Scriblerian Cognition
Pope, Swift, Arbuthnot and Self-Knowledge

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Abstract   Members of the Scriblerus club were sceptical about the power of reason and about fashionable get-knowledgeable-quick schemes. For Swift in particular, scientific projectors were motivated more by the passion of pride than by a desire for truth. But some members of the group expressed a different attitude in their non-satirical works. Alexander Pope and John Arbuthnot reflected on knowledge – especially self-knowledge – and found a positive role for the passions. Arbuthnot's poem *Know Thyself* explicitly addresses the relationship between the bodily, affective self and knowledge. Both Arbuthnot in his poem and Pope in his *Essay on Man* employ the image of a maze to symbolise the difficulty of understanding human nature. This essay will consider how Pope, in his *Essay on Man*, addresses questions raised by Arbuthnot and Swift about the relations between the passions and cognition. In particular it will consider which takes priority – passion or reason – in the process that leads to knowledge. The notions of process and progress are also at issue in Pope's account of the development of the arts and sciences. The essay will also analyse the tension between the maze and the plan – the experience of confusion versus the knowledge of a structure. I will suggest that the apparent scepticism about knowledge that Pope evokes in his rhetorical question at the start of the *Essay* is partly worked out or circumvented through the use of structural devices that attempt to arrive at certainty. The prose arguments, concluding statements and maxims suggest that the *Essay* arrives at a truth that was already known.

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1   The Maze and the Plan

We know that the Scriblerians were highly sceptical about knowledge and reason and were especially critical about currently fashionable schemes. Jonathan Swift was particularly sceptical about attempts to find a short-cut to knowledge. When Gulliver visits the Grand Academy of Lagado, he reports:

> The first Man I saw was of a meagre Aspect, with sooty Hands and Face, his Hair and Beard long, ragged, and singed in several Places. His Clothes, Shirt, and Skin, were all of the same Colour. He had been Eight Years upon

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a Project for extracting Sun-Beams out of Cucumbers, which were to be put into Vials hermetically sealed, and let out to warm the Air in raw inclement Summers. He told me, he did not doubt in Eight Years more, that he should be able to supply the Governor's Gardens with Sun-shine, at a reasonable Rate: but he complained that his Stock was low, and entreated me to give him something as an Encouragement to Ingenuity, especially since this had been a very dear Season for Cucumbers. (Swift 2012, III, v, 259-60)

By making the academy resemble Bedlam, Swift suggests that scientific projectors are motivated by the passions of self-love, pride, and greed which over-power reason and lead to madness. Gulliver describes the academy in affectless prose, suggesting that he is not as horrified as perhaps he should be. His uncritical acceptance of the folly of the projectors is also the target of Swift's satire.

But some members of the group expressed a different attitude in their non-satirical works. Alexander Pope and John Arbuthnot reflected on knowledge – especially self-knowledge – and found a positive role for the passions. Arbuthnot's poem *Know Thyself* explicitly addresses the relationship between the bodily, affective self and knowledge. He begins by asking some of the key questions that agitated the Enlightenment (and thinkers in all ages):

> What am I? how produc'd? and for what End?
> Whence drew I Being? to what Period tend?
> Am I th'abandon'd Orphan of blind Chance,
> Drop'd by wild Atoms, in disorder'd Dance?
> Or from an endless Chain of Causes wrought,
> And of unthinking Substance, born with Thought?
> By Motion which began without a Cause,
> Supremely wise, without Design, or Laws.
> Am I but what I seem, mere Flesh and Blood;
> A branching Channel, with a mazy Flood?
> (Arbuthnot 1734, ll. 1-10)[1]

At the beginning of his poetic exploration of self-knowledge, thoughts of atomism and materialism make Arbuthnot feel lost. Similarly, Pope's *Essay on Man* opens with a vision of a maze:

> Awake! my St. John! leave all meaner things
> To low ambition and the pride of Kings.
> Let us (since Life can little more supply

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[1] For a discussion of this poem, its indebtedness to Pascal, and Pope's possible revisions, see Beattie 1935, 376-82.

