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Personal Writings - 1898, December 7 - Essay on Man

Madge Webb Riley

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Essay on Man. Pope.
December 7th 1898.

Madge L. Webb.
Peace Institute




Essay on Man.

The Essay on Man is divided into four epistles. The first is, Of Man in the Abstract; the second, Of the Nature and State of Man with Respect to Himself as an Individual; the third, Of the Nature and State of Man with Respect to Society; and the fourth is, Of the Nature and State of Man with respect to Happiness.

The whole is an argumentative poem.

In the first epistle the argument is, that we can judge only with regard to our own system, because we are ignorant of the relations of systems and things — for what can we reason but from what we know?



It says that man is not to be thought imperfect, but a person suited to his place and rank in creation. For why are oaks made taller and stronger than weeds? Because it is their place and rank. Everything has its place to fill, and every thing is due to providence, both to our present and future state.

In the second epistle the argument is, that the business of man is not to pry into God, but to study himself. To study his middle nature, his passions, and his faculties. The two principles of man is self love and reason, and both are necessary, for self love urges, and reason restrains. The passions are modes of self love.

Virtue and vice are joined
in our mixed nature. Vice
is odious in itself, but we
deceive ourselves into it, by first
enduring, pitying and then
embracing. But ~~however~~, the ends
of providence and general good
are answered in our passions
and imperfections. These are dis-
tributed to all orders of men, they
are useful to society, to individ-
uals, and in every stage and
every age of life.

In the third
epistle the argument is that
the whole universe is one sys-
tem of society. Nothing is made
wholly for itself, nor yet wholly
for another. The happiness of
animals are mutual, and that
the powerful still the weak control

Whether best with instinct or reason, we know that all enjoy that power which suits them best. God finds the proper bliss in the nature of each being, and sets its proper bounds.

Society is carried much farther by reason than by instinct, because reason still improves the ties, and at once extends the interest and the love.

The origin of political societies was, that, Great Nature spoke, and obedient man obeyed; cities were built, societies were made, and states were formed.

The origin of true religion and government was from the same principle of love. Thus, God the general granter

linked, and bad self love and
social be the same.

R

In the the
fourth epistle the argument
is, God intends happiness to be
equal, and to be so it must be
social since all particular hap-
piness depends on general, and
since God governs by general not
particular laws, so, "The Universal
Cause acts not by partial, but by
general laws."

It is necessary for order
and the welfare of society, that
external goods should be un-
equal, Happiness is not made to
consist in these: Order is Heaven's
first law: We are not judges
who are good; but that whoever
they are, they must be happiest.
But still this world contents us not.

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Virtue only constitutes a happiness, whose object is universal, and whose prospect is eternal.
"Virtue alone is happiness below."

The perfection of virtue and happiness consists in a conformity to the order of providence here, and a resignation to it here and hereafter.