilitarian would say that killing him would most likely be the correct action since it would prevent more harm to many others in the future). To use Aristotle’s criteria of virtuous action to judge Batman’s preserving Joker’s life, one would have to answer the questions: did he do

it knowingly, did he choose to save him, and save him for his own sake, and did he do it from a stable character?

The Joker gives the answer to the last point when he says, “you won’t kill me out of some misplaced sense of self-righteousness.”150 Batman’s resolve on the matter of not killing anyone is a fundamental tenet of who he is as a person and as a champion of justice. In Miller’s portrayal of the archenemies’ final confrontation, Joker condemns Batman’s unwillingness to kill as a matter of spirit rather than a resolute character. He says, “I’m really…very disappointed with you, my sweet…the moment was…perfect…and you…didn’t have the nerve…paralysis really…just an ounce or two more…of pressure…and […] They’ll kill you for this…and they’ll never know…that you didn’t have the nerve.”151 But it is Batman’s thoughts that tell the truth of the matter, “I hear…voices…voices calling me…a killer…I wish I were.”152 Rather than his reluctance to kill the Joker being a flaw like indecisiveness, his impulse is automatically set to stop at the brink of murder, even if the idea of killing carries some benefits. His character is unchanging on both occasions.

If Batman’s character is understood to be unchanging in this way, the answers to the first two questions become apparent. If he is resolved never to kill in any circumstance, then he will always chose the alternative to it. Therefore, when faced with the reality of letting the Joker drop to his death, he acts in accord with the decision he has made well before this occurs. His choice is predetermined upon arrival at their ultimate confrontation. It may be questioned, then, if he is really choosing to save the Joker for his own sake? Since the choice

150 Nolan and Nolan, The Dark Knight, Chap. 36, 2 min., 13 sec.
151 Miller, The Dark Knight Returns, 150-151.
152 Ibid., 150.
is made before they meet, how could he be choosing this act for its sake specifically?

Another example of a similar situation sheds light on this question.

There is a contrasting scenario presented in Nolan’s earlier work, *Batman Begins*, Batman’s final confrontation with the newest incarnation of Ra’s Al Ghoul. As the runaway train speeds toward its collision, the defeated Ra’s asks, “Have you finally learned to do what is necessary?” To which Batman responds, “I won’t kill you, but I don’t have to save you.”153 Batman escapes the train, leaving his enemy to his fate. The difference in the two scenes is that in the former, Batman’s direct actions are what send Joker over the ledge; therefore it is his responsibility whether Joker lives or dies. In the latter, Ra’s Al Ghoul has set the literal and proverbial train in motion towards its collision. Batman’s primary incentive is to save the citizens of Gotham from the horrors of Ra’s’s plan. Whether Ra’s himself lives or dies is of his own doing. The difference in the two seemingly conflicting scenarios is Batman’s choosing to endanger the villain or not. When he has taken action that results in potentially killing his enemy, he chooses to act to save him *in that instance*. However, if his enemy is mortally imperiled by his own action, Batman’s decision not to save him isn’t hindered by his sense of righteousness. It is clear that the decision Batman has made against killing at all costs is a matter of choosing on his part and it is a clear indication that his will in the matter is unchanging and stable. What is left is whether Batman’s reliance on his allies is a fault whose end result is continence rather than virtue.

Leigh credits Alfred as being the true virtuous hero in the story. She says, “By doing the right thing at the right time in the right way and for the right reasons, all as second nature,

Alfred exemplifies the virtuous character.”\textsuperscript{154} It is hard to deny that Leigh’s assessment of Alfred is anything but spot on. Oftentimes Alfred knows the right move, the right words, and is frequently Batman’s go-to advisor. And it is clear from all the accounts that Alfred has arrived here through years of experience, training, and study of his own. Because of his unique background, Alfred is very much a pillar of Aristotelian virtue. But does one pillar of virtue negate another?

