

Pope's An Essay on Man. Man is a Mighty Maze! But Not Without Plan

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Abstract

The present study is an analytical one deals with Man, his position in the universe, his relation to God and other creatures according to the idea of Chain of Being. Pope's poem "An Essay on Man", in which Pope describes Man as "a Mighty Maze! But Not Without Plan", has been elaborately discussed, based on Pope's point of views. A brief resume of Pope as a main figure in the Eighteenth-century English literature is given, with some ideas of his distinguished works. The Scriblerus Club, the famous literary club formed by the prominent figures of the Eighteenth-century English literature is treated. The study sheds light on the on Eighteenth century as a traditional period in English literature. The importance of the age is that it is the age of scientific ideas and the experimental methods. In addition, it is the age of enlightenment. The poem has been elaborately discussed, concentrating on Man and his importance in the universe, depending on Pope's philosophy on Man. The study depicts Man's strengths and weaknesses, his place in the Universe according to the Chain of Being, his relation to God and Man's limited power. Man lacks the power of controlling his age, the acts of God, and his inability to control his means of living. Thus, the study tackles man's mystery as a mighty maze.

Key words: Man, Pope, Epistle, God

INTRODUCTION

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) was born in Lombard Street, London, on 21 May 1688. He was the most famous poet of the Eighteenth

Century; which is known as the Age of Pope. He was famous for his satirical verse and translation of Homer, the well-known Greek poet.

At first his family undertook his primary education, then he educated himself by reading the works of the classical writers and satirists such as Horace and Juvenal, Homer and Virgil. His earlier reading included Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare and John Dryden.

Thorough his great efforts and love of reading and studying, Pope studied Many languages, including English, French, Italian, Latin and Greek. London Society offered him a chance to meet the prominent literary figures such as William Wycherley, William Congreve, Samuel Garth, William Trumbull and William Walsh. He also met Teresa and Martha Blount, the two sisters who offered a considerable help to Pope. He was also introduced to Addison the famous journalist, and Warburton. Then he was acquainted to Lady Mary Wortley Montague, the most famous and literary active woman of the age. Among his famous friends was the famous Sir Henry Cromwell, a gentleman of fortune, a Man of gentility and literary taste.

At his childhood, Pope suffered from bone disease and tuberculosis which led to his deformity. His poem "Pastorals" was published In 1709. This poem brought him fame, followed by his famous poem "An Essay on Criticism", which was published in 1711. In "An Essay on Criticism" he attempted to set the essential rules of criticism for judging literature.

His being acquainted to the members of the famous Scriblerus Club in about 1711 John Gay, Jonathan Swift, Thomas Parnell and John Arbuthnot was considered as changing points in his life and literary works.

"Windsor Forest" (1713) was the poem in which Pope describes the neighboring forest, which became a symbol of tranquility, serenity and peace. This poem is regarded as the source of inspiration to Pope.

By 1720, when he had finished translating and publishing the "Iliad", he was severely attacked by the critics of Grub Street, especially Dennis and Cowley Cibber. It is worth mentioning that Dennis criticized Pope's "Essay on Criticism", "An Essay on Man" and "Dunciad" as well, in which he and Cowley Cibber were severely attacked by Pope.

Pope's distinguished poem "The Rape of the Lock" was published in 1712, the revised version of which appeared in 1714. It is a mock-epic poem, a satire satirizes a quarrel between Mrs. Arabella Fermor (Belinda in the poem) and Lord Petre, who raped a lock of hair off Mrs. Arabella's head in cool blood. Pope wrote this poem as an endeavor to reconciliation between these two quarrelling families.

Pope's distinguished poem "Dunciad", published in Dublin, which was an attack on Theobald and a number of "dunces". It is a satirical poem. The "Dunciad" instigated the critics of Grub Street to lead their furious campaign against Pope.

Another important poem written by Pope were "Imitation to Horace" in which he parodied the style of Horace in satire. It was written in (1733-38). Pope also wrote "Messiah", which was translated by Samuel Johnson into Latin. Pope's "The Dying Christian to his Soul" was written in 1712 on a request by Steele, the famous journalist of the Eighteenth century. He wrote "Elegy on the Memory of Unfortunate Lady" and "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot"

Pope died on May 29, 1744, and was buried in the Church of St. Mary Virgin in Twickenham. Not only is Pope a poet, but also he is an essay writer, critic and moralist.