> 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.
> (Pope 2016, I, ll. 1-8)

After this initially leisurely rambling rumination, Pope poses his key questions about the source of knowledge and the relations between (implicitly rational) knowledge and (implicitly bodily) self:

> Say first, of God above, or Man below,
> What can we reason, but from what we know?
> (ll. 17-18)

Knowledge begins in self-knowledge. The natural philosopher might argue that man in his earthly aspect is the measure of all and the basis of reason; the moralist and satirist might maintain that unless man knows his limitations, he knows nothing. This essay will consider how Pope, in his *Essay on Man*, addresses questions raised by Arbuthnot and Swift about the relations between the passions and cognition. In particular it will consider which takes priority – passion or reason – in the process that leads to knowledge. It will also analyse the tension between the maze and the plan – the experience of confusion versus the knowledge of a structure. I will suggest that the apparent uncertainty about knowledge that Pope evokes in his rhetorical question at the start of the *Essay* is partly worked out or circumvented through the use of structural devices that attempt to arrive at certainty.

The maze is frequently used as a metaphor for mental confusion and philosophical labyrinths in poetry of the long eighteenth century. Thus, Milton's devils reason

> Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,
> Fixed Fate, Free Will, Foreknowledge absolute,
> And found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost.
> (Milton 1970, 115-6, II, ll. 559-61)[2]

Samuel Johnson quotes Milton in his Review of Soame Jenyns' *A Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*:

> The author has, indeed, engaged in a disquisition, in which we need not
> wonder if he fails, in the solution of questions on which philosophers

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2   For similar images of mental mazes and labyrinths, see Brad Pasanek's on-line database: *The Mind is a Metaphor*: http://metaphors.iath.virginia.edu/metaphors (2018-03-22). Milton also refers to mazes and labyrinths in *Paradise Lost*, IV, l. 239; V, ll. 620-4, IX, l.499, X, l. 830.

have employed their abilities from the earliest times.

"And found no end, in wandering mazes lost."

He denies, that man was created *perfect*, because the system requires subordination. (Johnson 2005, 399)[3]

While seeming to absolve Jenyns of blame for failing to solve problems that had confounded philosophers for ages, Johnson hints at a deeper criticism by implicitly comparing Jenyns' speculations to those of Milton's devils. The particular relevance of Johnson's criticism here is that Johnson considered Jenyns' *Free Enquiry* "little more than a paraphrase of Pope's epistles, or, yet less than a paraphrase, a mere translation of poetry into prose" (399). Thinkers of such different stripes as Johnson and Voltaire, and more recent critics such as Laura Brown (1985), have objected to the arguments maintained in Pope's *Essay*.[4] One of the key points of contention is the way the theory of the Great Chain of Being naturalises social inequality and subordination. This is not the place for a full examination of the ethical and political problems raised by Pope's *Essay*, but it is worth noting the questions Johnson raises about the implicit connections between the Chain of Being, social hierarchy and degrees of knowledge. He asks just how big is "the portion of ignorance necessary to make the condition of the lower classes of mankind safe to the publick, and tolerable to themselves"? (Johnson 2005, 408). Precisely what "degree of knowledge" will enable them to fit comfortably in the providential scale or subordination? He opines: "I believe it may be sometimes found, that a *little learning is*, to a poor man, a *dangerous thing*" (409). Here, and later in his Review, Johnson turns Pope against himself, quoting his *Essay on Criticism* against his *Essay on Man*.[5]

Johnson identified damaging inconsistencies in Jenyns' *Free Enquiry* which he implies apply equally to Pope's *Essay*. He declared that although he does not mean "to reproach this author for not knowing what is equally hidden from learning and from ignorance", Jenyns "has told us of the benefits of evil, which no man feels, and relations between distant parts of the universe, which he cannot himself conceive" (Johnson 2005, 418). Just

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3 Johnson's review of Jenyns' *A Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* (1756) was first published in *The Literary Magazine, or, Universal Review*, XIII-XIV (1757).

4 For Voltaire's discussion of Pope with Rousseau and marginal comments on the *Essay* in his copy of Pope's Works 1735, see Pope 2016, cii-iii, 10-11, 13, 15, 18, 21, 23.

5 "Surely, a man who seems not completely master of his own opinion, should have spoken more cautiously of omnipotence, nor have presumed to say what it could perform, or what it could prevent. I am in doubt, whether those, who stand highest in *the scale of being*, speak thus confidently of the dispensations of their maker: 'For fools rush in, where angels fear to tread'" (Johnson 2005, 414). In his *Essay on Man*, Pope calls his readers or man in general 'fool' on at least six occasions.

as Jenyns claims for himself degrees of knowledge which are not only not available to the lower orders, but are not humanly possible, Pope seems to privilege himself with a God's eye point of view. He suggests that while 'man' is lost in the maze, he and Bolingbroke are in possession of a map. The suggestion that he can rise above the scene to comprehend the relationships between the passions and cognition might open him to accusations that, like Swift's projectors, his mind is clouded by the passion of pride.