As discussed above, the level of friendship Batman and Alfred achieve is an example of what Aristotle would declare a virtue friendship. While it may be the case that Alfred is a pinnacle of virtue, their relationship indicates that Batman’s own virtue resonates similarly with Alfred’s. Though it may not be to the same degree as Alfred’s, it has been shown above that Batman exhibits the characteristics of virtue. Using Cooper’s description of types of friendship, we can see how Batman’s achievement of virtue may just be lesser than Alfred’s, given the two men’s relative ages and experiences. This is not to say that Batman’s virtue is somehow compromised; it is rather to a lesser degree of the same category, much like the use-friendship of the house builder’s relationships with the wood seller and the barista. In their relative friendships, the house builder is closer to the wood seller because the wood seller’s service is more integral to achieving his ends than is the barista’s.

In Alfred and Batman’s case, I agree with Leigh in that Batman, “Still has much to learn.”\textsuperscript{155} However, Aristotle shows how those achieving this level of virtue continue to grow their virtue once in these relationships. He says, “And there would also be a sort of training

\textsuperscript{154} Leigh, “Virtue in Gotham,” 22.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 21.
in virtue from living among good people.”\textsuperscript{156} From this it can be inferred that fully virtuous individuals can and will continue to learn from one another when they enter into a close friendship. This means that each will always have a need for growth and change that they cannot achieve alone. Batman and Alfred can both be virtuous in their own right, albeit on different levels of virtue, and still continue to develop as their relationship persists through time.

Leigh’s conclusion that Batman is continent rather than virtuous does not account for the nuances of friendship. These fine distinctions show how, just like there are different levels of friendship, there are also varying degrees within those levels. This allows for a varied spectrum of relationship strengths to co-exist in a complex network between individuals and groups. This also means that one need not achieve the highest level of a sort before being classified as such. In other words, Batman can still be a seven on the virtue scale and Alfred a nine and the two men can each still be considered virtuous. The proof is in the nature, strength, duration and quality of their friendship, and similarly in the relationships Batman has with Gordon and even Robin at times. While it may be conceded that Batman’s virtue at times requires more development, I believe his actions, deliberations, and bonds of friendship prove that he is a hero of Aristotelian virtue.

\textbf{SECTION 3: BATMAN AND RORSCHACH, THE TRAGEDY OF ISOLATION}

\textit{Batman: The Dark Knight Returns} shares a literary continuum with another work, Alan Moore’s \textit{Watchmen}.\footnote{Alan Moore, \textit{Watchmen} (New York: DC Comics, 1986).} In Moore’s graphic novel, Walter Kovaes, aka Rorschach, is a

\textsuperscript{156} Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics Books VIII and IX}, 1169b.

\textsuperscript{157}
masked vigilante similar to Batman in that both men strive to rid their city of the injustice that is so pervasive. Both Rorschach and Batman pursue their goal with a zeal that at times resembles a pathological impulse. However, while both men share certain beliefs about justice, the level of Rorschach’s self-induced isolation demonstrates a degree that is so severe that what remains is a tragically flawed, sociopathic “hero.” This section will deal with the problem that self-sufficiency can produce when taken to an extreme. Rorschach’s cause and Batman’s are very similar, as well as each man’s methodology of engaging in his quest. However, the depth of Rorschach’s isolation is so much more severe than Batman’s that it crosses the line from virtue to deviant. And yet, it serves as a cautionary tale for Batman, whose own pursuit can, at times, rival Rorschach’s in his single-minded devotion, often at the expense of others around him.

Every interaction between Rorschach and another colleague is saturated by his coldness. In an ironic statement, he notes in his journal, “why are so few of us left active, healthy, and without personality disorders?”158 His meetings with the other masked adventurers are strained by his lack of interpersonal skills, and it causes some of them to cast him out or simply dismiss him as crazy. Ultimately, Rorschach escapes into his individual pursuit of the truth, conversing only with his journal and only acknowledging others’ participation when he is forced to.

