

Romanticism and Rationality: Reimagining Enlightenment and Sentimentalism in
Kate Grenville's *The Lieutenant*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the paradigms of epistemological thought, namely rationalism and sentiment which act as a dynamic propulsion behind the conceptual evolution of personal perspectives and societal constructs of ideological consciousness through the often-overlooked dimensions of reason versus emotion, and the clash of enlightenment with moral subjectivity in Kate Grenville's novel, *The Lieutenant*. It highlights conflict between the pursuit of rationality and moral sensitivity, and the complex manifestations of affective responses and life experiences. This critical study interrogates the challenges of universalizing Western rational doctrines to regulate the understanding and interpretation of individual and culturally specific experiences in the light of philosophical perspectives of G. E. Moore and Nietzsche reflecting on their viewpoints on goodness and moral constructs. It challenges absolute rationality, emphasizing the

belief that principles of goodness and morality vary across cultures and individuals. It suggests that rationality itself may not be entirely objective, as it is shaped by individual emotions and subjective experiences. The concept of right or wrong, as well as moral judgments, could be viewed as social constructs, influenced by personal perceptions and not by universal, absolute standards. The disparity between societal norms and silenced voices exposes the shortcomings of universalism, emphasizing the need to amplify neglected viewpoints while being attuned to their emotional and cultural sensitivities.

Keywords: Power, Rationality, Romanticism, Sentimentalism, Subjugation

G. E. Moore opines that ethical reasoning involves two fundamental investigations, one concerning the inherent truthfulness of moral axioms and the other requiring discernment of an action's righteousness or transgression. Rationality seeks logical justification, while sentimentalism relies on empathy and human experience. A purely rational approach may overlook moral depth, whereas sentimentalism alone can lead to bias. Ethical judgment, therefore, must balance reason and emotion, ensuring that both logic and human values guide moral decisions. G. E. Moore states:

I would wish it observed that, when I call such propositions 'Intuitions,' I mean merely to assert that they are incapable of proof; [imply nothing whatever as to the manner or origin of our cognition of them. Still less do I imply (as most Intuitionists have done) that any proposition whatever is true, because we cognise it in a particular way or by the exercise of any particular faculty: I hold, on the contrary, that in every way in which it is possible to cognise a true proposition, it is also possible to cognise a false one (36).

Moore makes an important distinction between two types of ethical propositions. The first type is described as "Intuitions," referring to moral truths that are self-evident and not open to proof or disproof. These are understood as fundamental principles that require no external justification. However, the author

emphasizes that they do not align with traditional intuitionism, which claims that propositions about specific actions, like whether an action is right or wrong, cannot be proven through the consequences of those actions. In contrast, the author argues that such moral propositions can be validated by examining the results of the actions they describe, bringing an empirical approach to ethics.

This article explores two ethical questions and their connection to rationality and sentimentalism in *The Lieutenant* by Kate Grenville. Some moral principles such as justice and kindness are fundamental truths that do not require external proof. Rooke comes to understand this through his deep connection with the Gadigal people. However, determining the moral nature of a situation demands decision involves evaluating the effects of a situation besides the values that inform personal conscience. His moral struggle whether to obey authority or follow his sense of compassion demonstrates this conflict. His transformation highlights the limitations of pure rational thinking in ethical decision making since emotions and human relationships play a crucial role in shaping moral choices. This emphasizes the necessity of both cognitive scrutiny and humanistic sensibility in formulating morally defensible judgments.

The philosophical perspective explored in *The Lieutenant* by Kate Grenville highlights the tension between moral absolutes and the need for ethical reflection. The protagonist, Rooke, initially holds a strict view of morality based on duty and authority, assuming that the rightness of his actions is inherently clear which does not require further examination. The narrator explains that "Like everyone else, he had taken the oath. It was easy to raise his right hand and swear that he would serve and obey" (Grenville 27). However, as he interacts with the Indigenous people, he begins to see the consequences of his actions more clearly, prompting him to question the moral principles he once accepted without hesitation. This shift in perspective forces Rooke to reconsider whether ethical truths can exist independently of their outcomes. His growing awareness reveals that moral reasoning is not always straightforward but requires careful

evaluation of real-world effects. The contrast between his early certainty and later doubts reflects the challenge of balancing principles with practical considerations.

Moore observes “that such mere existence of what is beautiful has value, so small as to be negligible, in comparison with that which attaches to the consciousness of beauty” (238). In *The Lieutenant* by Kate Grenville, G.E. Moore’s conceptualization of beauty, which emphasizes its value as deriving from the subjective experience of awareness rather than its mere ontological presence, finds a compelling manifestation in the character evolution of Daniel Rooke. At the start, Rooke, much like his fellow colonizers, remains oblivious to the beauty of the Gadigal people and their culture. Though their language, customs, and connection to the land surrounding him, he fails to perceive them as valuable. Rooke feels that “The journey of discovery he had just embarked on was of that order of significance, a journey not simply into the language of a race of people hitherto unknown, but into the cosmos they inhabited: the ways they organized their society and the gods they worshipped, their thoughts and hopes, their fears and passions” (Grenville 154). This mirrors Moore’s argument that beauty, when unnoticed or unappreciated, holds little significance. However, through his growing bond with Tagaran, a young Gadigal girl, Rooke attains a deeper consciousness of beauty. He develops an amicable bond with Tagaran and out of sheer affection, Rooke tells “I have a younger sister you remind me of” (Grenville 179). As he begins to comprehend the intricacy of her language and the profound wisdom of her people, his perspective shifts. Rooke’s journey emphasizes the transformative power of this consciousness, showing how it can inspire compassion, integrity, and meaningful action in the face of injustice.

