

The subject of ethics is frequently found at the center of issues that can profoundly affect the way in which both citizens and administrators choose to live. An underused but highly effective means of introducing the complexities of the subject may be found in carefully selected works of literature. This approach can sustain the interest of students while emphasizing the critical distinctions that are a fundamental part of the subject matter. James Clavell's King Rat is one such work of literature. In a Japanese prison camp at the close of World War II, democratic and aristocratic captives struggle to preserve their bodies without sacrificing what remains of their souls. The resulting tale provides a powerful examination of such issues as character, virtue, vice, fitness to rule, the good citizen versus the good human being, and, most especially, honor.

UNDERSTANDING ETHICS THROUGH LITERATURE

Character, Honor, and the Corruption of Body and Soul in King Rat

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For the men, Changi was more than a prison. Changi was genesis, the place of beginning again. (8)¹

Ancient political philosophers thought that there were but two basic ways to get a person to submit to the will of another: force or persuasion. The first approach is self-explanatory and requires few attributes that would necessarily distinguish a human being from the beasts. The second approach, however, is considerably different. As a *sine qua non*, it requires speech to communicate one's will. Furthermore, considerably more time is generally needed for it, because *persuading* another to do one's will

may necessitate many words (or even "speeches"). In the opinion of the ancients, though, the single most important point about speech concerned the *use* to which it was put. The use of speech *to discourse about right and wrong* was what definitively distinguished human beings from the lower animals. In its most appropriate form, speech was to be used to persuade one's fellows to do the right thing and avoid the wrong. In short, speech was to be about what we today broadly call "ethics."

However, in attempting to introduce this subject of ethics to interested students as a course of study—especially when the focus is most directly on administrative ethics—we find considerable uncertainty among scholars not only about the most desirable approach but also about the most appropriate content.² Most thoughtful scholars understand that students coming to the subject should be thoroughly grounded in such fundamental works as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* or even Sir Henry Taylor's *The Statesman*.³ Unfortunately, the typical student in an administrative ethics class is unlikely to possess the requisite educational background to profit immediately from such an approach. When one adds to this problem the fact that most students have at best only 15 or (at worst) 10 weeks to devote to the whole course, the limitations on content and approach become even more strikingly apparent.

Among the numerous possible compromises in this situation is an underused one that actually may be extraordinarily well suited to the circumstances. As some political scientists have come to recognize in recent years, carefully selected works of literature can be used as an interim means of introducing students to important political themes in ways that sustain keen interest without sacrificing any of the fundamental complexities of the subject. Properly presented, the dramatic interplay within appropriate works of fiction can intrigue and immerse students in ways that surpass almost all other approaches. In the special case of administrative ethics, there are works that allow for a fulsome exploration of such topics as honor, character, law, administrative discretion, codes, political power, and even the role that the more base parts of human nature (such passions as envy, anger, and hate) may inevitably play in various types of rule.

Indeed, recognition of the ways in which literature might be used to understand aspects of administration is by no means a recent insight. In fact, it can truthfully be said that this approach has long been advocated by some prominent figures in the discipline.⁴ (The linkage of administration with literature has never been overwhelming, but it still receives only

occasional treatment today.⁵ The contemporary dominance of behavioralism within both public administration and political science undoubtedly does little to encourage hope for an early reversal of this situation.) Nevertheless, there are many fine works of literature that have rich and very insightful treatments of administrative themes (see, e.g., Barr, 1958; Camus, 1946; Golding, 1959; Haines, 1947; Heggen, 1948; Hersey, 1965; Kafka, 1957; Orwell, 1954; Sneider, 1951; Wouk, 1954). Some of the best of these are set in military environments, which by the very nature of their aristocratic-based class systems offer fascinating looks at the problems of organizational structure, personnel management, democratic mores, human nature, and, above all, ethical quandaries. Because such novels frequently treat events occurring against a background of war, the characters and organizations are confronted with unusual—even extreme—situations. It is the very extraordinariness of these situations, however, that enables the works to treat fundamental themes so vividly. Indeed, only in the wrenching conditions of war can the true limitations of humans and their political creations be seen most clearly. (This is no small advantage to those observers who are, from the ordered safety of their democratic republic, presently attempting to puzzle out the true meaning and significance of such things as character, honor, virtue, or vice. As with so many other elements of our being that are truly important in human affairs—love, courage, loyalty, honesty—one generally does not know if they are truly possessed until such time as they are tested, that is, challenged under conditions of duress. As thoughtful commentators have long noted, war is the ultimate testing ground for the crucial aspects of man's character.) (See, e.g., Tocqueville, 1969, p. 649).