Though Rorschach is ultimately portrayed as a pathological “lone wolf,” he is able to team up effectively with Night Owl and Silk Specter to pursue their common goal. This can be viewed from an Aristotelian standpoint as a friendship of use or convenience. The heroes share a common end and even operate with a measure of friendliness. For example, in the

158 Ibid., 19.
scene where Rorschach attempts to comfort Night Owl after he hears of the death of Hollis Mason, Night Owl initially receives Rorschach’s attempt at sympathy with frustration and then understanding. It is clear, however, that the two never achieve the level of intimacy expected of a virtue friendship.

The difference between Rorschach and Batman is that Batman’s isolation seems necessary as a means to achieve his goal, while Rorschach’s is a result of his uncompromising focus on his own ends. Batman allows room for meaningful relationships with those who share in his endeavors, forming lasting friendships that are both useful and good for their own sake. Rorschach, however, is incapable of achieving the same level of trust with the other heroes (the fact that none of the other Minute Men had ever seen him without his mask until Specter and Night Owl rescue him from prison is a testament to this remoteness). Even while partnering with other heroes, he is distant and uncompromising in his actions and standards.

His inflexibility does result in an interesting conclusion, which perpetuates the tragedy of his heroism. In the end, after Veldt’s final solution is revealed and millions are sacrificed for the “greater good,” it is Rorschach’s unshakable character, which most epitomizes Aristotle’s criteria for virtuous action (this is the clearest occasion of a utilitarian versus deontological debate in the story) that is both heroic and tragic in the face of death. Night Owl, Specter, and Dr. Manhattan have all compromised on their beliefs about what constitutes justice and agree to go along with Veldt’s plan. However, Rorschach leaves the compound saying, “Evil must be punished. People must be told.”

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159 Ibid., 17.
160 Ibid., 23.
conceding on his convictions, Rorschach demonstrates Aristotle’s three criteria for virtuous action; he knows what he does, chooses it for its own sake, and does so from a (sort of) stable character.

The tragedy of his isolation is never more apparent than in this moment. Unable to compromise his beliefs pushes Rorschach’s seclusion past its ability to endure. Given the choice between foregoing what he believes is right or facing death, the only option apparent to Rorschach is death. In his essay, “The Importance of What We Care About,” Harry Frankfurt says, “I shall use the term ‘volitional necessity’ to refer to constraint of the kind to which [Martin Luther] declared he was subject. To the extent that such constraint actually does render it impossible for a person to act in any way other than as he acts, it renders it impossible by preventing him from making use of his own capacities.”161 Frankfurt’s account shows how an individual’s belief can be so engrained in her that she will be unwilling to act in opposition to it. Furthermore, Rorschach’s unwillingness to act in such a way is something that he is further unwilling to address or change.

Rorschach’s final stand exemplifies this notion in that when presented with two options, only one is actually available to him. This moment illustrates the tension between Aristotle’s (apparently) dueling notions of self-sufficiency and the ultimate goodness of friendship for the virtuous person. At this decisive moment, Rorschach represents the truly virtuous actor, neither compromising nor faltering in his mission. Conversely, Night Owl, Manhattan, and Specter all acquiesce to Veidt’s plan, originally taken to be abhorrent. Virtue, then, is either survived or destroyed by choosing whether or not one wants to go along with one’s friends. If so, virtue is sacrificed for some other view or moral goodness. If not, virtue

stands and stands alone. The tragedy plays out in Rorschach’s death as a virtuous act of heroism.

It could be that the dilemma between self-sufficiency and friendship is not present because Rorschach’s friendships aren’t as developed with Night Owl, Manhattan, or Specter as Batman’s are with Alfred, Gordon, or Robin. However, the reality remains that when faced with virtue or friendship, it becomes a mortal choice for Rorschach. In his final instant, choosing virtue is equated with choosing death, which is contrary to Aristotle’s premise that “being happy consists of living and being active.”¹⁶² Rather, Rorschach’s dilemma can be summarized as “life or death consists of virtue or compromise, respectively.” And since he has demonstrated that he is incapable of compromising on what he fundamentally believes, Rorschach ultimately must accept his death.

