

*Here, then, we rest: "The Universal Cause  
Acts to one end, but acts by various laws."  
In all the madness of superfluous health,  
The trim of pride, the impudence of wealth,  
Let this great truth be present night and day;  
But most be present, if we preach or pray.*

## Alexander Pope

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

#### Epistle III of "Essay on Man"

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#### I

Look round our world; behold the chain of love  
Combining all below and all above.  
See plastic Nature working to this end,  
The single atoms each to other tend,  
Attract, attracted to, the next in place  
Formed and impelled its neighbour to embrace.  
See matter next, with various life endued,  
Press to one centre still, the general good.  
See dying vegetables life sustain,  
See life dissolving vegetate again:  
All forms that perish other forms supply  
(By turns we catch the vital breath, and die),  
Like bubbles on the sea of matter borne,  
They rise, they break, and to that sea return.  
Nothing is foreign: parts relate to whole;  
One all-extending, all-preserving soul  
Connects each being, greatest with the least;  
Made beast in aid of man, and man of beast;  
All served, all serving: nothing stands alone;  
The chain holds on, and where it ends, unknown.

Has God, thou fool! worked solely for thy good,  
Thy joy, thy pastime, thy attire, thy food?  
Who for thy table feeds the wanton fawn,  
For him as kindly spread the flowery lawn:  
Is it for thee the lark ascends and sings?  
Joy tunes his voice, joy elevates his wings.  
Is it for thee the linnet pours his throat?  
Loves of his own and raptures swell the note.  
The bounding steed you pompously bestride,  
Shares with his lord the pleasure and the pride.  
Is thine alone the seed that strews the plain?  
The birds of heaven shall vindicate their grain.  
Thine the full harvest of the golden year?  
Part pays, and justly, the deserving steer:  
The hog, that ploughs not nor obeys thy call,  
Lives on the labours of this lord of all.

Know, Nature's children all divide her care;  
The fur that warms a monarch, warmed a bear.  
While man exclaims, "See all things for my use!"

"See man for mine!" replies a pampered goose:  
And just as short of reason he must fall,  
Who thinks all made for one, not one for all.

Grant that the powerful still the weak control;  
Be man the wit and tyrant of the whole:  
Nature that tyrant checks; he only knows,  
And helps, another creature's wants and woes.  
Say, will the falcon, stooping from above,  
Smit with her varying plumage, spare the dove?  
Admires the jay the insect's gilded wings?  
Or hears the hawk when Philomela sings?  
Man cares for all: to birds he gives his woods,  
To beasts his pastures, and to fish his floods;  
For some his interest prompts him to provide,  
For more his pleasure, yet for more his pride:  
All feed on one vain patron, and enjoy  
The extensive blessing of his luxury.  
That very life his learned hunger craves,  
He saves from famine, from the savage saves;  
Nay, feasts the animal he dooms his feast,  
And, till he ends the being, makes it blest;  
Which sees no more the stroke, or feels the pain,  
Than favoured man by touch ethereal slain.  
The creature had his feast of life before;  
Thou too must perish when thy feast is o'er!

To each unthinking being, Heaven, a friend,  
Gives not the useless knowledge of its end:  
To man imparts it; but with such a view  
As, while he dreads it, makes him hope it too;  
The hour concealed, and so remote the fear,  
Death still draws nearer, never seeming near.  
Great standing miracle! that Heaven assigned  
Its only thinking thing this turn of mind.

#### II

Whether with reason, or with instinct blest,  
Know, all enjoy that power which suits them best;  
To bliss alike by that direction tend,  
And find the means proportioned to their end.  
Say, where full instinct is the unerring guide,  
What pope or council can they need beside?  
Reason, however able, cool at best,  
Cares not for service, or but serves when pressed,  
Stays till we call, and then not often near;  
But honest instinct comes a volunteer,  
Sure never to o'er-shoot, but just to hit;  
While still too wide or short is human wit;

Sure by quick nature happiness to gain,  
Which heavier reason labours at in vain,  
This too serves always, reason never long;  
One must go right, the other may go wrong.  
See then the acting and comparing powers  
One in their nature, which are two in ours;  
And reason raise o'er instinct as you can,  
In this 'tis God directs, in that 'tis man.

