AN ESSAY ON MAN

AN ESSAY ON MAN

ALEXANDER POPE

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

TOM JONES

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

Princeton & Oxford

Published by Princeton University Press
41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540

In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press
6 Oxford Street, Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1TR

press.princeton.edu

Jacket art: Valentine Green, *An Abridgment of Mr. Pope's Essay on Man*, engraving, 1769, Wellcome Library, London

Paper ISBN 978-0-691-18105-9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Pope, Alexander, 1688–1744, author. | Jones, Tom, 1975– editor.
Title: An essay on man / Alexander Pope ;
edited with an introduction by Tom Jones.
Description: Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 2016.
| Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2015044289 | ISBN 9780691159812
(hardback : acid-free paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Philosophy, English—18th century—Poetry.
| Human beings—Poetry. | BISAC: POETRY / English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh. |
LITERARY CRITICISM / Poetry. | PHILOSOPHY / General.
Classification: LCC PR3627.A2 J66 2016 | DDC 821/.5—dc23 LC record
available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015044289

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

This book has been composed in Adobe Caslon Pro and Big Caslon FB

Printed on acid-free paper. ∞

Printed in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I WOULD LIKE TO express my gratitude to the following people and institutions: the British Library for permission to reproduce the frontispiece from the 1745 edition of the poem, and four pages from a copy of the 1736 edition of the poem annotated by Pope, © The British Library Board, C.184.d.3 frontispiece; C.122.e.31, pp. 21–24; the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, for permission to cite Jonathan Richardson Jr.'s transcript of a manuscript of the poem (Cased + Pope. Alexander Pope. An Essay on Man. Epistles I, II, III, and 10 lines of Epistle IV. MS Copy in the hand of Jonathan Richardson, the younger, unsigned and undated); the Morgan Library & Museum for permission to cite their manuscript of the poem, MA,348; the Houghton Library, Harvard University, for permission to cite their manuscript of the poem, fms Eng 233.1; Ben Tate at Princeton University Press for his proposal that I undertake this project, and his support throughout; Simon Jarvis and Jim McLaverty for scrutinizing my early plans; Anya Clayworth for discussions of editorial policy; James Harris, Christian Maurer, and Mikko Tolonen for encouragement in Edinburgh, 2013/14; Joanna Fowler, Elaine Hobby, and Alan Ingram, the organizers of the 2013 Bill Overton memorial conference, and other colleagues encountered there, especially John Baker, Hermann Real, and Nigel Wood, for the opportunity to share ideas; Hannah Britton and Anna West, the organizers of a symposium on endings in the School of English at St Andrews, and the other participants, for making me ask where this poem ends; staff at the British Library, the Houghton Library, Harvard, the Morgan Library, New York, the National Library of Scotland, and St Andrews University Library for all their assistance; Natalie Adamson, Peter Brennan, Phil Connell, Russell Goulbourne, Neil Pattison, and Courtney Weiss Smith for reading and commenting on the introduction and text; the anonymous readers for the Press,

whose responses have greatly improved my contribution to this volume; Karin Koehler for translating the text by Lessing and Mendelssohn cited in the introduction; all my colleagues in the School of English at St Andrews for maintaining a truly collective feel to our work; Gavin Alexander and Corinna Russell for hospitality and improving conversation on visits to Cambridge; Natalie Adamson for continuing to share ideas and life with me.

A NOTE ON THE FRONTISPIECE

William Warburton in his preface to the 1745 edition of the *Essay*, pp. v–vi, interprets the frontispiece as follows: "The Reader will excuse my adding a word concerning the Frontispiece; which, as it was designed and drawn by Mr. *Pope* himself, would be a kind of curiosity had not the excellence of the thought otherwise recommended it. We see it represents the Vanity of human Glory, in the false pursuits after Happiness: Where the Ridicule, in the Curtain-cobweb, the Death's-head crown'd with laurel, and the several Inscriptions on the fastidious ruins of Rome, have all the force and beauty of one of his best wrote Satires: Nor is there less expression in the bearded-Philosopher sitting by a fountain running to waste, and blowing up bubbles with a straw, from a small portion of water taken out of it, in a dirty dish; admirably representing the vain business of School-Philosophy, that, with a little artificial logic, sits inventing airy arguments in support of false science, while the human Understanding at large is suffered to lie waste and uncultivated."

ABBREVIATIONS AND FREQUENTLY CITED WORKS

Addison	Joseph Addison, *Cato*, in *John Gay's* The Beggar's Opera *and Other Eighteenth-Century Plays*, ed. by John Hampden (London: Dent, 1928; repr. 1964)
Aurelius	Marcus Aurelius, *The Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius*, trans. by Meric Casaubon (London: Dent, 1906)
Bacon, *Advancement*	Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. by Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000)
Bacon, *Essayes*	Francis Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. by Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985; reissued 2000)
Boethius	Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. by P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999)
Chudleigh	Mary, Lady Chudleigh, *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh*, ed. by Margaret J. M. Ezell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)
Cicero, *Dream*	Cicero, *Laelius, On Friendship (Laelius de amicitia) & The Dream of Scipio (Somnium Scipionis)*, ed. and trans. by J.G.F. Powell (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1990)
Cicero, *On Duties*	Cicero, *On Duties*, trans. by Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913)

