**AN ESSAY ON MAN.  
TO H. ST. JOHN LORD BOLINGBROKE.**

**THE DESIGN.**

Having proposed to write some pieces of Human Life and Manners, such as (to use my Lord Bacon’s expression) come home to Men’s Business and Bosoms, I thought it more satisfactory to begin with considering Man in the abstract, his Nature and his State; since, to prove any moral duty, to enforce any moral precept, or to examine the perfection or imperfection of any creature whatsoever, it is necessary first to know what condition and relation it is placed in, and what is the proper end and purpose of its being.

The science of Human Nature is, like all other sciences, reduced to a few clear points: there are not many certain truths in this world.  It is therefore in the anatomy of the Mind as in that of the Body; more good will accrue to mankind by attending to the large, open, and perceptible parts, than by studying too much such finer nerves and vessels, the conformations and uses of which will for ever escape our observation.  The disputes are all upon these last, and, I will venture to say, they have less sharpened the wits than the hearts of men against each other, and have diminished the practice more than advanced the theory of Morality.  If I could flatter myself that this Essay has any merit, it is 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.

This I might have done in prose, but I chose verse, and even rhyme, for two reasons.  The one will appear obvious; that 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.  I was unable to treat this part of my subject more in detail, without becoming dry and tedious; or more poetically, without sacrificing perspicuity to ornament, without wandering from the precision, or breaking the chain of reasoning: if any man can unite all these without diminution of any of them I freely confess he will compass a thing above my capacity.

What is now published is only to be considered as a general Map of Man, marking out no more than the greater parts, their extent, their limits, and their connection, and leaving the particular to be more fully delineated in the charts which are to follow.  Consequently, these Epistles in their progress (if I have health and leisure to make any progress) will be less dry, and more susceptible of poetical ornament.  I am here only opening the fountains, and clearing the passage.  To deduce the rivers, to follow them in their course, and to observe their effects, may be a task more agreeable.  P.

**ARGUMENT OF EPISTLE I.**

Of the Nature and State of Man, with respect to the Universe.

Of Man in the abstract.  I. That we can judge only with regard to our own system, being ignorant of the relations of systems and things, v.17, etc.  II. That Man is not to be deemed imperfect, but a being suited to his place and rank in the Creation, agreeable to the general Order of Things, and conformable to Ends and Relations to him unknown, v.35, etc.  III. That it is partly upon his ignorance of future events, and partly upon the hope of future state, that all his happiness in the present depends, v.77, etc.  IV. The pride of aiming at more knowledge, and pretending to more Perfection, the cause of Man’s error and misery.  The impiety of putting himself in the place of God, and judging of the fitness or unfitness, perfection or imperfection, justice or injustice of His dispensations, v.109, etc.  V. The absurdity of conceiting himself the final cause of the Creation, or expecting that perfection in the moral world, which is not in the natural, v.131, etc.  VI. The unreasonableness of his complaints against Providence, while on the one hand he demands the Perfections of the Angels, and on the other the bodily qualifications of the Brutes; though to possess any of the sensitive faculties in a higher degree would render him miserable, v.173, etc.  VII. That throughout the whole visible world, an universal order and gradation in the sensual and mental faculties is observed, which cause is a subordination of creature to creature, and of all creatures to Man.  The gradations of sense, instinct, thought, reflection, reason; that Reason alone countervails all the other faculties, v.207.  VIII. How much further this order and subordination of living creatures may extend, above and below us; were any part of which broken, not that part only, but the whole connected creation, must be destroyed, v.233.  IX.  The extravagance, madness, and pride of such a desire, v.250.  X. The consequence of all, the absolute submission due to Providence, both as to our present and future state, v.281, etc., to the end.

#### ARGUMENT OF EPISTLE II.

Of the Nature and State of Man with respect to Himself, as an Individual.

I. The business of Man not to pry into God, but to study himself.  His Middle Nature; his Powers and Frailties, v.1 to 19. The Limits of his Capacity, v.19, etc.  II. The two Principles of Man, Self-love and Reason, both necessary, v.53, etc. Self-love the stronger, and why, v.67, etc.  Their end the same, v.81, etc.  III. The Passions, and their use, v.93 to 130.  The predominant Passion, and its force, v.132 to 160.  Its Necessity, in directing Men to different purposes, v.165, etc.  Its providential Use, in fixing our Principle, and ascertaining our Virtue, v.177.  IV. Virtue and Vice joined in our mixed Nature; the limits near, yet the things separate and evident: What is the Office of Reason, v.202 to 216.  V. How odious Vice in itself, and how we deceive ourselves into it, v.217.  VI. That, however, the Ends of Providence and general Good are answered in our Passions and Imperfections, v.238, etc.  How usefully these are distributed to all Orders of Men, v.241.  How useful they are to Society, v.251.  And to the Individuals, v.263.  In every state, and every age of life, v.273, etc.

#### ARGUMENT OF EPISTLE III.

Of the Nature and State of Man with respect to Society.