Readers have long recognised other contradictions within the *Essay on Man*. One of the most notable is that the argument made in Epistle I that man cannot see God's plan conflicts with the advice offered in Epistle IV that happiness lies in submitting to God's plan. In his richly annotated and critically nimble edition of *An Essay on Man*, Tom Jones acknowledges the inconsistency between the teachings of Pope's first and last Epistles and argues that "The tension is not to be resolved – it is to be recognized as one of the truths of the vision of the fourth Epistle that it was arrived at by means of the first, and that the first lives on as an antagonist even as the more systematic vision is expounded" (Pope 2016, xxiv) Furthermore, Jones encourages us to see Pope as constantly shifting philosophical perspectives throughout the poem:

> There is an important temporal quality to inquisitive or essayistic writing of the kind Pope attempts in the Essay. It was a commonplace of the poetry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that the world changes, that therefore what was the case might not be so any longer, and so some (empirical) truths are temporally successive. Two contradictory statements can both be true of the world, in two or more of its successive states. (xxiii)

One of the most important sources for Pope is, as Maynard Mack also acknowledged, Montaigne's 'essayism' (Pope 1950; Mack 1985, 82-6). Before I turn to consider in what ways and to what extent Pope also adopts Montaigne's scepticism about reason and human knowledge, I want to examine the temporal quality Jones identifies by considering the relationship between passion and cognition in terms of succession. In what way is temporal order of the operation of passion and cognition related to larger questions of order in the *Essay on Man*?

2 "And Hence Let Reason Late Instruct Mankind": Order, Temporality and Knowledge

The relations between reason and the passions underpinned some of the ethical and epistemological questions that animated discussion for much of the Enlightenment. Does virtue lie in following or suppressing the passions? What part do reason and the passions play in arriving at knowledge? (Knowledge being the destination of the cognitive processes). Pope assumes that human nature is binary; it is motivated by both reason and passion, which are engaged in "elemental strife" (Pope 2016, 18, I, l. 169). At times he seems to endorse the traditional teaching of the Church that the passions are dangerous and must be suppressed by reason if man wants to live a virtuous life or even to achieve anything. One key issue in the relation of emotion to cognition or passion to reason is the issue of priority. Which comes first: thought or feeling? What Pope is suggesting about the temporal dimension on both the micro and macro levels is complex and hard to untangle. On the one hand, the poem argues that reason achieves something that is then destroyed by passion: "What Reason weaves, by Passion is undone" (Pope 2016, 33, II, l. 43). It is almost as if Reason, Penelope like, weaves her tapestry by day but her Passion for her missing Ulysses causes her to destroy it each night. On the other, he argues at some length in Epistle II that passion acts before reason is engaged. That seems to be the burden of the lines that open the second section of his second Epistle: "Two Principles in human nature reign; | Self-Love to urge, and Reason, to restrain" (34, II, ll. 53-4). The argument rocks from passion to reason repeatedly: "Self-love, the spring of motion, acts the soul; | Reason's comparing balance rules the whole" (34-5, II, ll. 59-60); "Self-love still stronger, as its objects nigh; | Reason's at distance, and in prospect lie" (35, II, ll. 71-2); the "rising tempest" of Passion "puts in act the soul"; Passion is the "Gale," while Reason is the "Card" or compass that provides direction (37, II, ll. 105-8). Putting Passion first might make it seem more important because it has priority. However, by putting Reason in second place, making it act as a check to Passion means that it actually dominates. It is "The God within the mind" (44, II, l. 204) who is both first and last.