Cicero, *On Friendship*	Cicero, *Laelius, On Friendship (Laelius de amicitia) & The Dream of Scipio (Somnium Scipionis)*, ed. and trans. by J.G.F. Powell (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1990)
Corr.	*The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. by George Sherburn, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956)
Dryden	*The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker and H. T. Swedenberg Jr., 20 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956–2000)
Erasmus	Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, ed. and trans. by Clarence H. Miller, afterword by William H. Gass, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003)
FL [. . .], *CiH* [. . .]	"A Finding List of Books Surviving from Pope's Library with a Few That May Not Have Survived," Appendix A in Maynard Mack, *Collected in Himself: Essays Critical, Biographical, and Bibliographical on Pope and Some of His Contemporaries* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1982), pp. 394–460.
Foxon	David Foxon, *Pope and the Early Eighteenth-Century Book Trade (The Lyell Lectures, Oxford 1975–1976)*, rev. and ed. by James McLaverty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991)
HLM	Houghton Library Manuscript
Horace	Horace, *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, ed. by H. R. Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926; rev. 1929), and Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, trans. by C. E. Bennett (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914; rev. 1960)
Hutcheson, *Essay*	Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. by

Thomson	James Thomson, *The Seasons and The Castle of Indolence*, ed. by James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972)
Voltaire, *Letters*	Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters*, trans. by Ernest Dilworth (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961)
Warburton	William Warburton, *A Critical and Philosophical Commentary on Mr. Pope's* Essay on Man (London, 1742)
Wollaston	William Wollaston, *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (London, 1724)
Wycherley	*The Posthumous Works of William Wycherley Esq; In Prose and Verse* (London, 1728)

INTRODUCTION

In four verse epistles of modest length published anonymously between February 1733 and January 1734, Alexander Pope revealed yet another aspect of his vast poetic ambition. Having already published a substantial collected poems in 1717, translated Homer, edited Shakespeare, and trumpeted the corruption of contemporary literary and public culture in his *Dunciad*, Pope writes a philosophical poem. He begins his poem with (nearly) the same avowed purpose as Milton in *Paradise Lost*, already in Pope's time the great British religious and national epic: to vindicate (Milton says justify) the ways of God to man. But Pope does not use biblical history—the elevation of the son, the fall of angels, the creation of the world, the fall of the first people—to shape his vindication. Instead he produces a description of man in the abstract in four epistles that he says are a map to the more practically oriented and historically specific poems he was planning, poems on subjects such as the use of riches and taste. Forgoing narrative is one challenge Pope sets himself; another is the ambition of the *Essay on Man* to synthesize the great diversity of thinking in the allied disciplines with something to say about where humans find themselves in the universe (anthropology, cosmology, metaphysics, moral psychology, physics, theology—just to begin a list). Pope formulates concise statements on central ethical topics, moderating between antagonistic schools of thought. Further, he writes a poem that passes for orthodoxy, even piety, in the terms of eighteenth-century British state religion, while not specifying the Christian revelation in the poem. Indeed, Pope evokes and transforms sources seen as a direct threat to the religious establishment, such as Lucretius's materialistic poem *De rerum natura*. Pope does all this in rhyming couplets, sacrificing none of the virtuosity he had already demonstrated in his previous original poems and translations.

An Essay on Man was warmly received—in its anonymous form even by many who were fresh from ugly exchanges with Pope in the

years following his *Dunciad* (1728–29). The *Essay* was imitated and echoed immediately by other poets, in essays on the universe, on the soul of man, on reason, and many other topics. The poem's reputation was assailed on the publication, and translation into English, of two critical treatises attacking its supposed fatalism by J.-P. de Crousaz in the late 1730s. But this episode provoked a substantial defense of the poem by William Warburton, who later worked with Pope to produce a last authorized text, with extensive notes and commentary, in 1743. In the final years of Pope's life, and after his death in 1744, translations of the poem in prose and verse, and sometimes its English original, were being read by philosophical luminaries around Europe. Voltaire called it the most beautiful didactic poem ever composed, Rousseau found in it a source of consolation, and Kant quoted it in his *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*. The poem was standard reading for the central philosophers of the Enlightenment, with figures such as Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, David Hume, and Adam Smith all turning to the poem to help them work through their own presentations of that contrary thing, the Enlightenment human subject: rational, yet sensual and passionate; motivated by an instinct for self-preservation, and yet ineradicably social. The poem's success is very much a legacy of the scope it gives its readers to see the human in quite radically different ways, as the product of order and design, or the product of chance and evolution.

The poem met with great, though never unmixed, success. It circulated widely among the framers of early state constitutions in America and has, in that context, been called perhaps "the most internalized work of social and political thought of the eighteenth century." The debates that founded the individual states and their confederation often responded to Pope's assertion that only fools would contest for forms of government.[1] Politicians continue to find rhetorical uses for the poem. A search of Hansard, the record of British parliamentary speeches, finds the poem recently cited in both houses, by likely candidates (Michael Foot, the Labour leader from 1980 to

1 Eric Slauter, *The State as a Work of Art: The Cultural Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 27–36 and quotation from p. 29.