I. The whole Universe one system of Society, v.7, etc.  Nothing made wholly for itself, nor yet wholly for another, v.27.  The happiness of Animals mutual, v.49.  II. Reason or Instinct operate alike to the good of each Individual, v.79.  Reason or Instinct operate also to Society, in all Animals, v.109.  III. How far Society carried by Instinct, v.115.  How much farther by Reason, v.128.  IV. Of that which is called the State of Nature, v.144.  Reason instructed by Instinct in the invention of Arts, v.166, and in the Forms of Society, v.176.  V. Origin of Political Societies, v.196.  Origin of Monarchy, v.207.  Patriarchal Government, v.212.  VI. Origin of true Religion and Government, from the same principle, of Love, v.231, etc.  Origin of Superstition and Tyranny, from the same principle, of Fear, v.237, etc.  The Influence of Self-love operating to the social and public Good, v.266.  Restoration of true Religion and Government on their first principle, v.285.  Mixed Government, v.288.  Various forms of each, and the true end of all, v.300, etc.

#### ARGUMENT OF EPISTLE IV.

Of the Nature and State of Man with respect to Happiness.

I. False Notions of Happiness, Philosophical and Popular, answered from v.19 to 77.  II. It is the End of all Men, and attainable by all, v.30.  God intends Happiness to be equal; and to be so, it must be social, since all particular Happiness depends on general, and since He governs by general, not particular Laws, v.37.  As it is necessary for Order, and the peace and welfare of Society, that external goods should be unequal, Happiness is not made to consist in these, v.51.  But, notwithstanding that inequality, the balance of Happiness among Mankind is kept even by Providence, by the two Passions of Hope and Fear, v.70.  III. What the Happiness of Individuals is, as far as is consistent with the constitution of this world; and that the good Man has here the advantage, V.77.  The error of imputing to Virtue what are only the calamities of Nature or of Fortune, v.94.  IV. The folly of expecting that God should alter His general Laws in favour of particulars, v.121.  V. That we are not judges who are good; but that, whoever they are, they must be happiest, v.133, etc.  VI. That external goods are not the proper rewards, but often inconsistent with, or destructive of Virtue, v.165.  That even these can make no Man happy without Virtue: Instanced in Riches, v.183.  Honours, v.191.  Nobility, v.203.  Greatness, v.215.  Fame, v.235.  Superior Talents, v.257, etc.  With pictures of human Infelicity in Men possessed of them all, v.267, etc.  VII. That Virtue only constitutes a Happiness, whose object is universal, and whose prospect eternal, v.307, etc.  That the perfection of Virtue and Happiness consists in a conformity to the Order of Providence here, and a Resignation to it here and hereafter, v.326, etc.

**EPISTLE I.**

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)  
Expatiate free o’er all this scene of man;  
A mighty maze! but not without a plan;  
A wild, where weeds and flowers promiscuous shoot;  
Or garden tempting with forbidden fruit.  
Together let us beat this ample field,  
Try what the open, what the covert yield;  
The latent tracts, the giddy heights, explore  
Of all who blindly creep, or sightless soar;  
Eye Nature’s walks, shoot Folly as it flies,  
And catch the manners living as they rise;  
Laugh where we must, be candid where we can;  
But vindicate the ways of God to man.

I.  Say first, of God above, or man below  
What can we reason, but from what we know?  
Of man, what see we but his station here,  
From which to reason, or to which refer?  
Through worlds unnumbered though the God be known,  
’Tis ours to trace Him only in our own.  
He, who through vast immensity can pierce,  
See worlds on worlds compose one universe,  
Observe how system into system runs,  
What other planets circle other suns,  
What varied being peoples every star,  
May tell why Heaven has made us as we are.  
But of this frame, the bearings, and the ties,  
The strong connections, nice dependencies,  
Gradations just, has thy pervading soul  
Looked 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?

II.  Presumptuous man! the reason wouldst thou find,  
Why formed so weak, so little, and so blind?  
First, if thou canst, the harder reason guess,  
Why formed no weaker, blinder, and no less;  
Ask of thy mother earth, why oaks are made  
Taller or stronger than the weeds they shade?  
Or ask of yonder argent fields above,  
Why Jove’s satellites are less than Jove?  
   Of systems possible, if ’tis confest  
That wisdom infinite must form the best,  
Where all must full or not coherent be,  
And all that rises, rise in due degree;  
Then in the scale of reasoning life, ’tis plain,  
There must be, somewhere, such a rank as man:  
And all the question (wrangle e’er so long)  
Is only this, if God has placed him wrong?  
   Respecting man, whatever wrong we call,  
May, must be right, as relative to all.  
In human works, though laboured 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.  
   When the proud steed shall know why man restrains  
His fiery course, or drives him o’er the plains:  
When the dull ox, why now he breaks the clod,  
Is now a victim, and now Egypt’s god:  
Then shall man’s pride and dulness comprehend  
His actions’, passions’, being’s, use and end;  
Why doing, suffering, checked, impelled; and why  
This hour a slave, the next a deity.  
   Then say not man’s imperfect, Heaven in fault;  
Say rather man’s as perfect as he ought:  
His knowledge measured 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 to-day is as completely so,  
As who began a thousand years ago.