While Epistle II treats of the relationship between Reason and Passion in the life of the individual, Epistle III considers the relationship between Reason and Passion in the life of the species. Or rather, it compares Reason and Instinct; we might ask whether Pope considers them to be equivalent. Structurally, Passion and Instinct occupy the same position in relation to Reason, and they are similar in modes of operation: in Epistle III, Reason is sluggishly slow to engage, whereas Instinct readily volunteers (57, III, ll. 85-8). The passions are instincts – innate, natural and a necessary part of human action, including moral activity, according to Pope – and they

should not be repressed. Moreover, Pope goes on to suggest, they are vital to knowledge. When he comes on to discuss the development of knowledge (the sciences) he employs temporal markers ("then" occurs more times in this Epistle than in any of the others) and implies a sequence of events. Yet he does not seem to me consistently to describe development. In a passage which combines allusions to the classical golden age with echoes of Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*, Pope declares:

> 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.
> (61, III, ll. 148-51)

So not all passions were present in the state of nature – pride he claims, emerged later, and it emerged with the growth of knowledge – what he calls here "Arts". He implies a temporal sequence when he refers to "the [morally inferior] man of times to come" (61, III, l. 161) and when he describes the emergence of increasingly tyrannical and superstitious political systems in section VI and in the restoration of the natural system by superior beings:

> 'Twas then, the studious head or gen'rous mind,
> Follow'r of God or friend of human-kind,
> Poet or Patriot, rose but to restore
> The Faith and Moral, Nature gave before.
> (69, III, ll. 283-6)

This statement is further complicated since, while it ostensibly describes an action in the past, it is probably designed to encourage the studious, generous, etc. to action in the future, an action perhaps to be led by the Patriot Bolingbroke and Poet Pope.

If we apply pressure to Pope's account of the growth of human knowledge in Epistle III, section V it emerges that this narrative of change is in tension with the idea of the divinely implanted duo of passions and reason. In a key passage in the third Epistle, Pope presents a conjectural account of the rise of knowledge, but in a form that I think encapsulates a problem thinkers then and now have grappled with: how to square epistemology with the history of science. That is, if you maintain that the structure of knowledge is embodied in the structure of the mind/body dyad, and that this original structure survives intact in modern man, how do you reconcile it with the recognition that man has evolved and knowledge has developed over time? In a way, it is a version of the nature-nurture debate. The architects of the great French *Encyclopédie* encountered this conundrum. Denis

Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert employed the old diagrammatic rep-
resentation of knowledge in the form of a tree to symbolise the structure of
knowledge. Robert Darnton describes how they adapted Francis Bacon's
division of knowledge into branches deriving not from the objects of knowl-
edge but from the faculties of the mind: memory, the source of historical
knowledge (including natural history); imagination, the source of the arts
(referred to as "poetry"); and reason (for them the principle faculty), the
source of philosophy comprising divine, natural and human philosophy
(Darnton 1984, 198-201; d'Alembert 1995, 50-1; cf. Yeo 2001, 27-32). Onto
this implicitly static Baconian structure of mental faculties, they grafted
the Lockean epistemology of sensation and reflection. Thus, not only is
knowledge rooted in physical feeling, it has a temporal dimension because
mental reflection comes after sensation to grow knowledge. Moreover, in
his *Discourse préliminaire* to the *Encyclopédie* (1751), after mapping out
a logical model of knowledge, d'Alembert sketched a hypothetical his-
tory of human knowledge that resembles Pope's in several respects. Like
Pope, d'Alembert derives both science and ethics from epistemology; he
stresses the importance of instinct and describes the successive invention
of sciences such as physics, agriculture and geometry as need arose and
reflection on experience made possible (d'Alembert 1995, 8-45). After his
analysis of the deep structures of knowledge (in mental faculties) and his
long view (of the history of knowledge), d'Alembert argued that it was pos-
sible to master the three-dimensional field by means of an encyclopaedic
arrangement of knowledge which

> consists of collecting knowledge into the smallest area possible and of
> placing the philosopher at a vantage point, so to speak, high above this
> vast labyrinth, whence he can perceive the principle sciences and the arts
> simultaneously. From there… he can discern the general branches of hu-
> man knowledge, the points that separate or unite them; and sometimes he
> can even glimpse the secrets that relate them to one another. It is a kind
> of world map which is to show the principal countries, their position and
> their mutual dependence, the road that leads directly from one to another.
> This road is often cut by a thousand obstacles. (d'Alembert 1995, 47)