The philosophical poem "An Essay on Man", the topic of this research paper, was published between 1732 and 1734. In this poem, Pope tried to "vindicate the ways of God to Man" as the same as Milton did as mentioned by Rawson (2011; 244): *"Pope Conspicuously alludes to Milton's epic attempt to 'justify' the ways of God to men; but in place of Milton's intense psychological narrative of fall and redemption, we have a satiric diagram of universal truths."*

1. SCRIBLERUS CLUB

It was a literary club established by the prominent figures of Eighteenth-Century Literature such as Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Dr. Arbuthnot, John Gay, Dr. Samuel Johnson and others.

The main objectives of this Club were to satirize ignorance and pedantry in a manner similar to that of the fictional scholar Martinus Scriblerus, as stated by Michel Delon (2001; 1182): *"The greatest writers of the period even founded the delightful Scriblerus Club, the purpose of which was to poke collective fun of their pompous, pedantic, ignorant and eponymous hero, whose comic biography*

appeared in 1741 as Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus."

One of the major aims of the Club was to satirize all the false taste in learning. Most of the members wrote satirical attacks on Sir Robert Walpole and his Whig government. It is worth mentioning that establishing a literary club is an advanced idea at that time. It is considered as systematic organization concerns with refinement, lucidity and correctness of literature. This is why the writers of the Eighteenth-Century England gave special attention to these elements.

Most of Pope's friends were the members of the Scriblerus Club. They were the distinguished figures in the Eighteenth-Century England. They enriched the English literature with their distinguished works. In this regard, Joseph Black et al (2010; 435) say:

Pope's famous group of friends were his fellow members of the Scriblerus Club, formed in 1714 by Pope, Johnathan Swift, John Gay, Dr. John Arbuthnot, Robert Harley (Lord Oxford), Thomas Parnell, and Lord Bolingbroke. The members focused upon an invented learned fool, Martinus Scriblerus, to whose work they attributed all that was tedious, narrow-minded, and pedantic in contemporary scholarship. The origin of Swift's Gulliver Travels (1726), Pope's Dunciad (1728), Gay's Beggar's Opera (1728)- generally seen as greatest satire of their age-may all be traced to the Club.

It is clear that Many of the distinguished literary products of the Eighteenth-Century England were produced under the umbrella of the Scriblerus Club. Further, since the Club concerned with upgrading the literature through satirizing the bad works done by bad writers, it rendered considerable services to the literature of that era. Criticism flourished due to the literary works of the Club. To give example in this respect, Pope's Dunciad which was one of the works produced by the Club was attacked severely by the critics of Grub Street led by the powerful critic Dennis.

Dennis (1839; 164) posed a very harsh criticism on Pope after the publication of his Poem "An Essay on Criticism", says,

"His (Pope's) precepts are false or trivial, or both; his thoughts are crude abortive, his expressions absurd, his numbers harsh and unmusical, his rhyme trivial and common, instead of majesty we have something very mean; instead of gravity, something that is very

boyish; and instead of perspicuity and lucid order we have too often obscurity and confusion."

Criticism participated greatly in Eighteenth-Century England in promoting literature in general and poetry in particular. The results of such kind of criticism were a refined and lucid literature. Pope was subjected to a very harsh campaign of criticism after his publication of "Shakespeare", especially the critics of Grub Street namely Dennis and Luis Theobald. Although the critics were so subjective in their criticism like that of Dennis, this made the authors think deeply before presenting their works for publication as they knew that their literary works would be examined strictly and this might affect their reputation as men of letters.