THE EXTREMES OF BODY AND SOUL: UNDERSTANDING *KING RAT*

One such fascinating work of literature that powerfully treats a number of important themes is James Clavell's *King Rat*. Set in a Singapore prison at the close of World War II, the tale concerns the last 8,000 English and Australian (along with a few New Zealand, Canadian, and American) survivors of the disastrous fall of that city in March 1942.⁶ In mid-1945 (the time of the story), these are all that remain of the more than 100,000 Allied troops captured by the Japanese. Living an unnatural existence as an all-male society physically cut off from the outside world, these

survivors have been allowed to administer their own prison, provided they abide by whatever "laws" their Japanese captors choose to impose. The men are of different nations, classes, and religions. Being members of various Allied armies, they are, of course, also distinguished by their respective ranks. Despite earnest attempts by the Allied camp administrators to retain the conventional "civilizing" influences of these "other world" marks of distinction, long-term survival in the prison oftentimes is more dependent on individual cunning, loyalty to the fundamental two- and three-man units, one's spirit or will to live, and luck. Struggling to survive one more day in the hellish confines of the camp, each individual finds the civilizing influences of culture, class, religion, manners, and, above all, morals frequently tested—and far too often, the restraining influences of these ties are not up to the task.

In the camp the immediate need is bodily survival. Hence it is here that the essence of a man, the strength and purity of his soul, is made most visible. Once liberated, it is not the degradations and humiliations of the body that most mark the main characters in the tale. Rather, it is the indelible (to the bearer) stain of moral corruption and the accompanying anguish over precisely what is good and what is evil. There is one question each man surely asks himself: Is it wrong to adapt morality to circumstances in order to survive?⁷ Within the confines of this prison, each man has an unparalleled opportunity to begin life anew, to start again without the advantages of heredity or profession or the disadvantages of past misbehavior. The extreme conditions of Changi prison produce an egalitarian leveling of the inmates. As a consequence, every one of them has an unasked-for opportunity to know his own character as it truly is, unadorned by any of the conventional masks that might once have so artfully cloaked it in the world outside Changi.

THE CIVILIZED AND THE BARBARIC

Although Clavell laces the work with a number of major themes that seemingly compete for the reader's attention, the most persistent of these is probably that which seeks to distinguish civilized from uncivilized human behavior. In pondering this Aristotelian concern for what separates man from the animals, it helps to remember that this is a most unnatural human community. Perhaps most obviously, it is an all-male community; the only women live in the tortured memories of the prisoners.⁸ In

addition, all of the prisoners but Corporal King have been reduced to mere shells of men.⁹ With bodily survival foremost among their concerns, most of the prisoners have had ample opportunity to reorder the priorities of their lives (or, at least, reconsider them). The more trivial conventions of the outer world (e.g., clothes, modesty, vanity, insupportable social hierarchy) have generally been discarded. What is accentuated in their stead are the qualities of "manhood" needed to excel in this peculiar environment: smarts, cunning, and "luck."¹⁰

Indeed, the imbalance of manhood in the community makes the almost total absence of womanhood strikingly apparent.¹¹ Understandably, this situation tends to draw attention to those few instances in which traits that might be considered "womanly" are present. Among the more obvious of these are the roles of Sean and Steven, two inmates who have adapted to the unnatural situation of the camp by assuming feminine characteristics. (Indeed, in the case of Sean, who has "become" the glamorous women he portrays in the camp's theater, the age-old tension between nature—specifically the malleability of human nature—and nurture is artfully held up to the reader's gaze. Here the great power of "fame" is presented as the medium that ultimately makes Sean—as well as hordes of lustful observers—believe that he really *is* a woman.)¹² In addition to their effeminacy, the virtue of compassion also visibly sets these two men apart from their fellow inmates.¹³ Although the mimicking of the physical allure of women appeals to the baser parts of human nature, the display of this compassion has a most salutary effect on the observer. (In at least one case, it clearly serves to transform disgust into pity.)¹⁴

The impression that this all-male community of ex-soldiers exists at the edge of civilized human behavior is particularly strong during the early portions of the tale. Here the reader is confronted by abundant evidence of the tensions between passions and reason among (and within) the men. The passions of hate, anger, envy, and malevolent envy are used freely to describe the reactions of various characters toward each other. Admittedly, the object of a substantial portion of these passions is usually *the King*, the ironically named American corporal who glories in the world he has cunningly created and measures his "stature" partly by the passionate way in which others react to him (21). The larger question, though, concerns what restrains these men from giving vent to their passions through *action*. If such influential philosophers as Hobbes and Locke are correct that the avoidance of force or violence to their persons and property is the foremost reason why men seek the security of civil society, then its absence in this

camp (inhabited by men who paradoxically originally came together for the explicit purpose of maximizing their ability to employ it efficiently and well) is most interesting. One credible explanation for their restraint appears to be found first in the role of law within the camp and, second, in that of *ethos* (understood in the ancient sense of *character*).

THE RESTRAINT OF LAWS

Conquered by force, the multinational camp inmates are overtly subject to "Jap law." "Camp law," in turn, conforms to, and is supportive of, this Japanese law (and may well go beyond it in those areas the Japanese have elected not to address). However, the men's near universal hatred of the Japanese, nurtured and bolstered by the latter's past and present cruelties, taints camp law by virtue of its association with the despised conquerors. Although the senior Allied officers implement the most absurd Japanese orders—including that requiring the equivalent of 20 flies per inmate to be caught, counted, and delivered to the Japanese administrator each day (91)—they also make clear that some of their conforming camp laws are to be ignored (113). Because the very nature of effective law depends on its being respected (which, in turn, requires that it be broadly applicable and voluntarily obeyed), the alliance of despised Japanese and tainted camp laws understandably does not have the greatest success in restraining the prisoners.

