

"He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster." This quotation by Friedrich Nietzsche encapsulates the struggle faced by the main character V in Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*. In this novel, V faces the ultimate challenge of toppling the oppressive Norsefire regime while maintaining his moral superiority. However, as V's plot unfolds, he shows more similarities with the oppressor than with the freedom fighter, the primary one being their abandonment of morality. Both parties adopt a contextualist mentality in pursuing their goals and view the greater good as subjective, leading to widespread suffering. This method of justification does not hold up, and V's image as an altruistic rebel quickly crumbles when looking through a moral lens. In this way, V's methods are unjustified because justice is based on societal morals and ethics and cannot be bent to fit one's desires, such as revenge or oppression. Therefore, V's actions cannot be legitimized and actually mirror the corrupt Norsefire regime. Analyzing V's actions through this viewpoint begins to reveal what lies beneath the mask.

Many of V's early plots are formed upon a foundation of revenge rather than the betterment of the population. V, an escapee from the Larkhill concentration camp, has scores to settle with his former torturers and uses tying loose ends as justification. Dr. Delia Surridge knows this too well and states to V: "When I saw you that night... The night you escaped. You were standing against the flames. You turned, and you looked straight at me. I knew that one day you'd come looking for me, that you'd find me" (Moore 73). Dr. Delia knew that V had been scarred deeply enough to enact revenge at some point, that revenge being murder. This knowledge of V's mental state paints a picture of what V is willing to do in order to achieve his goals and the moral bankruptcy he harbors. Such a lack of morality is further exemplified in V's killing of Bishop Lilliman, in which he states: "I am the devil and I have come to do the devil's work. I do not have a name" (60). V reveals his rationale for his actions: he is an executioner, not

a judge. This illustrates V's ability to justify his actions in his mind as punishment rather than petty revenge. Eduardo Pérez-Navarro, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, states in his paper "The Way Things Go: Moral Relativism and Suspension of Judgement": "Objectivism makes people intolerant... contextualism does not make people intolerant; however, it makes them so tolerant that they are forced to suspend their judgement about issues that we take to be important." Contextualism encapsulates V's method of justification for his actions, in which he views morality in a more primitive way. V views revenge as a moral punishment for one's transgressions, which allows him to act in such heinous ways. Such actions call V's ethical framework and his view of his own agency into question.

Whether or not V views himself as an actor or simply as one carrying out orders originating from a firmer belief is constantly put into question. Many times, V will act and claim it is the will of anarchy, his ideology. Such a belief allows him to act as a messenger rather than someone with agency. A key example of this is when Evey confronts V about wanting to help in his ensuing plot. V tells Evey of a man, to Evey's confusion, that man being: "Nobody you'd have heard of. A German gentleman named Mr. John Faust. He made a deal too" (44). By referencing Faust, V reveals his view of Evey as Faust, someone who abandons their morals to achieve their desires. Simultaneously, V is removing his agency from the situation, framing himself as merely carrying out Evey's wishes. After their plot to kill the Bishop succeeds, Evey, horrified, asks V about the ethics of murder, to which he states: "Why are you asking me? And as for me involving you, I seem to remember that you were the one anxious to make a deal" (64). V pushes the blame to Evey for her involvement in the scheme, while removing his actions as the murderer from question. The moral consequence of V's actions need not be questioned since Evey spurred him to act. V contextualizes his actions in this way, which aligns with

Pérez-Navarro's statement: "There is no privileged point of view in relativism... but contextualism fixes truth in a single viewpoint — the one that uses it." V's personal truth closes his eyes to the moral implications of his actions. V can act as a messenger of his ideology and commit atrocities as he pleases. These acts bear a striking resemblance to those of the Norsefire party, the group V is hell-bent on eradicating.

Hypocrisy is baked into V's identity from the very beginning. V's reverence for anarchy directly mirrors the destruction brought about by the Norsefire regime. Similarly, both parties justify their actions through a higher power, whether physical or ideological. Adam Susan, leader of Norsefire, shares such worship as V, except he worships the Fate supercomputer: "I would wait upon your every utterance and never ask the merest splinter of affection. Fate... Fate... I love you" (39). V speaks in much the same way Adam does about anarchy, viewing it as a guiding light and a show of moral authority. Having a higher power allows V and Adam to act independently of their own emotions and morals, as said power trumps their reservations. Each party shares even more similarities in how they justify their cruelty, which Eric Finch reflects on: "He's become some sort of all-purpose symbol to them, hasn't he? People need symbols, Dominic. He understood that. We've forgotten it" (252). Understanding coercion and obedience is paramount to both parties' ideologies. V strives to appeal to the morality of the people he leads, despite his own lack of morality, much like the regime. In the excerpt "Justice" from *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Thomas Pogge, Professor of Philosophy, states: "Morally flawed judgements are unjust only if they involve an abuse of morality itself — that is, only if they appear with a moral pretension they do not live up to. Unjust is someone prepared to violate moral principles she herself likes to appeal to." This quote perfectly captures the moral flaws of both parties in the novel. Each party abuses its own personal definitions of morality to

manipulate the public. V's hypocrisy and selfishness reveal the injustice of his efforts toward freedom, despite his positive beliefs in a better society. He is blind to the morality of his actions, which begs the question: What would moral justice look like in this context?

One must look to the oppressed in order to find true justice in the novel. The two most notable examples are Evey and Valerie. Both characters understand that true justice comes not from destruction but from resistance and being stalwart in one's beliefs. Valerie, a killed lesbian actress, is the prime example of justice through perseverance. Her letter to V states: "I shall die here. Every inch of me shall perish... Except one. An inch. It's small, and it's fragile, and it's the only thing in the world that's worth having" (160). Valerie's declaration of resistance as her final act shows justice in a way that V has not. Her spirit of kindness is preserved in her words, which inspire future generations to reflect and work toward a better world, which Evey takes to heart. However, her time with V allowed her to find a middle ground. Evey takes V's place after his death and continues his unfinished plots. Evey even takes the mantle of a messenger of anarchy and tells the public: "Tomorrow, Downing Street will be destroyed; the head reduced to ruins and in what has gone before. Tonight, you must choose what comes next: lives of our own, or a return to chains" (258). Evey demonstrates to the people their tenuous existence and informs the public of her plots, allowing as few human casualties as possible. Evey views the world more objectively, as John Gustafsson, Professor of Philosophy, states in his journal *Binary Act Consequentialism*: "A voluntary act is right if and only if the outcome of x is not worse than the outcome of not-x." Evey understands this ideology well and knows from all the horrors being on the other side of terror that one must measure their actions and understand moral consequences in order to be an active arbiter of justice.

V's exploits throughout the novel paint him not as an altruistic freedom fighter, but as a sociopathic madman who fights for his own good, much like the regime he attempts to topple. He abandons moral and ethical principles to achieve his goals. The destruction and chaos V births provide a view into his deeply flawed ideology and morality, displaying hypocrisy, sociopathy, and a disregard for human life. V has had a rough life, but as such does not justify mass murder and abandonment of ethics. V's hypocrisy is placed front and center as the reader comes to understand that V is an unreliable narrator and protagonist. The mask he wears should remain in place, not to protect his identity but to prevent others from seeing what is truly underneath.