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ESSAY ON MAN

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ALEXANDER POPE

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POPE
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Edited by
A. HAMILTON THOMPSON, M.A., F.S.A.

Cambridge:
at the University Press
1913

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-61996-8 - Pope: Essay on Man
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107619968

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First published 1913
First paperback edition 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-61996-8 Paperback

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PREFACE

THIS edition of Pope's *Essay on Man* is intended to supply the student with a readable text of one of the chief masterpieces of eighteenth-century poetry, and with a short commentary and notes, which may serve to elucidate the poem without becoming a formidable addition to it. The editor's obligations to previous editions are recorded at the end of the introduction.

A. H. T.

GRETTON,
NORTHANTS.
June 1913.

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INTRODUCTION

THE four epistles which constitute the *Essay on Man* were published separately at short intervals between February 1733 and January 1734, the first three anonymously, the last under the author's name. They were intended by Pope to form the first book of a versified system of philosophy, and 'to be to the whole work,' as he wrote in 1730, 'what a scale is to a book of maps.' The system, originally planned in four books, was limited in its later form to two books of *Ethic Epistles*. Of these the completed *Essay on Man* was the first: the five *Moral Essays* are portions of the second, the general subject of which was characterised by Pope as the Use of Things. Pope's habit of desultory composition, of writing isolated passages and connecting them as his fancy prompted him, was fatal to the completion of his design. The *Moral Essays*, which appeared under Pope's own name, are separate poems, published (with the exception of the fifth, which was written in 1715 and published in 1720) between 1731 and 1735, the period which covers the composition and publication of the *Essay on Man*. Their pretensions to philosophy are subordinate to their character as satire, and in this respect they offer a striking contrast to Pope's serious pursuit of his argument in the

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Essay. Pope described them, or rather the contemplated whole of which they were to form a part, as 'a system of ethics in the Horatian way.' In the *Essay*, on the other hand, he changed the 'gaieties of Horace' for the 'grave march of Lucretius.' It is probable that he had some doubt of the reception which would be accorded to the more serious portion of his scheme. This accounts for the care with which he preserved the anonymity of the first three epistles of the *Essay on Man*. His contemporary publication of the *Epistle to Lord Cobham* (1733), with its more familiar treatment of human nature and its allusions to living persons, may have had the effect of concealing the fact, obvious though it may seem to our own day, that its acknowledged author was identical with the anonymous philosopher of the *Essay*.

Pope's general scheme was due to the advice of lord Bolingbroke, with whom he had been in close correspondence since 1724. Bolingbroke, deprived of any active participation in state affairs, had turned his versatile intelligence to the study of philosophy. His fragments of philosophical writing were not made public until some years after the *Essay on Man* had appeared. Their close correspondence of thought and of actual phrase with Pope's poem has been responsible for the theory that Bolingbroke plagiarised from Pope. The reverse, however, is the truth. Bolingbroke used Pope's genius to popularise his own ideas upon the government of the world and the relative happiness of man. Pope, in a letter to Spence, records that Bolingbroke supplied him with seven or eight sheets of notes,

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‘both to direct the plan’ of his philosophical poem ‘in general, and to supply the matter for the particular epistles.’ These sheets or their contents are now included in Bolingbroke’s fragmentary writings, and it is impossible not to recognise that passages which, in Bolingbroke’s prose, would have been sterile imitations of Pope, are, in Pope’s verse, skilful adaptations from Bolingbroke’s arguments, and that their want of originality is compensated for by poetic genius. Most of these parallel passages are quoted in the notes to Elwin and Courthope’s definitive edition of Pope, and only a few representative examples need be noted here. Thus Pope writes (*Essay on Man*, i, 247):

‘And, if each system in gradation roll
 Alike essential to th’ amazing Whole,’ etc.

Bolingbroke (fragment 42) writes: ‘We cannot doubt that numberless worlds, and *systems* of worlds, compose this *amazing whole*, the universe.’ Again (*Essay on Man*, ii, 23):

‘Go, soar with Plato to th’ empyreal sphere,
 To the first good, first perfect, and first fair.’

