Ethical Dilemmas In Film

Batman Begins
Batman Begins is a movie made in 2005 based on fictional characters from the DC Comic books. The movie was directed Christopher Nolan and stars one of my favorite actors, Christian Bale. The film tells the origin of Batman and begins with little Bruce Wayne’s fear of bats, dealing with the murder of his parents and his journey to ultimately become Batman. Bruce Wayne disappears for seven years after he graduates from college, Bruce then returns to his family business “Wayne Enterprises”. Wayne Enterprises is a very large company, a fictional fortune 500 type of company. Since he has disappeared many of the people left in charge have taken his company and turned it into a large, insensitive, big business concerned only with profits and the bottom line. Wayne Enterprises has also started dealing in military weapons amongst many other questionable product lines. The public has turned against Wayne Enterprises, many cover-ups and conspiracies have surfaced, turning the business into a detested icon. Additionally much of the media portrays Wayne Enterprises to be anything but ethical and thus has tarnished the great “Wayne” name. Bruce faces many ethical dilemmas when he returns regarding Wayne Enterprises, because of his secret Identity as Batman he is unable to become the sensitive philanthropist his father once was. In a way to hide his true identity he takes on the role of the “millionaire playboy”, he owns the business, but appears to be only concerned with his night life and girlfriends; he is unattached to any of the business side of Wayne Enterprises. However the truth of the matter is that Bruce Wayne pays very close attention to Wayne Enterprises and cares deeply about its reputation and the people who work for him.
One of the first ethical dilemmas is that Wayne Enterprises is marketing and developing weapons to the military and government. Bruce feels very strongly about this, when he left Wayne Enterprises (W.E.) it had a reputation that was honorable and very peace oriented. Upon his return he was shocked to find out that they had a whole division devoted to research and development of future weapons and defenses. Because Bruce must have the appearance of not caring about W.E. he is unable to discontinue many of the military contracts and associations. Additionally, Bruce needs many of these “top secret” gadgets to aid in his fight against crime as Batman. This issue was never really resolved in the film, Bruce ended up taking control of W.E. and shutting down many of the un-ethical operations, but he still has access to some of it, so it leads the audience to believe that some of it is still being developed. If I were Bruce I would handle the situation very similarly. Instead of shutting down part of the division I would maybe focus R&D on making better body armor or bomb diffusing devices. I would focus on things the military would be interested in but items that would be seen has non violent. I believe doing this would allow Bruce to keep using and producing many of his crime fighting gadgets but still allow him and W.E. to be ethically free of all violent weaponry.

The second ethical dilemma facing W.E. is that its seen as a “big evil business”. W.E. was once a model of what a good business should look and perform like; unfortunately after Bruce’s father died it left many of the shares of the company to the money hungry board members. These board members have grown the company but at the cost of its reputation. W.E. is now perceived to be heartless and evil by many of the citizens of Gotham City. W.E. controls many of the utilities that supply Gotham City with water and electricity, in an attempt to maximize profits they have put many people on the streets by raising fees and prices. In the movie they never really directly addressed this issues, it is assumed that after Bruce gained full
control of W.E. many of these types of problems would be rectified. If I was in Bruce’s situation I would pull down the prices hard in a short amount of time in hopes to gain some positive media attention. After that I would then develop a community outreach program, again to try and gain some positive media interest. Good PR would be a necessity in gaining public approval and trust. It would be an expensive process, but I believe W.E. could turn their reputation around in a relatively short amount of time given the right tools were implemented.

A big issue that goes relatively unnoticed within the movie is the fact that Bruce Wayne is using W.E. assets to directly fund his personal life. Every single one of Batman’s gadgets and weapons comes from Wayne Enterprise. Within the movie he talks about changing the books and manipulating the paper work to hide the money. I understand that he needs to hide these expenditures to keep Batman’s identity safe, but at the same time he is stealing money and resources from the company. As the CEO Bruce needs to consider the fact that he has shareholders that count on him to be honest and transparent when it comes to the company’s finances. This problem was never really properly addressed within the movie. There was an employee that did notice that the books were showing an absorptive amount of money being shuffled around and he tried to extort some money from W.E. with no success. If I were Bruce I think it would be top priority to keep the business running legally, the last thing he would need is a lawsuit that would expose him. I think he should devise a way to cover up the costs that would both satisfy the shareholders as well as his secret identity. I believe a solution is available, because he is actually using this equipment when it’s in pre-production I think Bruce is in fact helping the company by testing the equipment, live in the field. Often the equipment might fail Batman and he will recommend improvements and innovations to the R&D teams. I think he
should bundle his costs inside design and testing, he then protects his identity with corporate cover and is doing nothing un-ethical when it comes to shareholders.

Besides the ethical problems mentioned previously there are a few more dilemmas facing Bruce Wayne. In addition to marketing Wayne Enterprises Bruce must also market Batman. Bruce often mentions Batman as being a symbol, a symbol to remind all the bad men that there is justice and consequence. Additionally he must remain a positive figure in the media and the law enforcement’s eyes even though he breaks many laws and injures many people both on accident and on purpose. I believe Batman to be more of a utilitarian than anything else, he won’t take a life but he will do just about anything else to prevent a serious crime.

This was an interesting assignment, I enjoy examining fictional stories though a realistic lens. I learned that Batman is a very complicated person! I think it’s interesting that many of the filmmakers put this much attention into the plotlines of movies. I think character development is a crucial part in making a good movie, it’s important for the audience to empathize with characters and develop almost an emotional relationship with them. This movie did very well at the box office; I blame most of the success on the intricate and complex life of Bruce Wayne. The duality between Bruce Wayne and Batman is what makes the movie in my opinion. Additionally, many of the ethical dilemmas facing Wayne enterprises actually are very similar to issues that many American corporations encounter.