There are other laws, however, that are perceived as being superior to those of the Japanese captors. For instance, Colonel Smedley-Taylor confirms his intimate knowledge of the Geneva Convention's code of ethics to a Japanese officer and emphasizes that the Allied officer's "job is to enforce *civilized* law" (90-91, emphasis added). More exalted yet was a "natural law," which held that "only by mutual effort did you survive" (27). This law governed the most fundamental of all camp associations, that of "the unit." An alliance of two to four men committed first and foremost to themselves, the unit undercut all other loyalties—nation, rank, friendship—and was crucial to a man's survival in Changi.¹⁵ If one was cast out of this mutually supportive relationship and it became known, it was almost impossible to join another. Fair dealing and trust were the foundations of the unit, and to be cast out meant these sacred elements had been violated (27 and 65). Except for the King, survival by one's self was not possible.

ARISTOCRATIC HONOR AND CONVENTIONAL INEQUALITY

Honor—what it is, how it is maintained, and, above all, how it is lost—is one of the more thoroughly examined elements of character in the tale. Not surprisingly, the degradation of the prisoners is used to illuminate its more common opposite, dishonor. As portrayed here, whatever lasting sense of either honor or dishonor a man carries with him through life is certainly conventional, the appropriate standard internalized through habits long nurtured by family, nation, profession, tradition, and religion. In Changi, though, men are forced to confront the extent to which they have truly adopted the standard, for here they are tested in ways unimaginable to those on the outside.

The one critical ingredient that sustains the distinctions between honor and dishonor is inequality. Although it is entirely possible for a man's relations with others to be conducted according to some idealized standard of honor, it is a considerable assistance to his efforts if the standard is, well, visible. A stellar "Exemplar of Honor"—such as an Admirable Nelson at Trafalgar—would be most suitable. Admittedly, though, such exalted figures set a standard that would probably overwhelm far too many well-intentioned men of good character. Lesser mortals would find themselves in the discouraging position of continually falling a considerable bit short of such perfection. From the standpoint of encouraging honorable conduct that is more attainable, is it not much better to have a highly visible *negative* standard from which select men can shrink in horror?

A rigid, highly stratified class system is wonderfully suited for fostering this understanding of honor. The hereditary English aristocracy, represented in Changi by the remnants of the British military, nicely embodies this arrangement (although here in a tattered and uncomplimentary way). In contrast to a natural aristocracy or meritocracy (long championed by Jefferson for America) (see Jefferson, 1954; Richardson, 1984), such hereditary aristocracies drastically restrict the competition for the scarce worldly goods—wealth, status, honor, political power, and office—so coveted by most men to only a very small percentage of the population. Unlike natural ability, which may be as easily bestowed on a pauper as a wealthy noble, the bloodlines that are the foundation of hereditary systems are visible and easily verified. With the interrelations of this "blue-blooded" class governed by appropriate gentlemanly codes of behavior—bolstered and sustained by a complementary aversion to the highly visible

conduct of the masses beneath them—the hereditary aristocrats live a life of privilege that ordinarily is disturbed by only the mildest forms of domestic competition. In this insulated environment, their conventional class-based ideas of honor are nurtured and protected.

Although seldom approaching true meritocracies, democracies are clearly distinguished from hereditary aristocracies by at least one important feature that is relevant to this discussion: Within them the competition for the scarce goods is much more universal, tenacious, and, hence, ungoverned. Their citizenry may still be subdivided by artificial means (e.g., a young Corporal King was stigmatized as “white trash” back in civilian America), but the barriers are not impenetrable. Above all, these democrats are certainly accustomed to the rigors of a less fettered competition. Not surprisingly, therefore, the democrats come to the extraordinarily competitive conditions of Changi—which, interestingly enough, have some features that would also be found in a meritocracy—far better equipped than the hereditary aristocrats to compete for the traditionally scarce goods.

The camp retains the military’s fundamental separation of officers and enlisted personnel in the matter of living quarters, but other distinctions from the outer world are less successfully sustained.¹⁶ As seen through the class-conscious eyes of the typical English officers, their American and Australian counterparts are special objects of derision because of the easy familiarity with which they associate with enlisted troops.¹⁷ However, the greater equality of relations among these democrats—and, above all, the social mobility that is a principal hallmark of the civilian worlds from which they sprang—is, in fact, a matter of intense pride for members of these nationalities.¹⁸ Not coincidentally, of all the inmates, it is members of the American and Australian contingents who seem to be among the least troubled by questions of honor.¹⁹

In fact, it is the English aristocrat Peter Marlowe—one of the more complete, civilized human beings in the tale—who struggles mightily with the intricate demands of honor and, in the process, makes the issue most visible to the reader. Descended from an unbroken line of English officers that reaches back to 1720, Peter is an “hereditary officer” (135, 145, and 180). Conditioned by this formidable tradition, he is a member of England’s privileged upper class. Although neither he nor his family have wealth, they do possess what one might characterize as “earned” prestige (180). Two hundred and twenty-five years of honorable service to “the Union Jack” have clearly given the Marlowe family the right to it.