1983 and author of several books, including one on Swift) and less likely (Eric Pickles, communities minister in the coalition government 2010–15), and in the context of debates on establishing a social science research council (because the proper study of mankind is man), energy policy, capital gains tax, life sentences for murder, Wales, and Westminster Council. The poem has been used as a tool for thinking by philosophers and politicians from the middle of the eighteenth century to the present. It has been a practical resource for understanding where humans are placed in the world, what kind of being they are, and what they should do. It has had a palpable role in shaping national and international understandings of human nature, knowledge, and obligations.

Consequently it is surprising that the poem has not figured more prominently in the productive confrontation of literary and cultural studies with social theory and postwar European philosophy that has left such a strong mark on the university study of literature in the Anglophone world in the last few decades. It is particularly surprising given the close attention Pope's poem pays to some of the main strands of thought that have emerged or are emerging in this ongoing confrontation. To take just one example, Pope is intrigued by the human-animal distinction, with all ranks in his great chain of being displaying different qualities, yet all subserving one another. His capacity for seeing things from the animal point of view, for imagining the different worlds animals inhabit, has been noted by recent readers such as Laura Brown and Judith Shklar. Pope's poem is an extended meditation on the limits of human cognition, inasmuch as they shape our interrelation with others—other people primarily, but also other organisms or beings of all kinds. It is an attempt to show what poetry, distinct from all other literary modes, can do to make such thinking real, live, and palpable for its audience; how it can make us feel, across its lines, and across its more elaborate argumentative units, the antagonistic forces that always beset our efforts to understand the human. It is unlikely that these will ever cease to be important commitments for a philosophical literature or for poetry. Attuning ourselves to Pope's nuance and scope allows us to see the perennial relevance of his poem. I hope in this introduction to make a contribution to that attunement.

following on from the passage just quoted, is impressively severe. The doubts that made Claudian teeter between providentialism and materialism are resolved by the killing of Rufinus: that is what persuades him there must be a God after all.

This poem shares the poetico-philosophical realization of the *Essay on Man*: people who look hard at the world often find their view of the object shifting between aspects, an aspect of order, harmony, and coherence, and an aspect of random variation, chance, and inscrutable causes. The aspects are not perfectly distinct.[4] Claudian does not say that he ceases to see regularity in the ordering of the physical universe; but he thinks that regularity might have emerged by chance rather than direction. He does not doubt observable order, but notes that when he considers the sphere of human actions, and the high incidence of the problem of calamitous virtue (and its sister, the problem of prosperous vice), he takes the moral world as evidence against the benignity, even the existence, of the gods. The resolution of Claudian's doubts is by a means (revenge killing) that might not appeal to Pope. The standard Christian approach to the problem of calamitous virtue begins with the supposition of a future state of rewards and punishments, rather than with pain meted out to one's enemies in this world. And a standard Stoic approach to the problem notes that apparent ills cannot really be ills to the truly wise man.[5] But for certain kinds of thinker, among whom I place Pope, neither an assertion that the next world will correct the injustices of this one, nor an insistence that people in this world can free themselves from suffering by detaching themselves from a dependence on external goods, will seem an adequate explanation for the fact that there is benevolent order *and* suffering. Plotinus, a

4 Fred Parker, *Scepticism and Literature: An Essay on Pope, Hume, Sterne, and Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 88, 117, describes the *Essay* as "Like a photographic double exposure [. . .] scepticism leads to, and terminates in, the intuition of a benign disposing power distinct from and beyond the scope of reason, yet with which the reasoning consciousness can associate itself."

5 Seneca, I,61: "Injury has as its aim to visit evil upon a person. But wisdom leaves no room for evil, for the only evil it knows is baseness, which cannot enter where virtue and uprightness already abide. Consequently, if there can be no injury without evil, no evil without baseness, and if, moreover, baseness cannot reach a man already possessed by uprightness, then injury does not reach the wise man."

Christian Platonist writing just over a hundred years before Claudian, presents the problem of calamitous virtue as a real problem, requiring real intellectual work to explain:

> As for the disregard of desert—the good afflicted, the unworthy thriving—it is a sound explanation no doubt that to the good nothing is evil and to the evil nothing can be good: still the question remains, why should what essentially offends our nature fall to the good while the wicked enjoy all it demands? How can such an allotment be approved? [. . .] Certainly a maker must consider his work as a whole, but none the less he should see to the due ordering of all the parts, especially when these parts have Soul, that is, are Living and Reasoning Beings: the Providence must reach to all the details; its functioning must consist in neglecting no point.[6]

Taking the shift of aspects between providential and naturalistic views of the world, sharpened by a consideration of apparent moral injustice, as a point of departure for philosophical satire unites Pope and Claudian closely.[7] That Pope offers in the *Essay* an explanation of the interrelation of these two aspects through a sustained examination of the workings of providence in this world is what allies him with Plotinus.

