**“An Essay on Man,” Epistle 1  
Alexander Pope**

1. Pope poses the essential question: Is Man, who can only see his immediate world, actually capable of understanding God’s plan for the whole universe? He addresses the problem logically in the remaining stanzas.

2. Any man who presumes to understand God’s point of view doesn’t believe that God has created a unique place for each of his creations. We must begin by admitting we can only perceive a “part . . ., and not a whole,” (l. 60) and trust that whatever order we can perceive is a reflection of God’s overall plan.

3. No other animals presume to second-guess God through science or philosophy. Even less “civilized” humans (the “poor Indian” of line 99) accept that Nature is the best way to understand God.

4. One who realizes his proper place in God’s creation will be happier; it is “In pride, in reasoning pride” alone that humans lose their way to God (l. 123).

5. Men are prone to believe that the universe was created for their exclusive use. We are tempted to call things that cause us grief or fear “evil,” but this only exposes our limited point of view. It’s none of our business why God creates terrible things like earthquakes or floods — we must trust that they’re part of a larger plan.

6. In fact, all human unhappiness stems from wanting to be or have something humans are not meant to be or have. Happiness lies in wanting only “what his nature and his state can bear” (l. 192).

7. One proof of God’s existence is that there are objects in our world too large, or small, or high, or low for humans to perceive. Therefore, some other force must have created the universe for the use of a variety of creatures.

8. Pope describes the “vast chain of being” (l. 237), which is similar to (though not exactly the same as) the Renaissance scala naturae. Each link of the chain is necessary for the strength of the whole — no one is more necessary than any other.

9. Pope completes his metaphor: “All are but parts of one stupendous whole/ Whose body Nature is, and God the soul” (ll. 265-6).

10. He concludes with an exhortation to the reader to take comfort in the knowledge that the universe is the result of a benevolent and orderly design (even though we might not see it), and that “Whatever IS, is RIGHT.

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