1.1 Eighteenth Century as an Age of Enlightenment

Enlightenment means to understand or to comprehend something. However, in the eighteenth-century Europe the meaning became wider to include the importance of science and reason. This is why the eighteenth century is also called the age of reason. It is well known that the people of the eighteenth century were very religious and they were strongly clinging to religion. The enlightenment came to be as a substitute to religion and traditional conceptions. This led to the revival of sciences and experiments. The metaphysical conceptions were no longer prevailed. For these reasons; the eighteenth century was also called the age of enlightenment and the age of reason. The age witnessed the development of liberty progress, and other positive values such as tolerance, the separation of church and state and other values, the matter that led to change in political and governmental status. New ideas and conceptions about government and rules and the domination of church appeared. The influential domination of the church in all life matters was weakened so a new way of thinking predominated.

It is the enlightenment that set the base of the modern progress of Europe or the whole world. It was an intellectual liberation from superstitions and primitive thinking of people. This was resulted in prominent thinkers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) the owner of the theory of Social Contract and author of Discourse of Inequality. He was the founder of the modern political thoughts. The economist and thinker Adam Smith (1723-1790) is to be

mentioned here as one of the prominent figures of the Enlightenment period. Smith authored the Theory of Modern Sentiment ((1759) and An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of the Nation (1776). Scientific and political theories, economic and social thoughts were greatly developed in this period.

To sum up, Enlightenment is a term refers to the movement of intellectual liberation. Free thinking flourished, the matter that led to the intellectual creation of thinkers and writers. To quote Chris Baldick (2008, 109):

Enlightenment is a general term applied to the movement of intellectual liberation that developed in Western Europe from the late 17th century to the late 18th (the period often called 'the Age of Reason'), especially in France and Switzerland. The Enlightenment culminated with writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau.

In the field of journalism, it is necessary to mention the role of the pioneers Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Richard Steele (1672-1729), who participated greatly in the field of freedom of press. Addison and Steele added much to the English Literature and English writing.

2. POPE'S AN ESSAY ON MAN

Pope's Essay on Man is one of the most distinguished Eighteenth-century poetry. It composes of four epistles, most of them are about Man and his relation to God. The poem is a moral and philosophical, deals with the relation of Man to God and state of Man in the universe. It has been published in 1733- 1734. Man's place in the universe is questionable, together with his position in the Chain of Being. In this poem, Man can be judged according to God with His relation of all things.

Man has not been created alone in this world but with other creatures with their various kinds and species. God is just and perfect, Man is imperfect but with his positive relation to God he can endeavor to reach perfectibility. God makes Man be preferred to all creatures. The universe in which Man shares living with other creatures is governed by God through universal system. In this system, every creature is placed according to its status in a specific order. Accordingly, actions are linked to each other and any action leads to another pursuant to the Chain of Being.

Man in Pope's "An Essay Man" is of a limited power, but he is honored by God by his power of mind. Man does not obtain the power of controlling his age, his means of living and his being rich or poor. He struggles in this world to gain his means of living and tries his best to fight diseases and crises. In spite of all these, Man leads his life balancing between happiness and sadness. He doesn't know when he dies, but he goes on leading his life depending on hope. He does not know the moment in which he dies, but he enjoys his life normally. Man's life depends on other creatures and the environment surrounds him. He has been created and placed after angels and above birds and other creatures as mentioned by Pope:

*Awake, my St. John! leave all meaner things
To low ambition, and the pride of kings.
Let us (since life can little more supply
Than just to look about us and to die)
Expatriate free o'er all this scene of Man;
A mighty maze! but not without a plan;
A wild, where weeds and flow'rs promiscuous shoot;
Or garden, tempting with forbidden fruit.
Together let us beat this ample field,
Try what the open, what the covert yield;*

(Pope's Essay on Man, Epistle I, Lines 1-10).

Although Man is of a limited power, he is honored by God by his power of mind. Man does not obtain the power of mastering his age, his means of living and his being rich or poor. He struggles in this world to own his means of living and tries his best to fight diseases and crises. In spite of all these, Man leads his life harmonizing his happiness and sadness. He doesn't know when he dies, but this matter does not limit his life and ambition depending on hope. He has been specified and placed after angels and above birds and other creatures as mentioned by Pope.