A VERSE ESSAY

The *Essay* is more inquisitive than expository: there is a real question to be addressed, and the philosophizing voice that produces this poem will make an inquiry into that question, rather than set out a solution already formulated. The *Essay* is not a work of systematic philosophy, of which the consecutively encountered branches all stem from a stable set of core doctrines. The poem is on the contrary a

6 Plotinus, III.2, 6, pp. 141–42.

7 A. D. Nuttall, *Pope's* Essay on Man (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), pp. 54, 80, recognizes that there is a philosophical tension in the poem between limited human reason and the complete reason of a rational universe, and that there is a tension in humans themselves, occupying a middle position in the great chain of being that Nuttall identifies with consciousness.

testimony to the experience of thinking and seeing in one way and then another, a testimony to the unfolding of experience and ideas, of consecutive states of belief and understanding. Pope adopts an inquisitive *attitude*, a style of thinking and writing that brings the feel of certain ideas in the personal experience of the author into play among more theoretical considerations. In this way Pope's *Essay* is true to the history of the essay as a genre. Essays in the early eighteenth century are inquisitive, with the French model of Michel de Montaigne very much in evidence, and behind Montaigne his Latin and Greek favorites Seneca and Plutarch. These are all writers who accumulate evidence on every side of a question and engage in consecutive consideration of the attractions of now one, now another approach. For these authors, writing an essay does not oblige one to demonstrate a set of core beliefs entirely fixed before the process of writing begins; quite the opposite may be the case. There is equally a tradition of British philosophical essayism and inquiry incorporating canonical philosophers such as Bacon, Locke, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume, who combine the inquisitive attitude I am describing with various degrees of systematization. (I will point to connections between Pope's poem and works by these and other authors below.)[8] The purpose of attitudinal writing of the sort found in these philosophical essays is not only or merely to expose truths, but to produce dispositions in a readership.[9] The writing will of course have to deal in truth, but the truths it deals in will always be relational: they will be the truths of how certain kinds of creature (people) can reconcile their capacity to understand, at least in part, what is going on around them with their capacity to make choices to behave in one way or another. Joseph Spence, a friend of Pope's who recorded his conversation, and other literary conversation of the time, says that in 1730, when the poem is being composed, "Mr Pope's present design [is] wholly upon

8 John J. Richetti, *Philosophical Writing: Locke, Berkeley, Hume* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 49–50, suggests parallels between the conversational openings and the associated social assumptions of Locke's and Pope's *Essay*s.

9 Harry M. Solomon, *The Rape of the Text: Reading and Misreading Pope's* Essay on Man (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), notes of the poem that "we should expect the constative function of language to be ancillary to the directive function."

human actions, and to reform the mind."[10] Pope's inquiry has reforming ambitions, describing actions in order to change minds.

There is an important temporal quality to inquisitive or essayistic writing of the kind Pope attempts in the *Essay*. It was a commonplace of the poetry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that the world changes, that therefore what was the case might not be so any longer, and so some (empirical) truths are temporally successive. Two contradictory statements can both be true of the world, in two or more of its successive states. As John Donne put it, "though some things are not together true, / As, that another is worthiest, and that you: / Yet, to say so, doth not condemne a man, / If when he spoke them, they were both true than."[11] Pope's poem, though, is less concerned with the mutability of the world than with the mutability of human judgments. Different views of the world succeed one another in our imagination, and in our rational judgment (if these things are really distinct).[12] One may be inclined to say, on encountering such inconsistent views in Pope's poem, that he has not thought it through and shows himself more a poet than a philosopher. Or one might say that a convincing, gripping, plausible essay or inquiry has to be true to the temporality of thought, has to recognize that thought happens in particular lives. Those lives are never thought entirely through until they end, and there is no guarantee that their course will represent a continuous progress toward ever greater logical certainty about the nature of the physical and moral world. Readers might very well feel strongly the tension between Pope's derision for the attempt to see beyond the human position in the scale of created life, in the first epistle of the poem, and his depiction (in the fourth epistle) of a blissful socially integrated universe in which recognized interdependence with others outside ourselves is parsed as love. How can one believe in Epistle I that it is "but a part we see, and not a whole" (I.60), and also in Epistle IV that humans learn "from this union of the rising Whole, / The first,

10 Spence, I,130, no. 295.

11 *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. by C. A. Patrides (London: Dent, 1985), p. 306, "To the Countess of Salisbury. August. 1614.," lines 47–50.

12 Rosalie Colie, "John Locke and the Publication of the Private," *Philological Quarterly* 45 (1966): 22–45 (pp. 32–33), argues that Locke took human understanding to be a process conducted in the course of a life, and so necessarily changing.

last purpose of the human soul" (IV.337–38)? The tension is not to be resolved—it is to be recognized as one of the truths of the vision of the fourth epistle that it was arrived at by means of the first, and that the first lives on as an antagonist even as the more systematic vision is expounded. Such tensions are evident at the local as well as the general level. "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," so that blessings are always in the future. "The soul, uneasy and confin'd from home, / Rests and expatiates in a life to come" (I.95–98). This may be a present tense with a future sense: the soul will rest in the next life. Or it may be a true present tense, suggesting that the soul now rests in the idea of a better future state. The ambiguity of tense suggests that people already enjoy those blessings that are possible only in the next life. The poem captures complex, shifting attitudes in its local and general organization. If Pope seems to lurch between thinking all human views of the world are provisional to thinking that humans are full and conscious agents in the providential scheme, then the antagonism between the two views should be tempered by a sense of the strong semantic connection between the provisional (the forecast) and the providential (the foreseen). The particular literary mode of Pope's poem is well suited to expressing the shift of aspects characteristic of his philosophical attitude.