Bolingbroke (fragment 58): ‘They *soar up on Platonic wings* to the *first good* and the first just.’ Pope simply adapts Bolingbroke’s phraseology to the requirements of his metre and of the more elaborate language of poetry. In ep. ii, l. 274

‘Hope travels thro’, nor quits us when we die’

is a briefer rendering of Bolingbroke (fragment 50): ‘Hope, that cordial drop, which sweetens every bitter potion, even the last.’ The whole argument of ep. iii,

T. P.

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enunciated in ll. 109–14, is founded upon Bolingbroke, e.g. (fragment 51): ‘We are designed to be social, not solitary creatures. Mutual wants unite us, and natural benevolence and political order, on which our happiness depends, are founded on them.’ Pope’s idea (ep. iii, ll. 123–4) that love of children is merely an extended form of self-love in the parents is found in the same fragment: ‘As our parents loved themselves in us, so we love ourselves in our children.’ Lastly, in ep. iv, ll. 131 sqq., Pope, in arguing the difficulty of establishing a ‘kingdom of the just,’ merely versifies Bolingbroke (fragment 57): ‘Christian divines complain that good men are often unhappy, and bad men happy. They establish a rule, and are not agreed about the application of it; for who are to be reputed good Christians? Go to Rome, they are papists. Go to Geneva, they are Calvinists. If particular providences are favourable to those of your communion, they will be deemed unjust by every good protestant, and God will be taxed with encouraging idolatry and superstition. If they are favourable to those of any of our communions, they will be deemed unjust by every good papist, and God will be taxed with nursing up heresy and schism.’ These instances, selected out of many, will indicate the extent of Pope’s debt to Bolingbroke. The debt was more than repaid by the permanent literary form with which Pope clothed these casual speculations.

The main subject of the *Essay on Man* is the apparent inequality of happiness upon earth. It attacks the one-sided conclusion that ‘Man’s imperfect, Heav’n

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in fault' (ep. i, l. 69), and its object is to 'vindicate the ways of God to Man' (ibid. l. 16). The whole question was one which appealed to the general intelligence of the day, and Bolingbroke was not the only author whom Pope pressed into his service. There are remarkable parallelisms between passages in the *Essay* and arguments in the *De Origine Mali* (1702) of William King, archbishop of Dublin (d. 1729), the *Characteristics* (1711) of the third earl of Shaftesbury (d. 1713), the philosophical works of Samuel Clarke (d. 1729), and *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (1724) of William Wollaston (d. 1724). Pascal and Locke are also among the writers whose works were evidently consulted; while the *Fable of the Bees* (1714) of Bernard Mandeville (d. 1733) furnished a prominent portion of the argument of the second epistle. It is uncertain whether Pope read these authors for himself. He certainly knew Mandeville's book, which clothed a not very profound species of philosophy in a popular form; but it is likely that Bolingbroke may have directed his attention to marked passages in some of the others. It is quite certain that the theory, stated with qualifications by the late Mark Pattison, that the *Essay on Man* was intended to be 'an elegant version' of Leibniz's *Essais sur Théodicée*, is contradicted by Pope's own confession to Warburton in 1739 that he had 'never read a line' of Leibniz. Pope's philosophical reading was anything but wide, and his misleading allusions to ancient philosophy are proof that his interest in such subjects was superficial. It may fairly be concluded that such reading as may be traced in

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the *Essay on Man* was guided and even defined by the advice of Bolingbroke.

Bolingbroke's attitude, however, was definitely hostile to revealed religion and Christianity. According to the Christian system, man is created in the image of God and derives his whole moral being from the effort to model his life in harmony with the ideal attributes of the Deity, and so effect his restoration to the state from which he has fallen. Against this Bolingbroke set the rationalistic explanation that the moral attributes of God were inconceivable by man and totally inconsistent with human ethics. This conclusion obviously makes any effort towards the divine impossible for man, and throws him back upon himself and the guidance of mere instinct. While vindicating the justice of God by assuming that it has no relation to human ideas of justice, it reduces the divine element in human affairs to a negligible quantity. To some extent this theory, conveniently suppressing what it cannot explain, is reflected by Pope. It may perhaps be inferred from the emphatic statement that 'the proper study of mankind is Man' (ep. ii, l. 2), which is repeated in a slightly different form in the last line of the poem. It is also shadowed forth in the daring speculation that Heaven may be deliberately responsible for certain aspects of moral evil (ep. i, l. 155 sqq.) —i.e. that what seems to man a breach in the moral world is perfectly consistent with divine attributes of which he has no knowledge. In any case, while God is recognised as the Universal Cause upon which the whole chain of being depends, as the soul of each order