Pope begins his An Essay on Man by addressing his friend Mr. Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke, asking him to leave all unkind and unnecessary things, telling him indirectly that life is short and everything in this life is trivial and the result is death, the eternal fact that everybody knows. Man, according to Pope, is a mighty maze, but not without a plan. Man is a big maze. This can be seen in his life, his belief, his creation, his coming to this world, his relation to other

creatures, his place in the Chain of Being, his life and death and the like. Man is described by Pope as wild, treats the other surrounding creations fiercely, merciless, mercilessly and tyrant.

This universe is created and put in order, and Man is placed according to this order. This order should be maintained as any change thereof will destroy the world. Accordingly, everything happens to Man is to be considered good. Man should submit to God's will. This universe can only be understood to Man by the human system as Man ignores the relationships of God's creations:

*Say first, of God above, or Man below,
What can we reason, but from what we know?
Of Man what we see, but his station here,
From which to reason, or to which refer?
Through worlds unnumber'd though the God be known,
'Tis ours to trace him only in our own.*

(Epistle I, Lines 17-22.)

It is impossible for Man to know his actual fate, what's going to happen tomorrow, when he dies and where to go, whether to be healthy or ill, rich or poor, lives long or short age. Despite of all these, Man lives clinging with hope, apart from what is going to happen to him. This is the secret of God bestowed upon him, easily to be happy and easily to be sad, easily to remember and easily to forget. This is the secret of life.

Maze is used as a symbol of knowledge. In the previous lines, Pope utilizes the sciences of Galileo and Newton to create an image of the universe to clear out the mystery of the mind as mentioned by Smith (1997; 191):

"Pope's musing on the maze are somewhat more serene, yet no less interesting or profound. In the first stanza of An Essay on Man, Epistle I, Pope calls the world "A mighty maze! but not without a plan". What does he mean? The stanza immediately following provides a clue, for in this section of the poem Pope exploits the cosmology of Galileo and Newton to create an image of the universe as a divine labyrinth which reveals the intricacy and mystery of the mind.

On the other hand, the relation of Man to God is discussed within the idea of the "Great Chain of Being" which is the biggest series of foundation. It arranges and classifies the creatures from upper to

lower classes. It is a hierarchical structure starts with God down to the "*angels, demons, stars, moon, kings, princes, nobles, commoners, wild animals, domesticated animals, trees, other plants, precious stones, precious metals and other.*" (Wikipedia)

This classification in the researcher point of view is not so logic as it puts the creator as a part of creatures and openly agrees with the idea of class division among people. It joins between the spiritual animals with unspiritual ones, animals with stones and metals. It may be said that the Great Chain of Being targets the creation in general. If it is so, why not classifying these creatures according to their species and join them together according to the unity of creations pursuant to the joint existence. God the Creator is above than to be classified with what He creates. The order of the universe has been set and founded by God and He creates Man as Man regardless of his status, job, richness or poverty. There may be other creatures somewhere in the universe unknown to Man. It is better to classify according to the infinite power and the degree of power of mind:

*May tell why Heav'n has made us as we are.
The strong connections, nice dependencies,
Gradations just, has thy pervading soul
Look'd through? or can a part contain the whole?
Is the great chain, that draws all to agree,
And drawn supports, upheld by God, or thee?*

(Epistle 1, lines 28-34)

God creates Man and Man should submit to God's power. Religions explains the mechanism of this submission. All the matters of Man are dominated by God, his creator, so Man goes around the domain of his ability and capabilities. Man exists in this world with a power distinguishes him from other creatures. He dominates most of these creatures and exploits them for his own interests. Man should study himself properly, knowing his state in this limitless universe. God's affairs are far away beyond Man's ability, but Man is governed by self-love and reason. It is impossible for Man to comprehend the ways of God. Man seeks for happiness, but happiness is not measured by his traditional tools. Man works for gaining money and good means of living, but these also are governed by the will of God. According to God, "One single can its end produce." Man, who considers himself as

the master of the universe may be a mere trivial creature in other universes. Man can only comprehend a small part of this universe. He is unable to know about the whole universe:

*In human works, though labour'd on with pain,
A thousand movements scarce one purpose gain;
In God's, one single can its end produce;
Yet serves to second too some other use.
So, Man, who here seems principal alone,
Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown,
Touches some wheel, or verges to some goal;
'Tis but a part we see, and not a whole.*

(Epistle 1, lines 53-60)

Man can be described as a creature who loves himself. But what about the other creatures? All creatures love themselves due to their struggling to live. The wars and competition over the nature resources are the reasons of self-love. Contrary to all animals, Man is distinguished as the most advanced creature for he uses his minds and other means given by God such as his body formation. Thus, he leads a diffident life than other creatures.