This image of the labyrinth and map resembles that of the maze and plan
with which Pope opens the *Essay on Man*. At this point in the poem, Pope
does not yet position himself high above the field of knowledge. Rather,
while he explores the "heights", they are "giddy" rather than stable and he
also operates at ground level, beating "this ample field" trying to discover
what it conceals. Moreover, his tree of knowledge does not resemble the in-
tellectual schema of the *encyclopédistes*, rather it recalls the Biblical tree
of forbidden knowledge. Against Pope's description of the "Garden, tempt-
ing with forbidden fruit," Voltaire wrote in his copy of Pope's *Works*: "mais,

mon cher pope, | si c'est un fruit deffendu, tu ny dois donc pas toucher"
(Pope 2016, 7, I, l. 8, fn.) However, by the third Epistle, Pope seems to
have constructed for himself a vantage point from which "he can perceive
the principle sciences and the arts simultaneously." Yet Pope's response
to the problem of the relation between the innate and the acquired differs
from that of the *encyclopédistes*. It is not just that he is less systematic
or less radical, he is also less optimistic about the triumph of reason and
the progress of knowledge. In several respects, his model is the inverse of
that of the *philosophes*. D'Alembert moves through philosophical history
to a logical model, enabling him to combine the genealogical order of the
growth of branches of knowledge with the epistemological structure of the
operation of the mind under the rubric of encyclopaedic order (Darnton
1984, 205; d'Alembert 1995, 46-7). He also insisted on the triumph of
civilisation and the importance of men of letters and *philosophes*. Pope's
approach is almost the inverse of this model.

Pope argues at length in Epistle III that human knowledge is derived
from Nature. But where d'Alembert derives knowledge from an abstrac-
tion – "the nature of the thinking principle within us" (8) – Pope derives
the history of knowledge from natural history in a beguilingly sensuous
passage of intensely patterned verse:

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 plow, the worm to weave;
"Learn of the little Nautilus to sail,
"Spread the thin oar, and catch the driving gale."
(Pope 2016, 62-3, III, ll. 169-78)

Enacting the kind of interchange that he claims occurred in an imagined
state of nature, Pope turns creatures into farmers, doctors, architects,
weavers and sailors so that they can teach their arts to man. Mini-beasts
can even instruct man in the arts of politics and law; "The Ant's republic"
warns of the dangers of communism while "the realm of Bees" models
the wise monarchy (III, ll. 183-90). However, the mole does not actively
teach man to plough nor the nautilus to sail; Pope is not depicting talking
animals; rather, it is Nature that speaks. Actually, the mechanism of this
knowledge transfer is more complex. Although "the voice of Nature" seems
to be an external authority instructing man, Nature here is synonymous
with Instinct, thus it is an aspect of the human, as is Reason. Reason is ul-

timately the active principle, for "To copy Instinct then was Reason's part". The passage seems to sketch a narrative of development. Pope implies that man existed in a state of ignorance and then he gradually acquired art: "See him from Nature rising slow to Art!" (62, III, l. 169). The arts that nature tells man to learn follow a traditional order based on need: nutrition, medicine, architecture, farming, the manufacture of clothing, navigation, social organisation, politics, etc. There is an implied sequence in which Instinct precedes Reason: "And hence let Reason late instruct Mankind" (63, III, l. 180). However, any temporal dimension collapses in the couplet which closes this chain of ideas and opens the next section:

> Great Nature spoke; observant Men obey'd;
> Cities were built, Societies were made
> (64, III, ll. 199-200).

While the shift to the past tense implies that the observant men existed in an earlier era from the reader, the caesural comma implies that cities and societies were constructed at the same time as each other and as the arts and sciences. Moreover, Nature does not say "learn this, then learn that and then learn this other thing". Everything is to be learned at once, and once learned, instantly put into effect. *An Essay on Man* is not a narrative poem. Unlike its great predecessor in the poetry of theodicy, *Paradise Lost*, it avoids Biblical history as well as eschewing Revelation, nor does it survey the development of knowledge from the Ancients to the Moderns. What it seems to do rather is derive human knowledge from natural history and 'history' in this usage means a systematic rather than a chronological study.