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of His creatures and of the whole creation, and as dispensing happiness in proportion to the requirements of each state, man throughout the poem is left to 'follow Nature's road,' and there is no hint of any divine revelation which brings him into direct communication with his Maker. His free-will is thus a portion of a fixed plan of which he can have no conception, and the following of instinct is a blind obedience to an incomprehensible fate.

Although Pope was of one mind with Bolingbroke upon this point, he was not wholly guided by his master. He was still nominally a Romanist; and, although his belief in the Christian revelation had given place to the fashionable deism of his day, he still retained the faith in a future state of happiness which Bolingbroke, following the logical consequence of his virtual denial of anything but the mere existence of a Deity, had abandoned. Pope's scheme of natural religion gave great importance to the fact that man, alone of created beings, enjoys the hope of a future life. Hope is instinctive with him: to hope therefore is to follow nature, the guide of man to God. As it provides the prospect of future bliss, hope becomes man's chief incentive to virtuous conduct. It constantly leads man upward, until its promises offer themselves to him as certainties, and hope becomes refined into faith. This is the one point at which Pope's reasoning seems to touch Christianity. He himself obviously was alarmed at the effect which the poem might have upon his more orthodox friends; and this was one reason which may have prompted his concealment of the authorship of

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the earlier books. He discussed the anonymous author in letters to his Romanist friend Caryll; pointing out expressions in the poem which might be misunderstood, and attempting to shew that the context could be harmonised with the tenets of Christianity. Thus he endeavoured to anticipate the objections which his older friends might advance against the general drift of the argument. It need hardly be said that, if certain passages can be construed into a general conformity with the Christian system of ethics, the poem, on the other hand, contains no mention or hint of the fundamental dogma of Christianity, the union in its Founder of the divine and human natures. Pope indeed wrote and meditated the inclusion of an address to our Lord in the general manner of Lucretius' address to his own master, Epicurus: this design, however, was prevented by the advice of Berkeley, and its execution would, one imagines, have caused more pain than pleasure to those whom it was intended to appease.

Pope's efforts to commend his poem to all parties were attended with the usual fate of such compromises. In 1737 its principles were attacked from the orthodox side by Jean-Pierre de Crousaz, a Swiss philosopher who lived at Lausanne, in an *Examen de l'essai de Mr Pope*, which he followed up in 1738 by a longer *Commentaire sur les principes de moralité de Mr Pope*. These were translated into English, the first in 1738 by Elizabeth Carter, the second by Samuel Johnson in 1742. They shewed that Pope's system involved, as has been already noted, a mere fatalistic conception of the universe, and was utterly at variance with the

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Christian scheme. Pope, however, in his alarm at an impeachment which he had hoped to avoid, was unexpectedly helped by an ally who possessed the natural gift for controversy in a high degree. William Warburton, rector of Brant Broughton, near Newark, had in 1737 obtained celebrity by the publication of the first part of his *Divine Legation of Moses*; and his appointment in 1738 as chaplain to the prince of Wales united his interests to those of the political party to which Bolingbroke and Pope adhered. It was at any rate in 1738 that he appeared as a champion of the *Essay on Man*, the principles of which he had previously denounced to his brother clergy. His commentary on the poem, defending its Christianity, was published in a series of letters, beginning in 1738, and reaching their complete form in 1742. Its arguments were special pleadings on behalf of those passages which are most ambiguous, and rested notably upon Pope's treatment of reason in the second epistle, a passage of which almost any meaning can be made, and upon his identification of hope with faith in the fourth. Warburton himself confessed that he found the fourth epistle as difficult to defend as the arguments of Crousaz and the blunders of Miss Carter's translation were easy to confute and expose. Pope accepted his help with anxious gratitude. The poem was revised with Warburton's advice, and appeared in 1743 in its present form, accompanied by Warburton's essay as a guarantee of its orthodoxy. This change of front alienated Bolingbroke from Pope, and turned the 'guide, philosopher, and friend' into a contemptuous

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enemy; but it is to the skilful counsel of Warburton and his fuller training in logical arrangement that we owe the final form of the *Moral Essays* as a whole. The stanzas called *The Universal Prayer*, which now follow the *Essay on Man* in complete editions of Pope's works, were written in 1738, when Warburton was beginning to defend Pope. In them Pope strove to reconcile his expressed belief in the unalterable scheme of nature with the complete freedom of the human will, and to give human instinct the dignity of conscience.