The poeticalness of Pope's text is intrinsic to its essayism. Philosophical essays and inquiries in prose have their prosody. That is true even of the mostly abstract-expository prose of John Locke, for example, whose critique of rhetoric as "perfect cheat," a subversion of the central or paradigmatic use of language in neutral scientific description, was so influential in the eighteenth century.[13] Such essays exploit shifts of attitude, turn from the anecdotal to the abstract, incorporate dialogue or reported speech, launch on encomia or rhapsodies, and so on. They may of course use some of the resources of language that are commonly called poetic: pun, irony, metaphor, the more or less organized variation of sounds and rhythms within recurring patterns of syntax or sentence structure. These features may become argumentative. An essay in verse will not be categorically distinct from prose essays on any of these counts, though it may trust more to such resources. William Warburton indeed suggests that

13 Locke, III.x.34, p. 508.

of what is, made possible by that alternative stressing of the line, has appealed to more recent readers. For John Sitter "what [Pope] ultimately means by 'Whatever IS, is RIGHT' might be 'Whatever is, IS.'"[19] One must work through seeing the world as provisional to seeing it as providential, and that work is partly done by the archetypally poetic features of Pope's text such as its stress. Such turning of the poetic to philosophical ends is in part a response to the pressure placed on rhetoric as a cheat and enemy of philosophy in Britain from the later seventeenth century. Pope is showing that poetry is not always philosophy's antagonist.

Pope chose to compose the *Essay* in verse for two reasons, the first of which he says is obvious: "principles, maxims, or precepts so written, both strike the reader more strongly at first, and are more easily retained by him afterwards: The other may seem odd, but is true, I found I could express them more *shortly* this way than in prose itself; and nothing is more certain, than that much of the *force* as well as *grace* of arguments or instructions, depends on their *conciseness*." Any merit of the *Essay* lies in "steering betwixt the extremes of doctrines seemingly opposite, in passing over terms utterly unintelligible, and in forming a *temperate* yet not *inconsistent*, and a *short* yet not *imperfect* system of Ethics" ("The Design").[20] The concision, the memorability, and the argumentative synthesis of the poem hang together in

physiker!," in *Lessings Werke*, ed. by Georg Witkowski, 7 vols. (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1911), III,295–338 (pp. 315–16). I thank Dr. Karin Koehler for providing me with a translation of this text.

19 John Sitter, "Eighteenth-Century Ecological Poetry and Ecotheology," *Religion & Literature* 40:1 (Spring 2008): 11–37 (p. 29).

20 Solomon, *The Rape of the Text*, p. 119, suggests Cicero as the model for academic moderation in which steering between extreme positions is not regarded as inconsistency. The earlier part (pp. 1–56) of Solomon's book is given over to a proliferation of nontraditional contexts (chiefly textual analogues) against which to read the *Essay*, in order to demonstrate its resistance to being situated. David B. Morris, *Alexander Pope: The Genius of Sense* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 163, thinks that "The aphoristic style convinces us of a completeness it cannot ultimately deliver." I am suggesting that aphoristic concision need not be opposed to openness to different positions, and steering betwixt extremes. Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Alexander Pope*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London, 1762–82), II,120, suggests something similar: "If any beauty in this Essay be uncommonly transcendent and peculiar, it is, BREVITY OF DICTION; which, in a few instances, and those pardonable, have occasioned obscurity."

its couplets. Its tendency to shift the mood of its address, from exposition (argument) to encouragement to adopt dispositions (instruction) is captured in the assertion of its concision and comprehensibility. Indeed, the poem in its concision tends to elide the distinction between the inclusive and exclusive senses of "or": sometimes statements that are either arguments or instructions are both arguments and instructions—the terms are interchangeable. (There are similar ambiguities on "or" at, e.g., II.35–36 and IV.264. See notes in both places.) The poem habitually intersperses imperative verbs instructing readers to think or act in some particular way in passages of otherwise relatively dispassionate and descriptive moral psychology or epistemology. The common view that the passions are stronger motivations than cold reason, expressed over ten lines (II.67–76), becomes a command:

> The action of the stronger to suspend
> Reason still use, to Reason still attend:
> Attention, habit and experience gains,
> Each strengthens Reason, and Self-love restrains.
>
> (II.77–80)

The dominance of the indicative mood has been such that the reader is inclined to assimilate the single imperative into the descriptive scheme, making it seem only natural that we should use our reason to counteract our passions. Pope blends argument and instruction in the poem, and conceives of his versification as one way of achieving that blend. As I have been trying to suggest, the inquisitive or essayistic attitude is one to which shifts of aspect in views of the world (physical or moral) are native. The memorably concise formulations of Pope's couplets—in their variable stress, their argumentative development, their imagistic echoes, and their shifts of tense and mood—capture a shifting of aspects between the provisional and the providential, and, crucially, their interrelation.