It would be an understatement, though, to say that Peter wears his heritage lightly. For instance, he readily learns the ways and language of the Javanese and joins a unit composed not of fellow aristocrats but of an Australian colonel and a civilian Scottish planter who has spent a lifetime in Malaysia (55, 58, and 63). Significantly, he is drawn to King, the American corporal who, having been "white trash" back in the civilian world, has come to excel in the brutally competitive conditions of the camp. The corporal's mastery of business enables him to become the wealthiest and probably the most influential prisoner in the camp.²⁰

It is through his lengthy association with the wily American enlisted man that Marlowe finds his sense of honor most challenged. Although his circumstances are certainly much changed from what they were back in England, Marlowe retains the aristocratic warrior's prejudice against engaging in business. For instance, offered an extraordinarily lucrative partnership with the King in a tobacco-curing venture, Peter demurs, ultimately explaining to the incredulous members of his unit that "I couldn't go into business. *Marlowes aren't tradesmen*. . . . It's just not done, old boy" (57).²¹ The Australian colonel, the Malay dwelling Scottish planter (Marlowe's "best friend"), and the King all share variants of the thought that Peter is naive and "[has] got his head in the sky. That boy's got some strange ideas" (57). But such ideas about honorable and dishonorable occupations appear unusual only to those who have long been accustomed to the harsher environments of democracies and the more universal competition that reigns within them. Marlowe's "protected" habituation before Changi had been quite consistent. Business was what the lesser classes traditionally engaged in, and one certainly must never be like them. Indeed, because he always viewed it as dishonorable, it is no shock that Marlowe is also befuddled by business. Despite the King's patient attempts, he considers himself "right out of my depth [whenever business is discussed] . . . I feel such an idiot" (111).

Fluent in Javanese, Marlowe is several times prevailed on by the King to assist in consummating various business transactions with either Korean guards or Chinese traders. During one such exchange, Peter is suddenly forced to confront the tension between his "hereditary" honor and the kinds of business activities in which he and the King are really engaged. In his mind, Peter has a conversation with his revered father, an officer in the Royal Navy.

Listen, my son. There is such a thing as honor. If you deal with a man, tell him the truth and then he must of necessity tell you the truth or he has no

honor. Protect another man as you expect him to protect you. And if a man has no honor, do not associate with him for he will taint you. Remember, there are honorable people and dirty people. . . . There are no buts, my son. True there are degrees of honor—but one man can only have one code. . . . Some things a man must decide for himself. Sometimes you have to adapt to circumstances. But for the love of God guard yourself and your conscience—no one else will—and know that a bad decision at the right time can destroy you far more surely than any bullet. (133-134)

A starker presentation of the dictates of the aristocratic code of honor would be hard to find.²² Furthermore, for young Marlowe it is made glaringly visible as a consequence of being uttered by his father, this stalwart, even heroic Royal Navy figure who had so obvious a hand in molding Peter's original understanding of what an honorable man was supposed to be. The immediate quandary is made all the more difficult by the fact that Marlowe and the King are knowingly selling counterfeit merchandise. Ultimately, Marlowe rationalizes his part in the exchange because he will use the proceeds (a considerable amount of money) to buy protein-rich eggs for his ailing best friend, Mac (134-135). The higher end thereby justifies the unsavory means.

Marlowe's rationalization is immediately tested, however, when he is offhandedly asked by the King to pass along some associated bribe money to Colonel Samson, "a power in the Regular Army, a man of caste, position and wealth." He does so, but only with the cold realization that "everything he had been taught to believe would have no value . . . if Samson was a hireling."²³ Well, Samson is certainly a hireling, but he differs from Marlowe in at least one very important way: Although a member of the protected aristocracy himself, Marlowe, a man demonstrably possessing a gifted intellect, consistently seeks out other meritorious individuals without regard to their military rank or conventional station. Marlowe, the product of a conventional aristocracy, could undoubtedly thrive in a Jeffersonian natural aristocracy. There is no suggestion, however, that the plodding Samson, competing on a much more leveled plane for the first time, could do likewise.