Enough has been said to shew that Pope's equipment for a philosophical poem was slender, and that, from this point of view, he did little more than versify ideas which, with their logical consequences, he either did not perfectly apprehend or adopted too lightly to have any interest in maintaining them. But this fact, which would seriously damage the work of an inferior poet, is of less importance to the *Essay on Man* than to the character of its author. The poem itself is a remarkable example of the triumph of poetical form and style over matter. Bolingbroke used the language of sound criticism when he distinguished between the functions of the philosopher and those of the poet who embodies philosophy in his verse. The poet 'must contract, he may shadow, he has a right to omit whatever will not be cast in the poetic mould, and when he cannot instruct he may hope to please. In short, it seems to me, that the business of the philosopher is to dilate, to press, to prove, to convince, and that of the poet to hint, to touch his subject with short and spirited strokes, to warm the affections, and to speak to the

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heart.' This distinction Pope thoroughly understood. On the one hand, his borrowed morality has little intrinsic value, his use of terms is loose, and his reasoning is at times too confused to be even specious. On the other, his manner of expressing himself is marked by a choice of words, a turn of phrase, and a general eloquence which go far to hide the defects of his subject-matter. The characteristic merits of his poem are somewhat in keeping with his inverted notion that nature grafts virtues upon our vices. His train of thought, imperfectly followed and not seldom involving itself in contradiction, is the occasion of passages which move upon a consistent level of dignified rhetoric and of epigrams which are justly among the most famous poetical common-places in our language. It is for the sake of these that we still read the poem: without them it would be of interest merely to the historian who uses literature only in so far as it illustrates the thought and culture of a special period.

The *Essay on Man* belongs to a time in Pope's life when his poetical practice had become fixed and was producing its most splendid results. It is the principal achievement of that 'correctness' of which the English couplet is the characteristic embodiment. An age which revolted against the formalism of eighteenth-century verse, and clothed the ever-changing shapes of its liberal fancy in an endless variety of beautiful forms, denied to Pope and his contemporaries the highest gifts of poetry, or indeed the title of poets. Pope's verse, it is true, moves within the limits of a form which, used with less imagination, can bear a close

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relation to prose. The couplet, as he used it, was the outcome of a revulsion of feeling against the extravagant fancies and tortured forms in which the poets of the age preceding the Commonwealth and Restoration had indulged. It became the chosen vehicle of natural and direct expression in an age which was largely concerned with things as they are, with the arrangement and classification upon a matter-of-fact basis of the things of life, after a period of intellectual and political disturbance. Dryden, whose verse was never wholly freed from the influence of the older school of poets, gave the couplet a vigour and fulness, which Pope, nearly seventy years his junior, refined and perfected into a conciseness and elegance which left room for no further improvement. With Pope correctness meant the avoidance of extremes of fancy and the pursuit of the natural instinct which teaches man good taste and the fitness of things. It is obvious that such a course, while it is precluded by its nature from emulating the high career of an exceptional genius such as that of Milton, is equally averse from the bathos of mere prose. An essential feature of Pope's correctness is his careful use of language, his choice of diction and his development of a style, all eminently suited to give his readers that imaginative pleasure which it is the chief business of poetry to supply—to satisfy their sense of beauty and to quicken their intelligence at one and the same time. The sustained eloquence of the *Essay on Man*, accompanied by an almost un-failing choice of the fit phrase, not only produces the delight which is inseparable from the result of finished

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workmanship, but makes a definite claim upon the intellect. This it could never do, were its poetry nothing more than metrical prose, however carefully the words might be strung together. In that case, the weakness of the arguments and the occasional triteness of thought would demand the first place, to the exclusion of all beauties. But Pope was able to kindle his verse into life with that poetic fire, the highest of literary gifts, which enabled him to rise above the inherent faults of his chosen subject, and to dignify them with a multitude of those memorable phrases in which the poet gives permanent shape to the most universal varieties of experience.