EDUCATION

As a Catholic, Pope was excluded from major public schools and the universities. He was educated by priests acting as tutors, then at two

clandestine Catholic schools, at the end of which process, by around his thirteenth year, he would have been drilled in Latin and Greek, and introduced to many of the major classical poets and orators, in fragments in their original language, and in translation. From twelve to twenty Pope immersed himself in poetry, reading the major Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and English authors, sometimes translating or imitating striking passages. At the same time, he read hungrily in his father's collection of works of religious controversy.[21] As a young man Pope was a precocious friend, and exchanged books, views on poetics, and critiques of works in progress with older men such as William Wycherley, William Walsh, Henry Cromwell, and William Trumbull. (Indeed Pope's surviving correspondence to 1711–12 consists of little else.) His earlier poems demonstrate an intimate knowledge of ancient and modern poets such as Virgil and Ovid, Boileau and Tassoni. Working on the translation of Homer, published in installments from 1715, would have increased Pope's familiarity with the classical authors (Hesiod, Herodotus, Plato, Pliny, Plutarch), commentators (Eustathius), and modern literary scholars (such as Anne Dacier) so frequently cited in notes to the translation.

Modern philosophical prose (including theology and politics) was clearly an area in which Pope read, even if he did not leave any other particularly concentrated record of that reading than the *Essay on Man*. Authors such as Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Temple, and Tillotson feature in lists he gives of admirable English prose, as do various more literary authors from Ben Jonson to Joseph Addison. One might say he admired his friends Bolingbroke and Warburton excessively for their philosophical acumen, given their current (low) estimation as philosophers. Yet they were figures Pope thought of as metaphysicians, and Bolingbroke may have guided Pope's reading as he was composing the *Essay on Man*. Pope writes on at least one occasion from Bolingbroke's library (*Corr.*, III,163). Given that Bolingbroke had returned from a decade in exile in France, his library is likely to have been well stocked with French authors, such as Pascal,

21 Pat Rogers, *A Political Biography of Alexander Pope* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), pp. 26–27; Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), pp. 47–52, 77–78, 80–81.

Fénelon, Nicole, Malebranche—writers with whom Pope, as a fellow Catholic, may have had a more immediate relation than some of his contemporaries had.

Identifying consistent intellectual dispositions in anyone is difficult, let alone a poet to whom I have just been attributing an acute sense of the variability of human judgments. But one can see in Pope an insistence on the unity of all true religion, and a deference to the inherited form of religion; a preference for the customary over the (arrogantly) rational or innovative in politics, as in religion; a moderate skepticism with clear allegiances to urbane satirical attitudes; and, crucially, an identification of the self-interested and the sociable in human interaction. Pope is a conservative skeptic for whom custom offers one of the only available witnesses as to what God has in mind for the species in the providential scheme. The following sections will identify certain persistent themes in the *Essay* that express Pope's dispositions: love (both desire for something lacked and bliss in its attainment) as a force of the universe; order as the result of love, emergent if seen from a human perspective, imposed if imagined from the divine; rising as the most fit term for the order that emerges necessarily from love; falling (out) as that concatenation of events that surpasses human knowledge and yet is improperly attributed to the divinity—an emergent disorder following from the corruption of the will. All together, these four themes suggest that social love is the mechanism by which humans rise from their fallenness to something as closely resembling order as possible.

LOVE

An Essay on Man is a poem of love: love expressed in the act of creating a world; love for ourselves, in the form of our appetites; love for others, from sexual partners to children to those with whom we constitute a political body. The static, hierarchical image of the chain of being is an important image in the poem, and Epistle I makes clear the severity of the transgression of aspiring to a higher position in the chain (I.233–46). Yet III.7–8 present the chain as a "chain of Love / Combining all below and all above." The chain understood as love unites all ranks of being in the creation, rather than dividing

them.[22] III.9–14 applies the same principle of love to atomic attraction and the animation of matter (see notes for echoes of Boethius and Chaucer/Dryden). Love of god and love of man are said to be the origin of all religious and political life (III.239–40). How should one understand this love that is at once cosmogenetic, a molecular force, and the basis of political society? Pope is explicit in aligning self-love and social love. These are not antagonistic forces in the poem but forces on a continuum. Self-love is identified most strongly with the passions (II.93), desires for real or seeming goods. Other people are one of the real or seeming goods people desire: "Each loves itself, but not itself alone, / Each sex desires alike, 'till two are one" (III.121–22). Each sex desiring alike nicely blurs the distinction in question: do they desire something that is like themselves, or do they both alike desire something outside of themselves? Is the likeness of their desire a likeness of the object of the desire to themselves, or a likeness between the objects of desire (they are alike in desiring something other than the self)? Love of children is self-love at a second remove (III.124); reflections on past obligations and calculations of one's own future weakness tend to produce care for parents (III.143–46).