Who taught the nations of the field and wood  
To shun their poison, and to choose their food?  
Prescient, the tides or tempests to withstand,  
Build on the wave, or arch beneath the sand?  
Who made the spider parallels design,  
Sure as Demoiselle, without rule or line?  
Who did the stork, Columbus-like, explore  
Heavens not his own, and worlds unknown before?  
Who calls the council, states the certain day,  
Who forms the phalanx, and who points the way?

#### III

God in the nature of each being founds  
Its proper bliss, and sets its proper bounds:  
But as He framed a whole, the whole to bless,  
On mutual wants built mutual happiness:  
So from the first, eternal order ran,  
And creature linked to creature, man to man.  
Whate'er of life all-quickeneth ether keeps,  
Or breathes through air, or shoots beneath the deeps,  
Or pours profuse on earth, one nature feeds  
The vital flame, and swells the genial seeds.  
Not man alone, but all that roam the wood,  
Or wing the sky, or roll along the flood,  
Each loves itself, but not itself alone,  
Each sex desires alike, till two are one.  
Nor ends the pleasure with the fierce embrace;  
They love themselves, a third time, in their race.  
Thus beast and bird their common charge attend,  
The mothers nurse it, and the sires defend;  
The young dismissed to wander earth or air,  
There stops the instinct, and there ends the care;  
The link dissolves, each seeks a fresh embrace,  
Another love succeeds, another race.  
A longer care man's helpless kind demands;  
That longer care contracts more lasting bands:  
Reflection, reason, still the ties improve,  
At once extend the interest and the love;  
With choice we fix, with sympathy we burn;  
Each virtue in each passion takes its turn;

And still new needs, new helps, new habits rise.  
That graft benevolence on charities.  
Still as one brood, and as another rose,  
These natural love maintained, habitual those.  
The last, scarce ripened into perfect man,  
Saw helpless him from whom their life began:  
Memory and forecast just returns engage,  
That pointed back to youth, this on to age;  
While pleasure, gratitude, and hope combined,  
Still spread the interest, and preserved the kind.

#### IV

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 walked with beast, joint tenant of the shade;  
The same his table, and the same his bed;  
No murder clothed him, and no murder fed.  
In the same temple, the resounding wood,  
All vocal beings hymned their equal God:  
The shrine with gore unstained, with gold undressed,  
Unbribed, unbloody, stood the blameless priest:  
Heaven's attribute was universal care,  
And man's prerogative to rule, but spare.  
Ah! how unlike the man of times to come!  
Of half that live the butcher and the tomb;  
Who, foe to nature, hears the general groan,  
Murders their species, and betrays his own.  
But just disease to luxury succeeds,  
And every death its own avenger breeds;  
The fury-passions from that blood began,  
And turned on man a fiercer savage, man.

See him from Nature rising slow to art!  
To copy instinct then was reason's part;  
Thus then to man the voice of Nature spake—  
"Go, from the creatures thy instructions take:  
Learn from the birds what food the thickets yield;  
Learn from the beasts the physic of the field;  
Thy arts of building from the bee receive;  
Learn of the mole to plough, the worm to weave;  
Learn of the little nautilus to sail,  
Spread the thin oar, and catch the driving gale.  
Here too all forms of social union find,  
And hence let reason, late, instruct mankind:  
Here subterranean works and cities see;  
There towns aerial on the waving tree.

Learn each small people's genius, policies,  
The ant's republic, and the realm of bees;  
How those in common all their wealth bestow,  
And anarchy without confusion know;  
And these for ever, though a monarch reign,  
Their separate cells and properties maintain.  
Mark what unvaried laws preserve each state,  
Laws wise as nature, and as fixed as fate.  
In vain thy reason finer webs shall draw,  
Entangle justice in her net of law,  
And right, too rigid, harden into wrong;  
Still for the strong too weak, the weak too strong.  
Yet go! and thus o'er all the creatures sway,  
Thus let the wiser make the rest obey;  
And, for those arts mere instinct could afford,  
Be crowned as monarchs, or as gods adored."

#### V

Great Nature spoke; observant men obeyed;  
Cities were built, societies were made:  
Here rose one little state: another near  
Grew by like means, and joined, through love or fear.  
Did here the trees with ruddier burdens bend,  
And there the streams in purer rills descend?  
What war could ravish, commerce could bestow,  
And he returned a friend, who came a foe.  
Converse and love mankind might strongly draw,  
When love was liberty, and Nature law.  
Thus States were formed; the name of king unknown,  
'Till common interest placed the sway in one.  
'Twas virtue only (or in arts or arms,  
Diffusing blessings, or averting harms)  
The same which in a sire the sons obeyed,  
A prince the father of a people made.