The style of the poem often errs upon the side of conciseness. So much matter is crowded into a couplet or a succession of couplets that connecting particles are omitted, words are left to the understanding, and the construction becomes so elliptic that not merely is the sense obscure, but the grammar here and there is faulty. Pope wrote with his habitual desire to make a point and clinch his couplet with a striking epigram; and his aim naturally gave his style a closeness of texture throughout, which demands constant watchfulness and attention to every word. In no other poet is the failure of the reader to note emphasis so fatal to the point of a sentence. The interdependence of the two lines of a couplet, with two contrasted subjects in one balanced by their objects in the other; the continual use of demonstratives to avoid repetition and to knit the threads of a prolonged contrast or comparison more tightly together, the continual inversions of the

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normal order of sentences, are among the points which call for the reader's sustained vigilance.

In one respect the *Essay on Man* is somewhat different from the special type of poetry which is associated with Pope. His habitual method of clothing his theme with contemporary allusions is much less prominent than usual, and, with the exception of the mention of Newton in ep. ii, ll. 31—4, is practically absent until we come to the fourth epistle. Even then, it is used only in a few passages; and the famous lines in which the career of Marlborough served him as an example of the vanity of human greatness contain no overt reference to the real object of his satire. The familiar comparisons and similes in which he indulged when imitating the 'gaities' of Horace were inappropriate to the 'grave march of Lucretius,' and such humble beings as the 'pamper'd goose' of ep. iii, l. 46, fill their place in the poem uneasily. In Pope's manuscript, however, his favourite allusions were introduced more freely than in the printed poem. Thus in ep. iii, after l. 108, the instinctive architecture of insects and birds was contrasted with the skill of well-known architects:

Boast we of arts? a bee can better hit
 The squares than Gibbs, the bearings than Sir Kit.
 To poise his dome a martin has the knack,
 While bold Bernini lets St Peter's crack.

The passage in which Falkland, Turenne, Sidney and Robert Digby are cited as examples of untimely death originally omitted Turenne, and coupled with the others the names of several of Pope's personal friends who

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had died early or suffered the loss of children. Such passages were eventually either expunged or altered to a form in which they were more in keeping with the rest of the poem. In the earlier epistles, this may have helped to preserve the secret of Pope's anonymity; and in the last he allowed himself rather less restraint —e.g. in his gibe at Lord Umbra and Sir Billy. The general character of the style, however, is sedulously adapted to the dignity of the subject, and anything that might be censured justly as false taste or bathos, save in a very few doubtful cases, is avoided. If Pope, face to face with the deepest of subjects, cannot claim to have touched the height of poetic endeavour, if his exhortation

‘Grasp the whole worlds of reason, life and sense,
 In one close system of benevolence’

sounds harsh and formal beside Tennyson's

‘For so the whole round earth is every way
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God’—

if his

‘chain of love
 Combining all below and all above’

is a less exalted conception than the Love

‘That moves the sun in heaven and all the stars’

of Dante, it is perhaps the fault of his age and of the particular type of thought which appealed most closely, if not profoundly enough, to his mind.

In the present edition of the poem the notes are intended to deal chiefly with the meaning of passages and allusions, and the discussion of words and citation

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of parallel passages has been avoided as far as possible. A multitude of parallel passages, chiefly noted by Gilbert Wakefield and Warton, will be found in the notes to Mr Elwin's text of the poem, in the monumental edition of Pope began by him and completed by Mr Courthope. A further wealth of citation was collected by Mark Pattison in the notes to the Clarendon Press edition of the poem. Both these editions have been constantly before the present editor in his work, as well as Sir Adolphus Ward's 'Globe' edition of Pope, and he has recorded his obligations to them in the notes. The text of the poem is in the main founded upon that of the early complete editions of Pope's works, and the punctuation has as far as possible been retained.

ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

EPISTLE I

1—16. Address to Bolingbroke, declaring the purpose of the poem. Its aim in tracing the connected plan of human nature, in exploring its heights and depths and observing man's foibles and manners with mingled amusement and fairness, is to demonstrate God's justice and impartiality to man.