Desire is, then, at the center of the religious and social order of the poem, and it was even more clearly so in earlier drafts, given the evidence of the two surviving manuscripts (the earlier Morgan Library Manuscript, the later Houghton Library Manuscript, cited here as MLM and HLM). In a note that Maynard Mack identifies as the prose beginnings of later verse (*LGA* 192–93), Pope presents desire as evidence for the immortality of the soul: "1 Happiness y^{e} End of Man. God implants y^{e} desire in all mankind, & he shows not y^{e} End wthout y^{e} Means, w^{ch} is Virtue 2 He implants further a desire of Immortality wch at least proves he w^{d} have us think of & expect it, & he gives no desire $_{\text{appetite}}$ in vain to any Creature As God plainly gave this Hope or instinct, it is plain Man should entertain it" (*LGA*

22 Charles Taylor contends, in *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 275, that "the chain of love for Pope is rather that interconnection of mutual service which the things in this world of harmonious functions render to each other."

ORDER

I have already cited Plotinus as a philosopher for whom providence is a real problem. His view of love as a recognition of kinship with what is other, better, and more orderly than ourselves may also be related to Pope: "It is sound, I think, to find the primal source of Love in a tendency of the Soul towards pure beauty, in a recognition, in a kinship, in an unreasoned consciousness of friendly relation. [. . .] Nature produces by looking to the Good, for it looks towards Order" (III.5, 1, p. 175). Love acknowledges the decreasing perfection of each position in the chain of created beings, but only as an aspect of the fullness of the creative imagination of the principle behind the universe: "the Reason-Principle would not make all divine; it makes Gods but also celestial spirits, the intermediate order, then men, then the animals; all is graded succession, and this in no spirit of grudging but in the expression of a Reason teeming with intellectual variety" (III.2, 11, p. 147). Order is also difference and inequality for Plotinus: "inequality is inevitable by the nature of things: [. . .] in all things, there is implied variety of things; where there is variety and not identity there must be primals, secondaries, tertiaries, and every grade downward" (III.2, 3, p. 159). Pope also happily asserts the necessity of inequality: 'Order is Heav'n's first law; and this confest, / Some are, and must be, greater than the rest" (IV.49–50). He goes on to claim that the hope and fear that accompany poverty and wealth, respectively, serve to equalize the two conditions. Happiness is equal, and realized through the mutual satisfaction of desires (IV.49–56).

Although I shall suggest below that Pope's defense of inequality draws on traditions of thought that stress the charity and sociability of embracing relative human imperfection, it is one of the moments in the poem that has attracted strong criticism. It is a moment at which the argumentative energy of the poem might lapse. Pope does not work for the assumption he forces on his readers—that order must be hierarchical. The following claim, that hope and fear render material inequality affectively equal, was questioned by Samuel Johnson, reviewing a publication very deeply indebted to the *Essay*:

> That hope and fear are inseparably or very frequently connected with poverty, and riches, my surveys of life have not informed me. The milder degrees of poverty are sometimes supported by hope, but the more severe often sink down in motionless despondence. Life must be seen before it can be known. This author and Pope perhaps never saw the miseries which they imagine thus easy to be borne.[27]

Pope explains away material suffering; his position even seems to suggest that higher beings enjoy and benefit from the suffering of humans. (Johnson does not press the point as far as he might: Pope's text suggests that the enjoyment higher beings take is that of consumption, as I show below.) This kind of thinking, Johnson says, is "better adapted to delight the fancy than convince the reason."[28]

The Johnsonian tradition of criticizing Pope's avowed and unavowed ideological commitments continues, and Laura Brown's short book on Pope of 1985 remains one of its most powerful documents. Brown declares that she wants to "define the strong poles of the poem," not "reconcile contradiction." For Brown, Pope's interest in submission within a natural hierarchy is an apology for imperialism. She suggests that Pope's depiction of the poor Indian (I.99–108), who sees the afterlife as a geographical zone in the physical world free from the rapine of Christians, is merely an occasion on which "the poem's imagery accidentally exposed a threat for which the notion of a beneficent natural order—even if it operates on a general scale and in the long run—cannot account."[29] For both Johnson and Brown, Pope's poeticality, his imagery, gives away his tendency to mask and apologize for the violence in systems of subordination. Johnson and Brown are obviously partly right about the poem: it excuses inequality in ways that are repulsive now, and that 260 years

---

27 Samuel Johnson, "Review of Soame Jenyns' *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*. 1757," in *A Commentary on Mr. Pope's Principles of Morality, Or Essay on Man*, ed. by O. M. Brack Jr., The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, 17 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 387–432 (pp. 406–7).