The gravity of the attack on Marlowe's conception of honorable conduct is not to be underestimated. (Remember, during the preceding 3 years, Marlowe had masqueraded as a native Javanese in one of their villages and been shuffled from one despicable Japanese prison to another. There is no indication that any of these past experiences caused him to seriously question "the code." It takes these late 1945 interactions with the King to do that.) At least with regard to aristocratic honor, Lieutenant

Grey, that unwavering enforcer of "camp law," may have been quite correct when he sneers at Marlowe after the liberation of Changi:

You were born lucky. You've ended Changi lucky. Why, you've even escaped with what *precious little soul you ever had*. . . Corruption. Moral corruption. You were saved just in time. A few more months around the King's evil and you'd have been changed forever. (350, emphasis added)

Indeed, this examination of honor would be incomplete without going beyond Grey's outburst on the subject and briefly looking at what he himself may have to add to our understanding of the code. At the outset, though, it must be conceded that in certain respects, Lieutenant Grey is not a very sympathetic figure—especially for democratic eyes. A product of a poor working-class family in Streatham, Grey understandably sees the army as the only ticket out of *his* hereditary condition. Possessed of neither class, wealth, nor family (his pitiful marriage to a young woman from similar straits—a woman who blindly sees *him* as *her* ticket out of the harsh conditions of the lower class!—is marked by an astounding degree of physical and emotional coldness), Grey nonetheless has a perverse if fanatic devotion to the aristocratic class system to which he so fervently aspires. Harboring an ill-thought-out hope that he might yet prove worthy of admission to the officer ranks of the "Regular Army" (almost the sole province of the upper classes), Grey simultaneously seethes with ill-concealed class hatred (114-116 and 127-128).²⁴ Without noteworthy military deeds of his own, he has been given the thankless task of policing the prison as its provost marshal. As such, he tries to ensure that the prisoners obey both camp law and Japanese law. All too often, his unenviable reward seems to be either thinly disguised contempt or barely concealed disobedience.

Nevertheless, there is a highly positive side to Grey's character. He attempts to perform his duties efficiently and, above all else, honestly.²⁵ Even Marlowe, the man Grey passionately targets, respects him, considering him to be a "good man to have on your side in a death battle. And an enemy to cherish" (37-38). Unlike the hereditary aristocrats whose ranks he so fervently desires to join, Grey does not lie, cheat, or steal. Incorruptible, his straight-arrow approach to his duties does not permit him to take advantage of any tangential "perks." He seems to exist only from one payday to the next, possessing "no spare rations" (114). Although he probably belongs to one, there is no mention of his all-important "unit." In fact, for all intents and purposes, Grey's position and temperament seem to confine him to a solitary existence, removed from whatever

passes as "normal" social interaction in this most abnormal of places. Despite (or maybe even partly because of) this isolation, Grey single-mindedly sets about enforcing the camp law. Ironically, of all the camp officers—most especially the English ones—he alone probably emerges from the prison without having sullied "the code" in any apparent way. He may have been (literally) a bit insane, but this man who so envies and admires the aristocratic code of honor (although, pointedly, not the *aristocrats* themselves) ultimately proves to be its most steadfast defender (118 and 351). Young Marlowe does not see the similarity, but Grey and Marlowe's revered father are alike in one crucial respect: Both see moral questions in colors of only black and white. (From this perspective, "Grey" is most ironically named, for there is no such color in his moral world.)

Although Marlowe rhetorically asks Grey if he'd "rather be dead with your . . . virtues than alive and know you had to compromise a little," he himself really is not so certain of the answer. How effectively did Peter really try to preserve those key parts of his morality, "honor-integrity-pride"? "Is it wrong to adapt? Wrong to survive? . . . What is good and what is evil" (351-352)? Marlowe, a privileged member of a decent regime with unnatural barriers between its citizens, finds himself in a unique position in the libertarian environment of Changi. Forced out of the protected class system of his early years when he flees the initial Japanese takeover of his aerodrome, he progressively seeks outsiders of merit and talent (the Javanese, the Australian colonel, the Scottish planter, King). He "adapts to circumstances" in ways that would neither displease his father nor trouble his own conscience. Here in the unprotected competition of the outer world, the aristocrat's crucial negative standard—the visible conduct of the lower classes—is, in a very real sense, removed, for there is precious little of life's scarce goods available to sustain artificial distinctions between groups. In Changi, individual merit—be it moral, intellectual, or physical—is mightily important in assaying the superiority of one human being over another. Indeed, in one ironical way, the hereditary aristocrats, most of whom openly or secretly continue to look down on their democratic brothers, prove to be the real negative standard, for their actions consistently and thoroughly belie their espousal of the cherished code of honor. When they are tested outside their protected class system, most of the aristocrats seem to fall miserably short of their own standards.

MORAL LEADERSHIP AND CORRUPTION

An exceptionally motivated and committed individual may well continue to adhere to his standards of good and evil under the most trying of circumstances. It is even conceivable that such a person could persevere when all around him others are faltering and discarding those same standards.²⁶ However, for most men most of the time, the example provided by their leaders is ultimately a crucial influence on their own efforts. In *Changi*, the most visible conventional superiors among the prisoners almost invariably are despicably corrupt. For example, Colonel Smedley-Taylor, a privileged aristocrat and hereditary officer, displays admirable courage in the face of a Japanese search and agrees to take ultimate responsibility if a hidden radio is found (90-92). However, he is the mastermind of a successful plot to steal the King's money box and is probably the ringleader of the unspeakably shameful scam whereby the daily rations of all the other men are deliberately shorted so that the senior officers can be better fed (326-327 and 245-347). Similarly, Chaplain Drinkwater is not only an aristocrat but a man whose chosen profession is intended to signify moral superiority. His responsibilities do not weigh heavily on him, though, for we see him systematically bilking his pitiable manservants out of their vitamin-rich eggs and stealing food from Marlowe (147 and 298).