17—34. Man's powers of reasoning with regard to the relations between God and man are limited by his knowledge of his actual station in a world which is only one of many. It may be possible for the philosopher, who has discovered the gradations of the solar system, to give a reason for man's place in the universe. But it is impossible for the soul of man to grasp the mysteries of that whole of which it is an insignificant part. God, not man, upholds the chain of being in which man is a link.

35—76. If man presumes to ask the reason of his insignificance, he may well attempt to solve the harder question, why he is not even more insignificant than he is. Why are oaks superior to weeds? Why is Jupiter greater than his satellites? Assuming that infinite Wisdom is the summit of a series of duly graded systems, each necessarily perfect in itself, it follows that man must occupy a place in this scale, and it only remains to ask whether God has placed him in a wrong position. (35—50.)

What, humanly speaking, is wrong, is right when considered in relation to the whole. Human effort is insufficient to its

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ends: God at once effects His purpose, and at the same moment makes it subservient to some other. Thus, in the general scheme of things, man may be subordinate to some unknown end, of which we, with our partial vision, can have no idea. He may expect to understand this possible use which he serves, as soon as a horse or ox can understand why man makes so various a use of their powers. (51—68.)

Complaints of the imperfection of man and the injustice of Heaven are in this light fruitless. Man is as perfect as he ought to be, under the limitations which his state and place prescribe. If there is ultimate perfection in a future life, our present limitations are of no account, but every man, past or present, is in this life equally blest. (69—76.)

77—112. Heaven conceals the future from each one of its creatures, and this ignorance of all but the present alone makes life tolerable. Thus the lamb, doomed to die, knows nothing of its fate and enjoys itself to the last. In this way Heaven enables each being to fill its present state, and it is Heaven alone which, extending its care to its smallest creatures, sees the true relation of things with impartiality. Our duty with regard to the future is to hope, to wait for the revelation which death will bring, and to adore God. He hides from us the nature of future happiness, but gives us hope for the future as our present mode of blessedness. Blessedness in this life consists, not in present contentment, but in the eternal renewal of hope, the expectation of future blessedness. The soul, restless and imprisoned here, looks for rest and freedom in the life hereafter. Thus the Indian, with his low scale of intelligence, looks forward to a future existence in a world which his imagination paints as a replica of this, peopled by his earthly pleasures made perfect, and without his present inconveniences.

113—130. Man, assuming himself to be wiser than the Indian, may use his personal feelings as a scale in which to counterbalance the dispensations of Providence by private judgment, and make that judgment the final test of earthly imperfection. Using the lower creatures as instruments of his own pleasure, he may yet complain that Heaven is unjust

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in allowing him to be unhappy, and may usurp God's place by putting his own justice in the place of God's and proclaiming that man ought to be the sole care of Heaven. This error arises from pride: pride is the cause which moves creatures of one order in the chain of being to trespass upon the limits of the order above them; and such an effort to transgress order is a sin against the Eternal Cause.

181—172. Pride assumes that the universe and the earth were created solely for the benefit of man, and, summing up its claims in the conclusion that earth is its footstool and the skies its canopy, encroaches upon the divine prerogative. But, if natural laws are thus subservient to man, how are we to account for exceptions, plagues, storms and earthquakes by which man is destroyed wholesale? This may be met by the argument that the laws imposed by God on Nature are of a general kind to which the exceptions are few, that Nature is liable to change, and that nothing is created perfect. Man, however, is equally imperfect: moral laws are as subject to exception as the laws of Nature. If happiness is man's chief end, he must expect moral and natural laws to follow the same course. It is useless to explain away plagues and earthquakes as slight imperfections in a general design, and at the same time to stand aghast before monstrous transgressions of the moral law. Men who are the scourges of humanity may correspond in the moral world to plagues and earthquakes in the natural. Pride can make no distinction: we reason right if we accept facts as they are. It might be better for us if we lived in a world of natural and moral calm, without tempests and without passions; but Nature and man are subject to the same general order, and their life is founded on the strife of the elements and passions.