In his book titled *The Methods of Ethics*, Henry Sidgwick contrasts ‘Utilitarianism’ with common-sense moral reasoning regarding the distribution of kindness and affection. Based on the principle of ‘Utilitarianism,’ decisions should aim at generating the greatest overall benefit, with no individual’s outcome considered more important than another’s, and without requiring equal treatment of everyone. People tend

to direct actions toward those with closer relationships (family, friends), which, while unequal, is seen as a practical necessity under utilitarianism. In contrast, common sense often asserts that we have special duties to those close to us, creating a moral dilemma about how much care should be given to loved ones versus strangers. The 'Intuitionist method' believes in inherent moral principles, while the 'Utilitarian method' focuses on calculating actions that maximize happiness, even when conflicting duties arise. The dilemma centers on whether moral decisions should prioritize maximizing collective happiness or adhere to 'intuitive moral principles' that emphasize special obligations to loved ones. Sedgwick writes,

For Utilitarianism is sometimes said to resolve all virtue into universal and impartial Benevolence ... Practically of course the distribution of any individual's services will, even on this view, be unequal : as each man will obviously promote the general happiness best by rendering services to a limited number, and to some more than others ... Common Sense, however, seems rather to regard it as immediately certain without any such deduction that we owe special dues of kindness to those who stand in special relations to us (241-242).

In *The Lieutenant* by Kate Grenville, the protagonist, Daniel Rooke, faces moral dilemmas that reflect the tension between utilitarianism and intuition-based moral principles, as discussed in the passage. Utilitarianism advocates for actions that maximize overall happiness, often emphasizing the greater good. Rooke, a British lieutenant, initially follows this principle, supporting the imperial objectives of the British Empire. However, as he forms a deeper connection with the Indigenous people, particularly through his study of their language, he begins to question whether the pursuit of colonial goals truly benefits everyone. Rooke is reluctant, and while the other men are eager to carry out their orders of attacking the natives, he seems detached and distant. "Rooke went about it slowly, even dropped his bag of shot, but all around him he could see the eagerness of the men ... One by one the men fired, Rooke among them. He fixed on a patch of glittering water far from the canoe, and hoped that for once his aim was good" (Grenville 264). The

novel explores Rooke's shift from utilitarian ideals to a more personal, intuitive sense of morality. His growing empathy for the indigenous people leads him to feel a moral obligation toward them, which conflicts with his duty to the British Crown.

In *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, Friedrich Nietzsche is emphasizing that 'willing,' the act of choosing or desiring, should be considered a fundamental aspect of moral philosophy. Morality is not just about following rules but about understanding the deeper drives and forces, like 'will,' that influence human actions. Nietzsche believes,

"Freedom of the will"—that is the expression for the complex state of delight of the person exercising volition, who commands and at the same time identifies himself with the executor of the order—who, as such, enjoys also the triumph over obstacles, but thinks within himself that it was really his will itself that overcame them ... Hence a philosopher should claim the right to include willing as such within the sphere of morals—morals being understood as the doctrine of the relations of supremacy under which the phenomenon of "life" comes to be. (26-27)

Rooke begins to feel that the outcomes of his actions are a result of his personal choices and moral beliefs, rather than simply a product of obedience to external authority. Rooke expresses his resentment to the Governor saying, "It was a wicked plan, sir, am sorry to have been persuaded to comply with the order. I would not for any reason ever again obey a similar order" (Grenville 285). His struggle is a philosophical one, as he navigates the morality of his actions within the complex, social structure of the British Empire and his developing understanding of the indigenous people. Therefore, Nietzsche's philosophical exploration of will, governance, and moral action mirrors Rooke's journey of self-realization and moral autonomy in the novel.

Nietzsche, in his book titled *On the Genealogy of Morality*, challenges the unquestioned acceptance of traditional moral values and urges a critical examination of their origins and effects. He

suggests that morality should not be viewed as an absolute, inherent truth but as a product of historical and social forces, subject to scrutiny and reevaluation. Nietzsche emphasizes that morality, particularly the distinction between “good” and “evil,” has been taken for granted without understanding its deeper implications. He proposes that the concept of “goodness” may not necessarily lead to human progress; rather, it may represent a regressive force that inhibits human development. Nietzsche writes:

We need a critique of moral values, the value of these values should itself, for once, be examined – and so we need to know about the conditions and circumstances under which the values grew up, developed and changed (morality as result, as symptom, as mask, as tartuffery, as sickness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, remedy, stimulant, inhibition, poison), since we have neither had this knowledge up till now nor even desired it (7-8).

Nietzsche’s critique of morality as a construct driven by historical and social contexts mirrors Rooke’s journey as he questions the traditional values of the British Empire, which frame the indigenous people as “evil” or inferior, while elevating colonization as “good.” Nietzsche’s idea that morality can act as a poison, inhibiting growth, is reflected in Rooke’s internal conflict, where his loyalty to colonial authority and the “good” of empire is increasingly at odds with his empathy for the indigenous people and the recognition of their humanity.

Thus, *The Lieutenant* reflects the philosophical debates about moral truths and sensitivity, where Rooke’s journey involves moving from a rational, utilitarian justification of colonialism to a more Nietzschean and Moorean understanding of morality based on individual empathy and an intuitive sense of justice. In the novel, Grenville explores the complexities of moral awareness and the conflict between established moral systems and the individual’s developing sense of moral truth, ultimately highlighting the importance of questioning societal norms and developing a deeper, more sensitive moral consciousness.

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