The list of lesser failed leaders could go on, but the above suffices to explain part of the unrestrained glee with which those resourceful enlisted rogues, King and Timsen, contrive a wonderful plan to sell (mislabeled) rat legs to the meat-deprived "brass." The enlisted troops (and Marlowe, the one increasingly "Americanized" officer who happily conspires with them) positively delight in the prospect of turning a tidy profit by feeding the rat meat to their discredited "leaders." It may not have been much, but the operation certainly had a satisfying aura of justice attached to it. Most of the brass were morally unfit to lead and the troops were abundantly aware of it.

Unfitness to lead was not universal, however. In addition to the already mentioned examples of Marlowe and Grey, we have Tom Cotton and Dave Daven, two keepers of camp radios who go nobly (in the case of Cotton, even flamboyantly) to their deaths when traitors reveal their secrets to the Japanese (71 and 95). Furthermore, there is Father Donovan, the saintly chaplain who is beloved by all. Marked by what may well be the most

"peaceful" eyes in all of Changi, Donovan has to be watched lest he give his daily rations away to those in greater need (275, 294, and 284). Unlike the aristocratic Drinkwater, *this* man of God willingly forgoes the things of the body and clearly delights in those of the soul. Of all the inmates, he alone probably emerged from Changi with the most unsullied character. His views of mankind may not have been so fortunate, though. "He knew that all men are children of God. But are they, all of them? . . . Could children of God do such things" (275)?

On an admittedly lower scale of moral leadership, there is Captain Brough, a downed transport pilot who is the senior American officer. Like all the American officers, he mixes freely and well with the two dozen or so enlisted troops in his command. He displays courage, standing up to the fear-crazed aristocrat, Colonel Sellars, and, to varying degrees, attempts to protect his troops from both Grey and the Japanese (90 and 306). He is portrayed as skimming a sizable portion of the King's money (the profit from the sale of a diamond ring), but he does so only to create a pool of money with which to supplement the weekly pay of all his troops (307).

BUSINESS, NATURAL INEQUALITY, AND POWER

Thank God for profit! The guy who thought of business was the real genius. Buy for a little and sell for more. Use your mind. Take a chance and money pours in. And with money all things are possible. Most of all, power. (154)

As previously mentioned, the inmates least troubled by the dictates of honor are, of course, the competition-honed democrats from America and Australia. Changi was certainly every bit as much a foreboding, pestilential hell hole for them as for their aristocratic allies. It was also more than that, though. It was an unprecedented opportunity to excel on a leveled playing field. Removed from even the minimal (especially in comparison to the English) restraints of family, wealth, connections, and privileged education that had characterized their civilian worlds back home, select individuals among these democrats could now compete in ways previously denied to them. The most effective competitor of all was, of course, "the King." In the stratified conditions of the American army, King was a lowly corporal in a construction battalion; back home, he had known only a drunkard of a father and a series of nowhere jobs (155). In Changi, the past was unimportant. Here only the present counted, and for that he was admirably equipped with boldness, cunning, and, above all, luck.²⁷

Indeed, King viewed relations among men as an exercise in Social Darwinism.

[Masters, a very sick man,] was weak and therefore no [-----] good. The world was jungle, and the strong survived and the weak should die. . . . That's what makes the world go round. There are the elite, and the rest. I'm the elite. . . . Thank God for America, [he] told himself for the billionth time. Thank God I was born American. . . . "Only place in the world were you can buy anything, where you get a chance to make it. That's important if you're not born into it. . . . But if you're not—and you want to work—why, there're so many [-----] opportunities, they make your hair curl. *An' if a guy doesn't work and help himself, then he's no [-----] good, and no [-----] American.*" (83 and 155; emphasis added; dashes in brackets indicate deleted expletives)

If Aristotle is correct—that what principally distinguishes man from the other animals is not only speech but the uses to which that speech is put—then King's application of this deterministic "law" derived from the behavior of lower animals to the relations among men is delusionary. Triumphantly successful at one endeavor—acquiring money—he smugly concludes thereby that he is naturally superior to his fellows across the spectrum and lauds both the American political and economic systems that facilitate such an event. Not surprisingly, he seems untroubled by the moral bankruptcy of Social Darwinism (see, e.g., Kristol, 1970). Indeed, at the conclusion of the tale we see the savageness of this key point ironically illustrated by the behavior of Adam and Eve, the ("genesis") rats who began King's most inspired business venture.

The living fed on the dead, and the living-weak became food for the living-strong until the survivors were equally strong. And then they fought among themselves and foraged.