28 Ibid., pp. 419, 410.

29 Laura Brown, *Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 82, 85–86, 73.

ago offended Johnson's understanding of "the maxims of a commercial nation, which always suppose and promote a rotation of property, and offer every individual a chance of mending his condition by his diligence."[30] There may be occasions on which we can defend Pope. He was alive to the injustices and contradictions his society, and his active role in it (as an investor in South Sea stock, for example), produced.[31] His depiction of the poor Indian cited above was, as I show in notes to the text, both longer and more biting in its critique of Christian imperialism in manuscript drafts than in the published text. It is not an image that accidentally impinges upon the text, but one that was toned down for print publication. Further, for much of the poem Pope is at least working for his view of order emerging from love, whether or not it is ultimately convincing. These factors might persuade readers to generosity in reconstructing Pope's arguments. But the tradition of reading that doubts the basis on which Pope apologizes for inequality shows how fissures and contradictions in his assertions and images can sometimes open up.

Pope's justification of inequality has a classical and Christian heritage. Jonathan Richardson Jr., the son of Pope's friend the painter and critic Jonathan Sr., recorded variants in the printed and manuscript texts of Pope's poems, having been supplied by Pope with the necessary materials.[32] When he transcribed MLM for Pope, he added a few pages of notes under the heading "Maxim order belonging to Essay on Man."[33] The first five maxims, with some preliminary notes, are as follows:

---

30 Johnson, "Review of Soame Jenyns," p. 410.

31 John Richardson, "Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest*: Its Context and Attitudes towards Slavery," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35 (2001): 1–17.

32 *LGA* 194–95. See also *Corr.*, IV,78, Pope to Jonathan Richardson, 17 June 1737, and IV,374, Pope to Jonathan Richardson, 1 December 1741.

33 Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, Cased + Pope. Alexander Pope. An Essay on Man. Epistles I, II, III, and 10 lines of Epistle IV. MS Copy in the hand of Jonathan Richardson, the younger, unsigned and undated, f. 2r–v; reproducing the same material MM says the maxims are found on f. 2r, with the notes on f. 2v. When I consulted the papers in November 2013, the notes were found on the recto, the maxims on the verso. I preserve the lineation of the MS in the citation.

1 [. . .]
ORDER in Nature or ye Universe consists in a continual
Opposition of Extreams
kept in due Bounds "ORDER is Heav'n's first Law —— IV 47.
from whence
our Happiness. "But Mutual Wants this Happiness increase,
"All Natures Diffe'rence keeps all Nature's Peace.
IV.53.^ cont.1:161.
The same is in Man "Two Principles in Human Nature reign,
"Self Love to urge, & Reason to restrain. II.43. &c.
"The rising Tempest puts in act ye Soul,
"Parts it may ravage, but preserves ye Whole. II. 95 &c.

Corolary to 1. As this ORDER ~~is~~ makes the Happiness of the
Whole, (which Happiness
is its Essense, & Sole End!) so, the ~~N~~nearer Every Individual
approach
'es, in Himself, to ORDER, that is to ^ TEMPERANCE, + not.
whose other
name is VIRTVE; by just so much the nearer He approaches to
Happiness.

+ which is suffering some Ill for ye Good of the Whole, as
Infinite Wisdom hath done in ye
Universe

Maxim.1.
ORDER
I.163.IV.47.
That ORDER requires all Degrees of ~~Single~~ Partial
Imperfection [supposing
allways preponderating predominating Good] to compose a
Perfect Whole.

2. That then ",There must be somewhere such a Rank as Man".
I.48.

3 That to compose that Rank the Individuals must be as they are

4. That then a Borgia or a Cataline are not Obnoxious to Pu:
:nishment because it was their Lot to be such, & not a
Cato or a Socrates.

5 that then the Imputation on Providence of an unjust Dis:
:tribution of Goods & Ills, to Ill & Good Men ceases.

These notes identify the moral quality of temperance with undergoing some imperfection in this world, as all animals, more or less imperfect, do, and indeed as God did through incarnation as Christ and through Christ's suffering. In these notes, the suffering implied by imperfection is an occasion for the practice of virtue and love (as it is for many philosophers from Seneca to Leibniz), and the part-whole dynamic of the *Essay* contributes to an explicitly Christian vision.

The Plotinian universe of relative imperfection and love is not unlike that of Empedocles, the pre-Socratic philosopher-poet of Agrigentum in Sicily, who sees the universe as an attraction and repulsion of the four elements, which seen from one aspect is a process of continual change, and from another perfect constancy:

For these very things are, and running through each other
they become men and the tribes of other beasts,
at one time coming together by love into one cosmos,
and at another time again all being borne apart separately by the
hostility of strife,
until by growing together as one they are totally subordinated.
Thus insofar as they learned to grow as one from many,
and finish up as many, as the one again grows apart,
in this respect they come to be and have no constant life,
but insofar as they never cease from constantly interchanging,
in this respect they are always unchanged in a cycle.[34]

34 *The Poem of Empedocles*, ed. and trans. by Brad Inwood, Phoenix: Journal of the Classical Association of Canada, Phoenix Presocratics, ed. by David Gallop and T. M. Robinson, Supplementary Volume 29, Phoenix Presocratics Volume 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 221, fragment 28/26. The text of Empedocles's poem (or poems) survives only in fragments quoted by other authors. This fragment is found in Simplicius's commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*. A foot-