3 "In Vain Thy Reason Finer Webs Shall Draw": the Question of Scepticism

Scholars have noticed that Pope shares his regard for the natural abilities of animals with Montaigne. Maynard Mack acknowledged Montaigne's 'essayism' as a key influence (Pope 1950; Mack 1985, 82-6). Mack and Jones identify numerous parallels between Epistle III and Montaigne's "Apology for Raimond Sebonde," which Pope read in Charles Cotton's translation (1685-1986). In particular, they see Montaigne behind Pope's rebuttal of proud man's assumption that animals were created for his convenience: "While Man exclaims, 'See all things for my use!' | 'See man for mine!' replies a pamper'd goose" (III, ll. 45-6; cf. Montaigne 1685-1686, II, 218, 348-

9).**6** Fred Parker also notes parallels between the "attack on anthropocentrism pursued in the first Epistle," and the "account of instinct in the third" and Montaigne's "Raimond Sebonde." For Parker, these parallels support a larger claim that Pope is a sceptical thinker who embraced "the fluidity of mental process" (Parker 2003, 6). One of Parker's most striking claims is that Pope's maxim "Whatever IS, is RIGHT" (I, l. 294, cf. IV, l. 394) is not so much "a reasonable consequence of what he supposedly already proved," as Bolingbroke called it (Parker 2003, 30 quoting Bolingbroke 1754, IV, 258 fn.) but rather "an experience, not an inference – that his scepticism delivers", or even an "intuition" rather than a logical deduction (31, 44).

Montaigne was one of Pope's favourite authors (Mack 1985, 82) and Pope is certainly critical of the pride man takes in his knowledge, a knowledge that he argues derives from animals' natural instincts:

> "Yet go! and thus o'er all the creatures sway,
> "Thus let the wiser make the rest obey,
> "And for those Arts meer Instinct could afford,
> "Be crown'd as Monarchs, or as Gods ador'd".
> (Pope 2016, 63, III, ll. 195-8)

This scepticism might derive from Montaigne, but neither Mack nor Jones cite him as a major source for the history of science passage I discuss above or for this sarcastic rebuke of those proud of human reason which rounds off this section. Jones also argues that Pope "does not go as far as Montaigne in asserting the superiority of the passions over reason" (Pope 2016, lxvi). Moreover, Parker's conclusion that *An Essay on Man* is a profoundly sceptical work (rather than one that includes sceptical passages) is arrived at by discounting a quarter of the poem and all of the accompanying prose. The whole of Epistle IV is dismissed in a footnote because in it, "Pope loses the sceptical thread. The Epistle abandons the central emphasis on the inadequacies of reason, lacks any equivalent to passion or instinct as a strong disposing natural force, and struggles to find arguments that support "whatever is, is right" (Parker 2003, 56 fn. 73). Similarly, Parker discounts the last third of Pope's *Epistle to Cobham: Of the Knowledge of Characters of Men* – a poem related thematically and structurally to *An Essay on Man*. Both poems discuss the theory of the ruling passion and were supposed to form part of Pope's projected "Opus

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6 Mack identifies Montaigne as a source or parallel for Pope 1950, III, ll. 49-52, 57-66, 91-2, 101-2, 151-60, 167-8, 169 ff., 183, 189-90. Jones cites Montaigne less frequently; see Pope 2016, III, ll. 27-46, 89-98, 172. They both cite numerous additional parallels for the ideas Pope expresses in these passages. Although Pope denies that animals are made for man's use at III, ll. 43-8, describing them as models for his knowledge in III, ll. 169-98 might contradict that claim.

Magnus", as he called it in a 1734 letter to Swift. This series of "Ethic Epistles" was supposed, according to Reuben Brower, to "have treated almost every conceivable aspect of human life", but only the *Essay on Man* and four *Moral Essays* were completed (Brower 1959, 241, quoted in Leranbaum 1977, 1). According to Parker, "the ruling passion is only the secondary subject of this *Epistle*; its main subject is scepticism, and the first two-thirds of the Epistle constitute the most sustained expression of radical scepticism in all of Pope" (Parker 2003, 32). So, in this reading, Pope in his serious moral-philosophical works is as sceptical about the power of human reason to arrive at knowledge as is Swift in his satires.