And yet there is still a necessity for friendship in Aristotle’s view of virtue. In fact, one may not actually be able to maintain his virtue while living a solitary life. It may be, then, that Rorschach does not fully exemplify virtue but some facsimile of it in some instances. Because if he were fully virtuous, or using Cooper’s version of virtue as being within the range of virtuous individuals, he would also require friendship as a good, indeed the highest good for himself. Instead, it may be the case that Rorschach embodies something different. Aristotle says, “Goodwill is like a characteristic of friendship; however, it is not friendship, since goodwill arises even for people we do not know and without their noticing it, but friendship does not.”¹⁶³ Aristotle’s account of goodwill frames a notion that Rorschach’s pursuit of justice may not lead him down a path of virtue friendship. Instead of

¹⁶³ Ibid., 1166b.
his feelings of justice being directed at certain individuals, it is diffused into a general state of being, incapable of being focused on a particular instance (whereas Batman can have both a general sense of justice for Gotham as well as justice for those whom he particularly loves).

Aristotle does say that “those who have goodwill do not, for all that, love each other, since people merely wish good things to those for whom they have goodwill, but they would not do anything to help them nor would they be inconvenienced for them.”\textsuperscript{164} It is clearly the case that Rorschach both strives to do good things for the general public and is inconvenienced by his actions (causing his own death would be a bit inconvenient). However, this apparent contradiction need not deny another truth about his character: that he is also a decent person in the Aristotelian sense. Similar to Batman, Rorschach’s actions are decent because he acts against the stated law so that he may provide a remuneration of justice for those citizens who cannot do so on his or her own. This decency, combined with his feelings of goodwill, may fuse into a form that closely resembles virtuous action. However, lacking the elements like love or deep trust in others, Rorschach remains isolated in a way that Batman is not. Therefore, it still remains that someone as isolated as Batman will require and establish meaningful friendships because of his virtue, however, Rorschach will never be capable of achieving such a bond and, therefore, an equivalent attainment of virtue.

In conclusion, Batman and Rorschach are both chasing a goal through a means that necessarily leaves each man in a constant and self-inflicted state of isolation. In doing so, each hero is able to take on more drastic means in order to achieve what he believes to be his mission. However, such drastic means take a toll on both men, and one cost is that both run

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 1167a.
the serious risk of complete seclusion, something that would cause a virtuous person extreme displeasure. Batman is saved from this fate because he finds a way to turn his partnerships and affiliations into something more meaningful than simply being a working relationship with like-minded people. Rorschach, however, never moves past the basic formulation of a use-friendship. He therefore is incapable of learning to trust others in a way that causes a deeper friendship to emerge. The tragedy of Rorschach is that in the end, his intentions require the least moral justification, yet he is the one who is destroyed. The catastrophe of isolation is that even the strongest heroes will need someone to trust in order to continue making their life something that is worth living.

SECTION 4: CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 is an analysis of the circumstances that cause friendships to dissolve and how the need for self-sufficiency in virtue can eventually lead to isolation, which is self-sufficiency in an extreme. This chapter also looks at the possibility that Batman is not the fully virtuous hero in the story. In section one, I focus on Robin as an example of how Batman’s relationships with some characters is strained by the way that he views others. Aristotle gives three accounts by which friendships are most often ended, and one in particular fits the two men’s relationship. The link that he and Robin share is a particularly powerful one for many reasons, yet the bond between them fails often because Batman is unable to adjust his vision of Robin to accommodate the fact that Robin’s own character is evolving and growing as he does. I use an insight from Laurence Thomas’s (see footnote 53) essay in order to show the problems that arise when friendships are formed amongst those whose station in life do not allow them to see each other as equals. This strain is eventually
saved by the fact that Batman comes to accept Robin’s fruition as her own virtuous individual.