And Adam ruled, for he was the King. Until the day his will to be King deserted him. And then he died, food for a stronger. *And the strongest was always the King, not by strength alone, but King by cunning and luck and strength together. Among the rats.* (352)²⁸

This is not to denigrate certain real (if low-level) virtues King possesses. For instance, he is a man of considerable courage. Perhaps his most visible display of it involves his (six!) trips outside the camp to visit the nearby native village. Even Marlowe, the self-assured man who so loves testing the mettle of others, is in awe of King on this score. But like so many of his other mildly admirable qualities (such as a sense of self-interested compassion that leads him to take care of suffering men who have been useful to him), the reader only sees this courage being displayed in the furtherance of self-interested, profit-making activities. King's standing in

Changi rests on a foundation of the baser parts of human nature. His acquaintances, toadies, and other assorted hangers-on associate with him out of self-interest. King is wealthy in a place of abject poverty and (to use Locke's apt phrase) can assist less resourceful individuals in their obvious quest for a more "comfortable self-preservation." With the sole exception of Marlowe, King has no true friends—fellow human beings who are mutually attracted to each other not out of self-interested obligation but because of a perceived commonality of intellect and, above all, character.

"The King," this American from the humblest of civilian and military circumstances, is most of all a man whose sense of self-worth is critically dependent on what others think of him. He is almost totally other-directed, without the crucial internal strength that might have been provided by a proper moral compass. Looked down on and even occasionally spurned by his social betters in America, King is perhaps understandably sustained by the recognition he has in Changi. That his "inferiors" envy and even hate him adds to the importance he attaches to his position. The critical thing is that they *know* who he is and undoubtedly wish they were in his place. "The hate and the envy . . . made him feel good and better than good, for he knew and they all knew . . . that he, of all of them, truly had it made" (312). Once the camp is liberated and his accumulated wealth (which he considered to be the source of "safety and life and power") is rendered worthless because it is in Japanese script currency, the King is once again a nobody (315). "No eyes, no hate, no recognition" aptly sums up his sudden invisibility to those who had previously felt obligated to pay him homage. The liberators had "taken away his face . . . Jesus God, he wept inside, give me back my face. Please give me back my face" (337).

CONCLUSION

Of all the major actors in this tale, it is Peter Marlowe, the hereditary British officer who has been habituated to dislike commerce as an arena suited only for the lower classes and the less-than-admirable parts of human nature, who emerges from Changi troubled but seemingly most intact in both body and soul. Born to privileged status, he has come to be deeply attracted to the most salutary aspect of democratic America—the "great idea" that "one man's as good as another" (339). A fiercely loyal friend who chooses his associates—even Corporal King—on the basis of his perception of their merits, Marlowe assesses people by their actions.

If they ever did so before, conventional rank or social standing now mean little to him. (As was previously mentioned, his best friend is Mac, the worldly expatriate Scottish planter, and his other unit mate—significantly, the only other officer in his select circle—is the sturdy Australian, Colonel Larkin.) Whereas both Marlowe and King believe in the equality of men, King, who has been on the bottom of the democratic heap, sees it as but a temporary situation until such time as he can “figure an angle and be better than the next guy” (180). Marlowe differentiates men by higher standards—loyalty, courage, compassion, and (a shaken but still intact understanding of) honor—without any indication that he wants to “get the better” of them. Perhaps most important of all, his behavior toward these other men is a product of his assessment. In these most physically appalling of circumstances, Marlowe ekes out his existence without kowtowing to moral inferiors, neglecting his moral equals, or failing to appreciate and recognize moral superiority. It is a most admirable standard, and if students of ethics come away from the work with a proper appreciation of it, their attendant labors with the tale will have been exceedingly well rewarded.

As a means of conveying both the greatness and the baseness of the human soul, *King Rat* has few peers. As a consequence, it serves as an ideal vehicle to introduce the subject of ethics in all its richness and complexity. Because it also makes such fundamental issues as honor, virtue, law-abidingness, and the distinctions of class (whether based on nature or convention) dramatically visible, it encourages the examination of related subjects that are certainly larger than what one would typically associate with administration. Moreover, by portraying administrative quandaries in the most extreme of circumstances (and it is hard to imagine more extreme human circumstances than those depicted in *Changi*), it helps one to explore not only the critical limitations of administration itself but also those of the larger political realm within which it must function.

NOTES

1. The numbers in parentheses in our text and notes reflect the page numbers in Clavell (1962) where the reader may find text pertaining to the analytic discussion. The authors wish to express special appreciation to Lloyd G. Nigro, whose fulsome praise of this work first caused us to look at it carefully.

2. For example, see Catron and Denhardt (1994).

3. For a thoughtful discussion of this subject, see Rohr (1978, pp. 56-57).

4. Although the use of literature is certainly not new to either the general subject of ethics or the broader field of political philosophy, its use in public administration seems to be more sporadic. Perhaps one of the more inclusive surveys in the discipline is found in Waldo (1968). As it pertains to ethics specifically, a recent treatment is found in Marini (1992). Earlier uses that are broadly related to the issue of character are found in Harmon (1989) and Dobel (1988). Decision making also is examined through the lens of literature in Adams and Pugh (1993). See also Holzer, Morris, and Ludwin (1979); Kroll (1965); Rowland (1959); Waldo (1956); and Wolfe (1924).