4 "Know then This Truth": Signs of Certainty in the *Essay*

There are times in his *Essay on Man* in which Pope does sound sceptical and even satirical about the relationship between the passions and cognition, addressing his readers as fools on several occasions. He places man in a very uncomfortable position on the "isthmus of a middle state" at the opening of Epistle II. There is a kind of tragic slapstick to the way that Pope's Man falls between the two stools of Mind and Body and ends up as "The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!" (Pope 2016, 29, II, ll. 3-18). In Epistle IV, Man's attempts to rise make him God's laughing-stock: "Heav'n still with laughter the vain toil surveys, | And buries madmen in the heaps they raise" (79, IV ll. 75-6). Yet, I suggest that this attitude is offset by signs of confidence and certainty that are not only scattered through the four Epistles but built into the structure of the *Essay* as a whole. The overall plan of the *Essay* is seen most clearly in his prose arguments (a dimension of the poem Parker overlooks). There is a set of topics, or rather frames in which Pope considers man: the Epistles consider the nature and state of man with respect to the universe, himself as an individual, society and finally happiness. The use of the terms "Design" and "Argument" for his prose outlines perhaps suggest the extent to which Pope hoped his Epistles would be as much Treatise as Essay. "Argument" can, of course, just mean the theme or a summary of the subject matter of a book. Yet, when Pope sets out a series of numbered propositions that indicate his line of reasoning, it also means "a connected series of statements intended to establish a position" (*OED*, s.v. "argument", 4). Moreover, he indicates some of the conclusions to be arrived at: "*The consequence of all, the* absolute submission *due to Providence, both as to our* present and future state;" "*That however, the* Ends *of* Providence *and* general Good *are answered in our Passions and Imperfections*" (Pope 2016, 5-6, I.x; 28, II.vi. Italics as in original). The sense of an orderly progress towards increasing knowledge is underscored by the way Pope uses the end of each Epistle to conclude the argument on that topic with an epigrammatic statement. The rightness

of the arguments of the second and third Epistles is underscored by the invocation of divine authority:

> Ev'n mean Self-love becomes, by force divine,
> The scale to measure others wants by thine.
> See! and confess, one comfort still must rise,
> 'Tis this, Tho' Man's a fool, yet GOD IS WISE.
> (49-50, II, ll. 291-4)

Epistle III similarly ends with God, though the tone is less aggressive in this image of charity and mutual support:

> Thus God and Nature link'd the gen'ral frame,
> And bade Self-love and Social be the same.
> (72, III, ll. 317-8)

We might also see these concluding apothegms as themselves being structured into a larger argument by the particular formation of the conclusions of the first and last Epistles. The first Epistle ends with the memorable dictum that perhaps Pope hopes to be taken as axiomatic: "Whatever IS, is RIGHT." This contentious claim is lent a sense of inevitability by the rhetorical pattern that leads up to it:

> All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
> All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;
> All Discord, Harmony, not understood;
> All partial Evil, universal Good:
> And spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,
> One truth is clear, "Whatever IS, is RIGHT".
> (26-7, I, ll. 289-95)

The repetition of "All" imparts a sense of orchestral magnificence and indisputable finality (like the kettle drums appearing at the end of a symphony). The excitement in the verse could provoke a passionate response in the reader that would carry the rational argument to the heart. Epistle IV gains the sense of a conclusion by returning to the social relationship with which the poem began and then revisiting the end of each of the Epistles in turn:

> Shall then this verse to future age pretend
> Thou wert my guide, philosopher, and friend?
> That urg'd by thee, I turn'd the tuneful art
> From sounds to things, from fancy to the heart;
> For Wit's false mirror held up Nature's light;

Shew'd erring Pride, WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT;
That REASON, PASSION, answer one great aim;
That true SELF-LOVE and SOCIAL are the same;
That VIRTUE only makes our Bliss below;
And all our Knowledge is, OURSELVES TO KNOW.
(97-8, IV, ll. 389-99)

The repetition of the lessons enforced at the end of the previous Epistles suggests that they have passed firmly into knowledge and the avowal that Pope learnt them from Bolingbroke enacts the social relationship which Pope argues is crucial to both virtue and knowledge. What were presented as contradictions and oppositions earlier are now harmonised into one complementary system ("That Reason, Passion, answer one great Aim; | That true Self-love and Social are the same"). Rather than being set against each other, reason and passion now look like equals because of the syntax and punctuation of the line. Pope's only question now is whether or not his verse will be equal to the task of demonstrating these truths to future ages.

Although Parker dismisses Epistle IV altogether (Parker 2003, 41, fnn. 72-3), I suggest that, by drawing things together, it arrives at a conclusion. While Pope's solutions to the problem of the relations between reason and passion may not fully convince, it seems to me that he does present them as a solution. Similarly, his *Epistle to Cobham* raises a question: how can we really know the characters of men? He provides the answer: by identifying their ruling passions, we can know men's true characters. Pope first identifies man as unknowable, both because the "Quick whirls, and shifting eddies, of our minds" (Pope 1951, 17, l. 24 [30]) make us too difficult to see and because our own subjective characters make us ineffective observers: "All manners take a tincture from our own" (l. 33). But instead of throwing up his hands, he presents the ruling passion as the clue which "unravels all the rest" (30, l. 178). It is the clue also in Epistle II of the *Essay on Man* and the two poems were closely linked. The *Epistle to Cobham* was published eight days before the final Epistle of the *Essay* and both were part of the projected larger schematic work which would compose his ethic scheme.