Section two argues against a position put forth by Mary Leigh that Batman is not a truly virtuous character. Instead Leigh credits Alfred with embodying all of the criteria that Aristotle claims are necessary to be a fully virtuous person. Leigh’s stance is drawn from evidence in *The Dark Knight* where she believes Batman’s inability to act or lack of understanding of the proper course of action is reason enough to call him continent rather than virtuous. Conversely, Alfred constantly seems to know what is the right thing to do and when it is the right time to do it. However, returning to Cooper’s conclusion that individuals need not exemplify every facet of virtue in order to be in a friendship of this type, I argue that Batman is virtuous and Alfred is virtuous, and that each man has an important impact on the virtue of the other.

Section three juxtaposes Batman with the character Rorschach from the graphic novel *Watchmen* by Alan Moore. I use this comparison to show how Aristotle’s claim that self-sufficiency in virtue can lead to a problem with the isolation of the virtuous hero. Rorschach, while not embodying every component of virtue, does have some virtuous characteristics that are redeeming. However, the length of isolation that he imposes on himself undermines his relationships with the other heroes. In the end, even though Rorschach’s character is the only one that is not changed from its original direction, his seclusion results in his destruction. This illustrates how a virtuous champion cannot survive in solitude, and that friendships are more important than simply a way to remain entertained.

This chapter concludes the discussion by centering on the negative elements of friendship. These are negative due to the fact that they take away from the strength and
reinforcement that friendship gives to a virtuous individual. Bonds formed over time through
effort, understanding, and mutual respect are also the hardest to maintain because they do not rely on something like the availability of outside resources without which the relationship would be nullified, like a friendship of use does. Instead, virtue friendships require that both parties constantly strive to consider the other as important as one’s own interests. Losing this can be painful, more so than losing any friendship of a lesser form. This chapter also shows how the lack of friendship can lead to dire circumstances as well. In one respect, the lack of any meaningful friendships results in a sinister and irredeemable character. In another, isolation can still lead to expressions of virtue but ultimately only a lonely destruction.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Aristotle’s form of a virtuous character is meant as a guide for readers and students to understand the foundations of virtue. His intention is to investigate a series of questions that answer whether or not there is an ultimate good called happiness at which everyone should direct her efforts and aspirations. In doing so, Aristotle creates a prescriptive account of virtue such that anyone following his direction will have a guide to help to facilitate his development.

Aristotle’s direction focuses on key aspects of an individual’s development, which include, amongst other things, the capacity to learn certain qualities, instruction and education, practice, understanding, and internalization of those qualities. And within these categories of instruction and development, he is meticulous in discussing the correct and incorrect ways of going about advancing these qualities. For instance, it is not enough for a student that a teacher tells her something is good or enjoyable, the student must experience the activity for herself and form her own reasoning for finding it enjoyable. Her development will be properly directed only when the teacher’s instruction is tempered by her own distinct appreciation.

At its core, Aristotle’s investigation into achieving the ultimate end of happiness describes a number of qualities, each of which has a particular methodology for proper development. Some qualities like courage, generosity, and magnanimity relate to an individual’s state of character. Others like scientific or managerial knowledge, prudence or knowledge of craftsmanship relate to an individual’s capacity for thought. There is one other
Aristotle devotes the final chapters to a group of topics, particularly friendship, which is crucial to the discussion.

Friendship as a virtue is what I aim to address throughout much of the preceding investigation. The notion that a particular type of friendship is one of the most admirable and necessary goods for an individual to possess is juxtaposed with the idea that who ever is truly virtuous needs nothing outside himself to sustain his happiness. But if the latter were true, then why would there be a need for friendship in the first place? Furthermore, when considering the character of a virtuous hero like Batman, how will he be able to square his need for individuality in the solitary pursuit of his extraordinary goal with the apparent need for friendship and comradeship?

