

Alexander pope's "an essay on man" analysis essay sample

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Famous for its expressive breadth and insightful wisdom, " An Essay on Man" (1733-1734) has been extremely popular during last three centuries. Its author, Alexander Pope, was a representative of the Neoclassical movement of the Enlightenment era. This time of Reason emphasized the vital role of Science in the contemporary society. Pope synthesized the ideas of his intellectual peers and created a poem which faced a lot of criticism as well as admiration. With the innovative use of poetic forms, it is unique and highly important. It was written under the influence of the philosophy of positivism. This essay was conceived to find the rational explanation of the divine plan, called " theodicy."

Some critics compare " An Essay on Man" to Milton's " Paradise Lost." Both authors tried to vindicate the ways of God to man but came up with different points of view. Milton believed that a man could overcome the universal rules through honesty and faith. In his turn, Pope insisted that we should accept the order and our place in the God's system. What is more, " Paradise Lost" is mostly religious, while Pope's work is fragmentary philosophical, ethical and political poem.

Many celebrated philosophers spoke about this work with great enthusiasm and delight. Voltaire liked Pope's oeuvre most of all. He was at pains to introduce his first French translation of the book entitled " Discourse en vers sur l'homme" in 1738. Two writers were good friends during Voltaire's stay in

England for more than 24 months. He admired Pope's oeuvre and even put him superior to Horace.

Structurally, the work is divided into four epistles - formal didactic letters written for someone. Pope dedicated his poem to Lord Bolingbroke. Being a political figure of that time, Lord had many philosophical conversations with Pope. After publishing the epistles under the title " Being the First Book of Ethic Epistles," Alexander Pope revealed his authorship. Originally, " An Essay on Man" had been designed as an introduction to his greatest work on society and its morality. However, later he changed his plans.

The first epistle answers the questions: " What is the place of a man in the cosmos?", " What is his nature?", " How is everything structured?", etc. The next one concerns itself with a problem of person's individuality, his desires, feelings and mental capacities. Epistle III is about man vs. society, and the notion of happiness is the main topic of the forth part.

Throughout the whole poem, Pope tried to contemplate on the nature of a human being and persuade the reader to recognize the existence of a Supreme Power.

He states that our abilities to understand the divine system are limited as our intellect is. The lack of knowledge is not the reason to doubt God's omnipotence. He not only created all that exists but also can control the forces of nature; he can do the supernatural things, something that does not obey physical laws. He can do anything. We should bear in mind that although God has unlimited power, this does not mean that He manifests this

power everywhere. That's why we possess free will, but it also entails the choice between good and evil in our everyday life. We are responsible for what we do.

People can see this opposition of good and evil even in nature. Yes, God created flowers, seas, soft grass, fruits and lovely animals. But, on the other hand, earthquakes, floods, snakes, and plaques are also the part of our existence on this planet. We do not like such negative things, but who are we to claim that they are unnecessary? Instead, we can take care of sick people, feed the hungry and give a shelter for the homeless.

We learn that there is a hierarchy in the universe. The general scheme is as follows: God (the top) - angels demons - humanity - animals - plants - earth with minerals and other inanimate objects (the bottom). This Great Chain of Being is perfect and unchangeable. Every creature has its own place and can't be higher in position. The morality here is that a human should accept his medium place and never try to become godlike striving for more knowledge and perfection.

A lot of attention is dedicated to the greatest sin of pride. We tend to think that we are in the center of the world and that everything was created only for our own use. We are ready to complain against the Providence when something bad happens to us, we put pride over reason, and these are our main mistakes.

The author dwells upon the problem of identity and self-love. God wants us to love ourselves, not in everything, but in the best. The love for oneself is

built on the same reliable and strong foundation as our love for the nearest and dearest. We must try to love ourselves - exactly what helps us strive for better. Pope teaches not to intervene in God's affairs, but to study ourselves.

In the universe, everything is bound together in the sole system of society where an individual is connected to the society as a part of the whole. A person lives in society; he is compelled to participate in any collective activity. A civilized person is physically unable to be excluded from it because he depends on it.

Since the very creation, a human has been in harmony with the earth and its elements. It was a spiritual connection we cannot feel now. The number of people grew, and they united under common traditions, religion, and territory. That's how the political society developed. In the poem, Pope attempts to write about true government and its duties. He suggests the origin of monarchy, patriarchy, and tyranny.

There is a description of man's endeavor to revive true government and religion on the first principle. They both have many forms, but the main goal of the former is to regulate the society. The latter is to govern the soul. The last part of "An Essay on Man" reveals the theme of happiness and virtue. Pope defines happiness as an ultimate end of human existence. If a person lives in accordance with the rules of God, he is happy, and he understands his function within the divine system. What is more, the author is looking for the answer to the question which touches many of us: "Why do

good and virtuous people die while sinful and despicable people continue living well?"

All in all, Alexander Pope succeeded in describing the perfect world created and harmonized by God. He defined our place in the Great Chain of Being and suggested to accept our position between angels and animals. The doubtless merit of the author is that when reading the poem, we can familiarize ourselves with the synthesized philosophical worldview of the eighteenth century greatest minds.

References

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