*Say rather, Man's as perfect as he ought:
His knowledge measur'd to his state and place,
His time a moment, and a point his space.
If to be perfect in a certain sphere,
What matter, soon or late, or here or there?
The blest today is as completely so,
As who began a thousand years ago.*

(Epistle 1, lines 70-76)

The only creature that God offers him knowledge and the ability of talking, Manufacturing, making and cooking his food and other qualities is Man. This does not mean that Man is perfect but he still a weak creature as his destination is not in his hand. Both Man's life and death are in the hand of God. In his *Essence of Christianity*, the German Philosopher Feuerbach (2008; 1) sets a logic and more comprehensive ideas about Man by saying;

Religion is the disuniting of Man from himself, he sets God before him as the antithesis of himself God is not what Man is- Man is not what God is. God is the infinite, Man the finite being; God is perfect, Man is imperfect; God eternal, Man, Man temporal; God almighty, Man

weak; God holy, Man sinful. God and Man are extremes: God is the absolutely positive, the sum of all realities; the Man is absolutely negative, comprehending all negations.

Ignoring the future events is for the benefit of Man. If the future is revealed to people, they will become greatly horrified. They will stay thinking about what will happen to them in the future. This is the secret of life which is known only by God, who holds and governs this university in a fantastic order. For this God's wisdom, Man understands only the things that concern his daily life, his health, his food and medications. Man is sinful as mentioned above by Feuerbach, but with tendencies to purify his sins, assisted by religions and human moralities. Virtue and vice are the two parallel qualities of Man.

*Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of Mankind is Man.
Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;*

(Epistle II, lines 1-9)

If Man is in need to know God, he should know himself first. Man should study himself properly, seek about the ways that lead him to understand God. Despite the great jump achieved in the present age about nature and Man, Man destination is still not completely known. He still ignores his destination, but this does not mean that Man to submit. Man should seriously look upon the unrevealed secrets of the Universe. Comparing with other creatures, Man the only creature who obtains more knowledge than other creatures. This at least what is appeared according to human's knowledge. But this knowledge is also limited. The extended Universe is still a mystery. Pope classifies Man as a middle creature, describing him as of too much weaknesses, "he hangs between, in doubt to act, or rest) (Line 7), deeming himself as a god, or beast, but dubiousness masters him. In Pope's view, Man is put in a place between God and animals. This point of view can be accepted with the knowledge obtained by Man till now. However, this

point of view may be not logic if it is supposed that there are other creatures somewhere in the Universe more advanced than Man.

*Nor think, in nature's state they blindly trod;
The state of nature was the reign of God:
Self-love and social at her birth began,
Union the bond of all things, and of Man.
Pride then was not; nor arts, that pride to aid;
Man, walk'd with beast, joint tena claim nt of the shade;
The same his table, and the same his bed;
No murder cloth'd him, and no murder fed.*

(Epistle III, Lines 147-54).

The negative qualities of Man lead to Man's unrest. Due to Man's greedy, wars and disputes are everywhere. Killing, robbing, stealing and destroying overwhelm. Nature is created by God for the benefit of all creatures. God creates nature and He is mastering its status. Nature should be more studied in order to discover more information about it. Nature is created for both Man and other creatures, but due to Man's greedy he wants to claim his ownership to it. He should know his limited power. He should study himself before worshipping God.