5. One welcome exception to this condition is the American Society for Public Administration's (ASPA) recent sponsorship of *Public Voices*, a new journal that is intended to serve as a forum for literary and artistic treatments of subjects concerned with administration.

6. One of the reasons why this tale so forthrightly confronts fundamental aspects of human behavior surely has to do with the author's own history. As a young 19-year-old member of the British Royal Artillery, he was captured by the Japanese in 1942 and spent the next 3 years in, among other places, Changi prison. He later contended that the "Japanese tore the heart out of me" there (*Current Biography Yearbook*, 1981, p. 83). The most admirable character in the work, Flight Lieutenant Peter Marlowe, may well be modeled on Clavell himself (*Current Biography Yearbook*, 1981, p. 84).

7. Grey, the camp provost marshal, jeeringly accuses Marlowe of having "escaped with what precious little soul you ever had" (350)!

8. The only exception to this situation concerns the two principal characters, the Englishman Marlowe and the American King. Marlowe turns down—much to his later regret—a village elder's implicit offer of his daughter. King, on the other hand, is the only prisoner who is privileged or "lucky" enough to have the company of a woman—and it is clear that he has associated with her for some time (165). Against this backdrop, we witness two of the more exquisite ironies of the work when members of this all-male enclave lovingly concentrate on, and perfect, the breeding of two lower animals, chickens and rats (57-59 and 96-107).

9. "In all this world, only the King ate like a man, smoked like a man, slept like a man, dreamed like a man and looked like a man" (10).

10. For examples, see 12, 21, and 111.

11. Peter Marlowe at one point laments that "without women . . . men are only a cruel joke" (48).

12. Even Marlowe, initially so horrified that his once manly wingman has "become" a woman, is later moved to declare: "You're a woman, Sean . . . God knows how—or why—but you are" (254).

13. For examples, see 52, 83, and 120.

14. Not surprisingly, it is the Englishman Marlowe who is moved by this display (120). The possession of compassion by certain members of the medical staff as well as by Father Donovan—the chaplain who takes the supremacy of the soul over the body so very seriously—certainly contributes to their respective acts of selflessness. It also separates them out from being mere "males" and makes them more balanced—in short, more "human." (For examples, see 20, 83, and 284-286.)

15. In all of Changi, the only man who did not belong to a unit was "the King," who was "sufficient unto himself" (27).

16. Even here their democratic allies resist, as the five American officers would have preferred to live with their own enlisted men (25).

17. For examples, see 16 and 90.

18. For examples, see 12, 13, 21, 155, 180, and 339.

19. Among these democrats, it is members of the "have-not" enlisted personnel who seize the initiative within Changi and become highly successful businessmen. As we will discuss, these individuals scrupulously maintain certain lower-order virtues—such as honesty (or at least a reputation for it)—but seek what they did not have in the outside world: money and, "most of all, power" (154).

20. Indeed, Marlowe, the privileged English aristocrat, is strongly drawn to the ways of the Americans. Perhaps assisted by numerous conversations in which the King lavishes praise on the American way of life (e.g., 155), Marlowe feels abandoned when the liberated Americans set off for home. Lashing out at his class-conscious nemesis, Grey, Peter extolls the fact that the Americans "think that one man's as good as another. . . . It's a great idea when you think of it" (339).

21. Emphasis added. See also 181.

22. It is one of this tale's marvelous ironies that the militaristic Japanese officers (products of a caste system even more rigid than that of their English enemies) also have a code of honor. In their opinion, the most dishonorable act is to be captured alive by one's opponent. For them, courage (which, after all, is concerned with a willingness to risk or even give up one's life) is a revered component of the code. Hence individuals such as Captain Yoshima regard the fearful compliance of certain British officers with "astonishment and contempt" (90) and denounce others for having been captured (91).

23. See 135.

24. Grey's hatred of the upper class—especially as embodied in the person of the privileged Peter Marlowe—and his desire to see its members brought low is all that kept him alive in Changi (351, 118, and 123). Indeed, Grey's difficulties with class even seem to extend to his sleeping arrangements: He "hated the idea of sleeping above or below someone else" (67).

25. Grey's "word was his bond; he was an honest 'cop' and not a little proud of his reputation." See 64 and 114.

26. After all, the ancient test as to whether or not you *really* sought a virtue for itself (rather than for the praise a reputation for possessing it brought) involved having a reputation for its opposite. In other words, to know if you truly pursued "courage" for itself alone, you must have a reputation among your fellow citizens for "cowardice."

27. King understood that he had had a spectacular "run of luck." However, he considered luck to be "hard work and planning and a little something besides, and not gambling. At least not unless it was a calculated gamble" (14).

28. Compare this description of the world of the loathsome rat with that of Corporal King, who is the only manly looking inmate (10), lucky (12 and 82), and, above all else, cunning (21).

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