Aristotle expounds on the complexities of friendship, showing how there are various types of what would be considered friendships, each resembling the highest standard in their own way. From this discussion it becomes clear that each class of friendship is composed of its own slope or pyramid, analogous to the varying degrees of loveable things, which lends a deeper complexity to the numbers, types, and quality of relations that people are able to cultivate. Therefore, we can see that a person’s sphere of associations can be vast and intricate in many ways and the resulting influence of each dynamic has a particular value.

Self-sufficiency, which appears to initially be in contrast with Aristotle’s picture of friendship, turns out to give a more complete picture of what is required in virtue and companionship. What seems to be a position requiring that all fully virtuous people have no need for friends, turns out to be a view that shows how self-sufficiency in virtue is actually achieved through tight relationships with others. This is because pursuing any goal as a means to find happiness will be encouraged when other like-minded friends are a part of the
pursuit. Batman’s ability to achieve happiness as an individual is bolstered by interacting with another who shares his goals. Self-sufficiency is not a measure of an individual acting as if he were in a vacuum, it is an indication of all the components that comprise what makes him happy. He is said to be self-sufficient when all those things, friends most of all, create and sustain the most choiceworthy life for him.

Batman presents an intriguing figure for this discussion because he embodies much of what Aristotle describes as the actions and characteristics of a virtuous hero. However, he is a complex character because the root of his motivation (i.e. a violent and disturbed childhood) raises questions about whether he is truly acting virtuously or in some other way. By looking at his relationships, and using the conclusions gleaned from examining Aristotle’s criteria for friendship and virtue, I conclude that Batman is virtuous in his actions, supported by those closest to him with whom he shares bonds of trust, intimacy, and a common pursuit of justice.

The strength of the argument lies in dissecting and then expanding on an understanding of Aristotle’s framework of virtue. Using Aristotle’s definition and the analysis of the elements of virtue provides a perspective by which we may view Batman as an individual who exemplifies this definition. An examination of Batman’s early childhood, education, and his most important relationships shows how his character is guided and directed into what appears to be an Aristotelian form of virtue. By dedicating his will, and partnering with others who share his purpose, Batman becomes an example of virtuous pursuit in a modern literary context.

A key part of this examination is the role friendship plays in understanding virtue. Friendship in Aristotle is one of the most important factors of virtue because he recognizes
the significance of another who will help an individual achieve the fulfillment in life that she will inevitably lack if she were to remain alone. By having friends a person will develop deeper and more profound paths to explore her own interests, finding continually more ways to remain engaged in the pursuits that make her the virtuous person she is, and her life worth choosing. Aristotle’s treatment of friendship as not just another virtue but as the most important virtue is indicative of the fact that virtue and friendship are inextricably linked. Batman exemplifies this link because the development of his virtue is essentially tied to those with whom he finds closest to himself. People like Alfred, Gordon, and Robin to some degrees show how virtue is engendered in part by those we consider most important in our lives.

In conclusion, the purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate two important ideas. First, how friendship and self-sufficiency in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* are reconciled in the fact that self-sufficiency does not necessarily mean alone. By using Batman as the primary example of virtue, I am able to show how the two concepts combine to form an understanding of virtue as a collaboration of efforts between individuals. Even with Batman’s particular need for self-isolation to protect his identity, he is able to allow a select few to become close enough to form the strongest bonds of friendship. And through these bonds he is capable of achieving much more of his goal than he would be on his own. As an exemplar of Aristotle’s view, Batman represents a paradigm of the difficulties associated with achieving and maintaining virtue.

Secondly, the purpose of this thesis is to add to a growing body of serious philosophical discussion about the art form of comic books. The goal is to show how a character from this genre can provide significant insight into the body of philosophical work
that has been established for a long time. As a largely overlooked genre, comic books have the potential to provide a window into the society from which they are produced. Using comic books as a lens provides the reader with peek into the condition of society at a particular time, and is often an allegory for the contemporaneous state of affairs. Therefore, comics are valuable tools for philosophical discourse that focuses on serious questions about the actions and events because they are an expression of society’s mood at a given time and place.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