Nature was the main topic in the literature of the England's Eighteenth-century. Alexander Pope himself mentions nature in his poem "An Essay on Criticism" too Many. Thinkers like Hobbes and Lock have theories about nature and state of nature in politics and society. Many of those thinkers attributed nature directly to culture. Many thinkers have the same conceptions of the writers of England's Eighteenth-century about nature and culture. In this respect Schmit (2007;105) says:

But however, culture is understood, "culture" is certainly the culture of nature. "Culture" is to such extent the culture of nature that culture can be understood as a sovereign of creation of the spirit only if the nature brings cultivated has been presupposed to be the opposite of spirit, and been forgotten. Because we now understand by "culture" primarily the culture of human nature; and because Man is by his nature an animal sociale, the human nature on which culture is based is the natural social relations of men, that is, the way in which Man, prior to all culture behaves toward other men.

As Man masters the Universe through the special capabilities offered to him by God, he is supposed to be just and fair, but he exploits these capabilities to harm other creatures. He was preferred by God but he does not obey God's orders. He has been created to construct the Earth, but he sheds blood, destroys and pollutes the environment instead. In the times of Pope, the world does not witness progress and technology as today, but as a philosophical and leaned Man, Pope sets good principles and morals. By this, it can be said that the Essay on Man is a philosophical and moral poem. It is also didactic due to the good lessons it sets.

*Come then, my friend! my genius! come along;
Oh, master of the poet, and the song!
And while the Muse now stoops, or now ascends,
To Man's low passions, or their glorious ends,
Teach me, like thee, in various nature wise,
To fall with dignity, with temper rise;
Form'd by thy converse, happily to steer
From grave to gay, from lively to severe;
Correct with spirit, eloquent with ease,
Intent to reason, or polite to please.*

(Epistle IV, lines 373-82)

In the above lines the poet evokes the Muse, the master of the poet and song to teach the poet or in general to teach human beings about various subject matters of the nature. Philosophically, the poet insinuates that Man's passion is flighty from a state to another, from happiness to sadness, from lively to severe. Man is in need for more lessons to teach himself that happiness does not remain forever, and the same can be said about sorrow. Man is of a low passion and he is in need to steer his happiness. Man's evil desires are in need for control and guidance. By all means, Man is weak, despite of all aspects of power. Since he does not obtain his destination, he falls in the hands of fate. In spite of dangers sounding him, God pertains on Man the characteristic of forgetfulness. So, he forgets about his short life and the dangers surround him.

*From sounds to things, from fancy to the heart;
For wit's false mirror held up nature's light;
Shew'd erring pride, whatever is, is right;
That reason, passion, answer one great aim;
That true self-love and social are the same;*

*That virtue only makes our bliss below;
And all our knowledge is, ourselves to know.*

(Epistle IV, lines 392-98)

"Wit" is also of a great importance in the Eighteenth-century literature. Pope describes it as of a false mirror. Maybe he means that Man is so naive, despite his all witty appearances. Man is showy, and superficial because he does not consider the results of his behavior. He should know that "whatever is, is right". Reasons and passion are the same, both of them lead to the fact that true self-love and social are the same, but virtue creates and degrades people's ecstasy. Learning is a value, and since Man occupies his place in this Universe, he should be of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

In his "An Essay on Man", Pope describes Man as "A Mighty Maze! But without Plan." (Epistle 1. Line 6). In spite of his intelligence and power, Man does not know his fate, nor what is going to happen to him. God creates Man but Man remains as a maze.

Man doesn't know when he dies and when he is going to be resurrected again. Mystery is a big title of Man's life.

Pope's poem "An Essay on Man" is a vindication of ways of God to Man. It is considered as a philosophical poem tries to shed light on the status of Man on the universe and his state according to the "Chain of Being". As a critic, poet, writer and philosopher, Pope enriches the English literature with his distinguished works in all these fields.

Pope's masterpiece "An Essay on Man" is considered as one of his most important poems. Pope describes Man as naïve, showy, and superficial, of checkered views and evil desires. Man is preferred by God but Man doesn't obey Him as required. He recalls man to know the ways of God, submit to his fate and obeys God. Man's negative behaviors lead to his fate. Pope mentions that Man is greedy as he depends on other creatures for his life. This is because Man is witty and enjoys qualities that are not found on other creatures. Then he comes to mention that man is weak despite his dominating power over the other animals. The poem worth studying for its importance and didactic nature.

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