5   The End

In a way, the problem with Pope's *Essay* is that it is not sceptical enough. It is too certain about its own 'plan' of the relationship between the passions and reason fully to embody the 'maze' of human understanding. It is not just that, as Jones argues, Pope "does not go as far as Montaigne in asserting the superiority of the passions over reason" (Pope 2016, lxvi), but it is also that the central trope of the poem – the Great Chain of Be-

ing – presents an image of fixity and imparts a hierarchical structure to the whole poem. Pope seems, despite his differences from the *philosophes* to imagine himself at "a vantage point, so to speak, high above this vast labyrinth" like d'Alembert's encyclopaedist. From this vantage point, he informs the reader of the 'secrets' he has discerned in the form of oracular pronouncements and commands. He frequently resorts to the imperative:

Know thy own point...
(26, I, l. 283)

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan...
(28, II, l. 1)

Know, Nature's children all divide her care...
(54, III, l. 43)

Know, all enjoy that pow'r which suits them best...
(57, III, l. 80)

Know, all the good that individuals find...
(80, IV, l. 77)

Know then this truth (enough for Man to know)...
(94, IV, l. 309)

The issue here is not just one of tone, but also the rhetoric implies a conception of knowledge as something that can be achieved in an instant. The command "Know" shortcuts the cognitive process. In his third Epistle, the history of knowledge is reduced to a single utterance: "Learn," says Nature and knowledge is achieved in one go (62-3, III, ll. 172-7). Time is telescoped by this use of imperative. While Pope is not attempting to achieve the kinds of short cuts to knowledge that Swift's projectors aim at in their vain experiments, the mutually constituting interchanges between passions and cognition do not take place. In these passages of didactic rhetoric, it is not for the reader to discover things himself, but for the poet to tell him.

The *Essay* concludes: "And all our knowledge is, OURSELVES TO KNOW". Arbuthnot uses the Delphic maxim as his title: "Know Thyself". The structure and the theory of knowledge implied in Arbuthnot's poem and in Pope's are quite different. Where Pope presents a four-part abstract argument, Arbuthnot traces his changing thoughts and his increasing mood of renunciation of himself and the world. He begins with urgent questioning: "What am I? how produc'd? and for what end?" (Arbuthnot 1743, 1, l. 1), then rejects the answers other people give him about whether he should

aspire to the divine or descend to his animal appetites: "Between those wide Extremes the length is such, | I find I know too little or too much" (5, ll. 79 80). He finds the way out of his painful dilemma is to pray and God sends enlightenment in the form of his "sacred page" (revealed religion) (l. 102). This dying physician learns to reconcile himself to his dual material and spiritual nature by learning to cultivate the right passions. In his last line he instructs himself: "Regain by Meekness what you lost by Pride" (10, l. 137), thus ending on a note of Christian resignation. Arbuthnot's explicit message echoes that of Swift's satires: from a Christian perspective, the passion of pride is a sin; Swift deems it to be the source of the God-challenging reasoning of the new science. Moreover, Swift, whose humiliating comparisons between man and beasts in Gulliver's "Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms" might also owe something to Montaigne's scepticism about human reason, does not spare his narrator. Even though he has repeatedly witnessed misplaced pride, Gulliver declares at the end of his *Travels*, "I am not a little pleased that this Work of mine can possibly meet with no Censurers… I write for the noblest End, to inform and instruct Mankind, over whom I may, without Breach of Modesty, pretend to some Superiority" (Swift 2012, 438). Unusually, Pope does not employ much self-implicating irony in his *Essay*. Figuratively, he accords himself a God's eye point of view from which he can see the plan of the mighty maze and that contracts the growth of knowledge into a single point of time in the creation of the world. Yet, crucially, that position of knowledge does not result from the *philosophes*' confidence in the power of reason, rather it too emerges from faith. His is a fideistic scepticism that is at the service of discovering a truth that is already established.

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