173—206. Man, in his discontent, wishes that he possessed, not merely the qualities of beings above him, but of those below him as well, where they seem to be an advantage. But, if he assumes that all creatures are made for his use, where would that use be, if he had all their powers? Nature has given each creature suitable organs and powers in proportion to its

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state: each has some quality to compensate for its apparent wants, and each is happy in its own condition. If this is so, is Heaven unkind to man, and to man alone? Is he alone, whom we call a rational being, to be discontented with everything, because he has not everything for himself? His real happiness, if pride could only recognise it, is to be content with his state of man, and to look for and think of nothing beyond. He does not need minute faculties of sight such as belong to the fly: he is not a fly, but a man. Give him keener senses, and what would be the use of the increased sensitiveness to pain which would be their consequence? If his ears were suddenly opened to the music of the spheres, it would be more than he could bear, and he would wish again for the more gentle sounds which were proportioned to his state as man. Providence, in what it gives and what it refuses to man as to other creatures, is all-good and all-wise.

207—232. A development of the theory of the chain of being already advanced. The scale of sense and thought ascends throughout creation from the lowest being to the highest, from the insect to man. In the lower animals, a gradation of each of the senses may be observed which varies from mere instinct to something which is hard to distinguish from human reason. There are points at which the sagacity of animals, a matter of memory in the first instance, assumes the character of reflection, and their natures take an intermediate quality, separated from reason by a thin, but insuperable barrier. This gradation is the necessary circumstance of the subordination of one kind of animal to another, and of all to man, whose reason may be said to comprehend the powers of the inferior beings.

233—258. The chain of being, thus graded, extends above man to the Infinite, below man to nothing. The pride of man, endeavouring to encroach upon higher powers, has as its possible consequence a similar endeavour on the part of lower beings. As creation is complete, the upward movement of one or more orders, unless attended by an uniform movement of all beings, must break a link in the chain and leave

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 978-1-107-61996-8 - Pope: Essay on Man
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a void in creation. One order, moving out of place, however small, is sufficient to destroy the chain. Each is essential in its proper place to the whole: therefore the disturbance of one puts all out of gear. If earth moved out of its orbit, the solar system would be wrecked: if the orders of angels left their proper spheres, there would be anarchy in heaven. It follows that the pride of man, in his comparative insignificance, is a mad and impious attempt to destroy the settled order of created things.

259—280. The absurdity of aspiring to an order beyond one's own is analogous to that of which one part of the human body would be guilty if it trespassed on the functions of another. Each being in its own order is subject to God as the Mind of all. Nature is the body, God the soul of the universe, of which each order is a part. God lives, moves, extends and works through everything, perfect in the smallest as in the greatest object, in the highest as in the lowest being. To Him each link in the chain of being is of equal importance: He fills, bounds, connects, and is equal to all.

281—294. Man therefore must not complain that the order of things is imperfect: in that order his happiness consists. He must realise his place in the world with its necessary limitations, and submit, knowing that, whatever his place may be in the scheme of things, his bliss in that must be proportioned to his capacities, and that he is safe in the guardianship of Heaven. All, unknown to him, is guided by the hand of God: what is discord to him is harmony which he cannot understand: the evil which overtakes individuals here and there is the good of the universe. In spite of the extravagances of pride and reason, we come to one conclusion, Whatever is, is right.

EPISTLE II

1—52. The moral to which our reasoning has led us is that self-knowledge is necessary: the study of mankind is not the designs of God, but man himself, in his doubtful

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position between a past and future state, wise and important, but only relatively, halting between the extremes of stoicism and scepticism. His whole existence is an enigma full of contradictions. He has achieved wonders in science and in abstract thought; but, in relation to superior beings and the Eternal Wisdom, he is merely insignificant. To higher orders of being, such a human prodigy as was Newton, is like an ape to a man, an object of wondering curiosity. Newton could explain the movement of comets, but the movements of his own mind and his own existence were a riddle to him. Human intelligence and reason may accomplish much, but man's lower part with its passions makes all the attempts of his superior part mere beginnings. Modesty is therefore necessary to the pursuit of science: man must disrobe his knowledge of all that is merely an excuse to exalt his own powers; and, when this is done, he will see their limitations and the actual insignificance of human capacity.