#### VI

Till then, by Nature crowned, each patriarch sate,  
King, priest, and parent of his growing state;  
On him, their second providence, they hung,  
Their law his eye, their oracle his tongue.  
He from the wondering furrow called the food,  
Taught to command the fire, control the flood,  
Draw forth the monsters of the abyss profound,  
Or fetch the aerial eagle to the ground.  
Till drooping, sickening, dying they began  
Whom they revered as God to mourn as man:  
Then, looking up, from sire to sire, explored

One great first Father, and that first adored.  
Or plain tradition that this all begun,  
Conveyed unbroken faith from sire to son;  
The worker from the work distinct was known,  
And simple reason never sought but one:  
Ere wit oblique had broke that steady light,  
Man, like his Maker, saw that all was right;  
To virtue, in the paths of pleasure, trod,  
And owned a Father when he owned a God.  
Love all the faith, and all the allegiance then;  
For Nature knew no right divine in men,  
No ill could fear in God; and understood  
A sovereign being but a sovereign good.  
True faith, true policy, united ran,  
This was but love of God, and this of man.

Who first taught souls enslaved, and realms undone,  
The enormous faith of many made for one;  
That proud exception to all Nature's laws,  
To invert the world, and counter-work its cause?  
Force first made conquest, and that conquest, law;  
Till superstition taught the tyrant awe,  
Then shared the tyranny, then lent it aid,  
And gods of conquerors, slaves of subjects made:  
She, 'midst the lightning's blaze, and thunder's sound,  
When rocked the mountains, and when groaned the ground,  
She taught the weak to bend, the proud to pray,  
To power unseen, and mightier far than they:  
She, from the rending earth and bursting skies,  
Saw gods descend, and fiends infernal rise:  
Here fixed the dreadful, there the blest abodes;  
Fear made her devils, and weak hope her gods;  
Gods partial, changeful, passionate, unjust,  
Whose attributes were rage, revenge, or lust;  
Such as the souls of cowards might conceive,  
And, formed like tyrants, tyrants would believe.  
Zeal then, not charity, became the guide;  
And hell was built on spite, and heaven on pride,  
Then sacred seemed the ethereal vault no more;  
Altars grew marble then, and reeked with gore;  
Then first the flamen tasted living food;  
Next his grim idol smeared with human blood;  
With heaven's own thunders shook the world below,  
And played the god an engine on his foe.

So drives self-love, through just and through unjust,  
To one man's power, ambition, lucre, lust:  
The same self-love, in all, becomes the cause  
Of what restrains him, government and laws.  
For, what one likes if others like as well,  
What serves one will when many wills rebel?

How shall he keep, what, sleeping or awake,  
A weaker may surprise, a stronger take?  
His safety must his liberty restrain:  
All join to guard what each desires to gain.  
Forced into virtue thus by self-defence,  
Even kings learned justice and benevolence:  
Self-love forsook the path it first pursued,  
And found the private in the public good.

'Twas then, the studious head or generous mind,  
Follower of God, or friend of human-kind,  
Poet or patriot, rose but to restore  
The faith and moral Nature gave before;  
Re-lumed her ancient light, not kindled new;  
If not God's image, yet His shadow drew:  
Taught power's due use to people and to kings,  
Taught nor to slack, nor strain its tender strings,  
The less, or greater, set so justly true,  
That touching one must strike the other too;  
Till jarring interests, of themselves create  
The according music of a well-mixed state.  
Such is the world's great harmony, that springs  
From order, union, full consent of things:  
Where small and great, where weak and mighty, made  
To serve, not suffer, strengthen, not invade;  
More powerful each as needful to the rest,  
And, in proportion as it blesses, blest;  
Draw to one point, and to one centre bring  
Beast, man, or angel, servant, lord, or king.

For forms of government let fools contest;  
Whate'er is best administered is best:  
For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight;  
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right:  
In faith and hope the world will disagree,  
But all mankind's concern is charity:  
All must be false that thwart this one great end;  
And all of God, that bless mankind or mend.

Man, like the generous vine, supported lives;  
The strength he gains is from the embrace he gives.  
On their own axis as the planets run,  
Yet make at once their circle round the sun;  
So two consistent motions act the soul;  
And one regards itself, and one the whole.

*Thus God and Nature linked the general frame,  
And bade self-love and social be the same.*