53—92. There are two reigning principles in human nature—self-love, the motive, and reason, the restraining power. Both are necessary to each other: they are not evil and good principles at perpetual war. Good is the result of their proper, evil of their improper working. Self-love is the spring of action, but action uncontrolled by reason would be purposeless and mischievous. Self-love needs most strength for its activity: reason is composed and quiet. It sees its objects in the future and at a distance, while self-love is bent upon its immediate object in the present. The strength of self-love therefore needs the watchfulness of reason, to check the temptations which are more plentiful than arguments against them. Constant attention to reason, practised as a habit, teaches experience, and produces the necessary check upon self-love. Minute philosophers may argue on behalf of one principle or the other, and divorce them from their union. Such argument is mere hair-splitting and confusion of words. The two principles have a common end, the avoidance of pain and the desire of pleasure; but, while self-love, left to itself, consumes its pleasures without reflection, reason teaches their

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 978-1-107-61996-8 - Pope: *Essay on Man*
 Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson
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use in moderation. So pleasure, pursued without reason, may become our greatest evil, while, with reason, it is our greatest good.

93—294. The passions are various forms which self-love assumes in the pursuit of real or apparent happiness. But, as, without the aid of reason, we cannot distinguish what is really good for us, the passions are under the control of reason, and are directed by her to virtuous ends which transform their nature. Freedom from passion, the stoical ideal, is not desirable: the passions supply that impulse to the soul, which, if partly destructive, is necessary to its life and preservation. Reason directs our course in the storm which the passions raise—a storm in which the workings of God are as manifest as in passionless calm. The passions must therefore be moderated and used by reason, in obedience to nature and God, not suppressed. Their just moderation in such conditions, warring but restrained, give balance to the mind and strength and colour to life. (93—122.)

Our whole life, bodily and mental, is occupied with present or future pleasures. But these assume different forms to different men; and consequently men's passions vary in strength. Each man has one master passion, to which the rest are subordinate, born with him as an integral part of his nature, and growing in strength with his growth. Everything in him conspires to feed this passion, which is strengthened by the enlargement of his mental faculties and the power of imagination: and even reason joins the other faculties in ministering to it. (122—148.)

Reason is thus weak in the face of the master passion. Her rules can only remind us of its folly: they do not serve as arms to withstand it. She makes excuses for it and encourages it at the expense of the weaker passions. Her utmost strength in this case is that of a guardian: her course is to follow nature and make a compromise with the passion. Nature is more mighty than reason: she gives the ruling direction to the soul with its inevitable course, and reason follows her along the prescribed path. (149—174.)

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But this irresistible power is not wholly evil, for what is best in human nature is grafted upon it. Virtue, without human frailty to give it substance, would be too refined for human use. Thus nature, working through the passions, produces the highest virtues, which spring from qualities that are at first sight opposed to them. Bravery and enthusiasm may be the fruit of anger, love of lust, emulation of envy: pride and shame are the roots of almost all the best qualities. With our vices, then, nature gives us closely allied virtues; and the power of distinguishing between the two, and giving a good direction to evil, belongs to reason, 'the God within the mind.' (175—204.)

Thus man is compounded of vices and virtues, intermingled and blent with each other, like lights and shadows in a picture. The difficulty of distinction gives occasion to a theory that there is no such thing as virtue or vice. But they are positive qualities, as there are a positive black and white; the danger lies in mistaking the two. (205—216.)

Vice, hideous in itself, becomes only too easily tolerable and even acceptable. Its degrees are hard to define: no vicious man but thinks that others are worse than himself, so thoroughly is he acclimatised to his own degree. As a matter of fact, every man has a certain degree of vice and virtue, and even the best men can condescend to their worse part. Self-love directs our changing course, at times to partial virtue, at times to partial vice. (217—236.)

Heaven, on the other hand, has one constant end in view, which counteracts these partial workings of the human soul. Out of human frailties Heaven produces blessings, and human imperfections are the foundation of human joy, peace and glory. It is weakness and the need of dependence that are the fundamental elements of social life, in which one class of man relies upon another for support. Thus our social pleasures come into being, and the defect which is their cause, aided by reason, teaches us to welcome death when the time comes. (237—260.)

Whatever be our ruling passion, each of us is content with