



## Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee

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Volume 8 | Issue 1

Article 3


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January 2017

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Sierra Billingslea  
sbilli1@students.towson.edu

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#### Recommended Citation

Billingslea, Sierra (2017) "Echoes of Leibniz in Pope's Essay on Man: Criticism and Cultural Shift in the Eighteenth Century," *Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/pursuit/vol8/iss1/3>

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## Echoes of Leibniz in Pope's *Essay on Man*: Criticism and Cultural Shift in the Eighteenth Century

SIERRA BILLINGSLEA

Towson University, Towson, MD  
sbilli1@students.towson.edu

Advisor: Dr. George Hahn

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This paper is an examination of the intellectual relationship between Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man* and the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. This relationship was accentuated by Crousaz, a Swiss critic, who accused Pope of plagiarizing Leibniz's misguided philosophy due to the evidence of Leibniz's Principle of the Best, Principle of Sufficient Reason, and Principle of Continuity found within *An Essay on Man*. This paper argues that both Leibniz and Popes' philosophies do not reflect a direct relationship but instead share the spirit of Augustan thought as well as a similar classical upbringing. Crousaz and other critics who criticized the philosophical constructs in the poem, particularly Voltaire, express the drastic social changes that took place around the turn of the century in Europe — a sudden questioning of faith and classical learning brought on by both political changes and natural disaster. In this way, *An Essay on Man* and the related criticism act as a microcosm of the changing ideals of the Augustan Age as it passed into the Enlightenment.

First follow Nature, and your judgement frame  
By her just standard which is still the same;  
Unerring nature, still divinely bright,  
One clear, unchanged, and universal light<sup>i</sup>

Throughout his lifetime as a poet, Alexander Pope emphasized the lack of originality in his works and in the works of all great writers. Like many other writers, he educated himself by imitating the greats, beginning first with pastoral poetry and moving up through the poetic ranks as he mastered each form. Pope studied the works of Virgil and Horace, even writing his own poetics based on Horace's *The Art of Poetry, An Essay On Criticism*, which was defended by Addison in *The Spectator* No. 253, "wit and fine Writing doth not consist so much in advancing Things that are new, as in giving things that are known an agreeable turn."<sup>ii</sup> Pope, like many of his contemporaries, did not aim to create something new, but to update the immutable ideas stated by the ancients to make them more palatable to his audience.<sup>iii</sup> He demonstrated this in many of his works as he climbed the poetic ladder, showing a broad skill in all forms of poetry.

The widely considered "paramount" of Pope's progression is *An Essay on Man*, published in 1733. The *Essay* is a version of a theodicy for the eighteenth century, following the legacy of Lucretius' philosophical poem:

Lucretius provided the frame of reference for the philosophical poem, but his epic gesture, as indeed all epic and heroic gestures, was no longer acceptable to the eighteenth century. The new standards required, as Bolingbroke continues, "that brevity which might be expected in letters, or essays" . . . thus the *Essay on Man* can be seen as an attempt, a successful attempt, to reduce the philosophical epic to the literary tastes of an age that had begun to dispense with the poem of epic dimensions.<sup>iv</sup>

Pope provides an update to Milton's epic theodicy, *Paradise Lost*, which he references frequently in the *Essay*. However, it is with this poem that Pope's imitation of others becomes an accusation rather than praise. The French philosopher and mathematician Crousaz<sup>v</sup> criticized Pope in his essay "Examen sur l'Essai de M. Pope" and "Commentaire" for his borrowing of Leibniz's flawed philosophy — largely his optimism. Later, Leibniz's optimism is famously parodied by Voltaire in his satire *Candide* in 1759. Voltaire was at first a fan of Pope's, particularly of his *An Essay on Man*, so the sudden shift in thinking seems unusual and alludes to a larger shift in values throughout European cultures.

Today, *An Essay on Man* is considered a flawed work, as highlighted by Solomon's essay "Trivializing *An Essay on Man*." According to Solomon, the new, more critical view is due to the tradition of a flawed reading that began with the Victorians. Both the Victorians and modern scholars attempt to apply contemporary paths of reason to the poem rather than examining its historical and philosophical context. Though, as Pope states in a letter to Warburton on the claims of his association with Leibniz, "I never in my life read a Line of Leibniz, nor understood there was such a Term as Prae-established Harmony, till I found it in Mons. Crousaz's Book,"<sup>vi</sup> Pope nevertheless echoed Leibniz's philosophies in his poem. Shortly after the work was published, the moral themes and optimistic views of the essay were commended, but after a brief time these compliments turned to disparaging remarks. There is a discrepancy between the time when the poem was written and the time that critics began to attack Pope's poem, perhaps indicating that the critics of Pope's poem are of a different period than Pope himself.

Pope, in his work and his life, continually reminisces of a time quickly slipping away from him. He and his close friends in the Scribblers Club<sup>vii</sup> mocked the newly wealthy, the new system of education, and the changing face of literature. During Pope's decline, a shift in style known as Romanticism emerged and rejected all that Pope and his Augustan comrades promoted as "good" literature. It is evident that Pope is the product of a different time as he is both a Tory and a classically trained poet, and that he is entrenched in the ideals of Europe predominant in the Augustan age. Thus, it appears only natural that in his magnum opus he chooses to embody values of Christianity, divine

order and right, and a holistic and rational world view. In embodying these values, Pope also embodies the philosophies of Leibniz, who, like Pope, represented the zeitgeist of the Augustan period of continental Europe – something that the early readers of the *Essay* commented upon.

Like Pope, Leibniz was self-taught and sought a classical education. Leibniz looked back to his philosophical forefathers, particularly Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes to create his own philosophies that in themselves were not wholly original. Thus the relationship between Leibniz and Pope is one of the compatriots standing against a changing Europe rather than that of a madman and his cheap pupil – as many critics seem to suggest. In J. Cameron’s review of Maynard Mack’s analysis of *An Essay on Man*, Cameron writes, “Mr. Mack’s penetrating analysis of the poem is designed to show that it has been enormously undervalued; that in it Pope does ‘write his time’; and that the achievement in terms of his accomplished union of expression with feeling is great both as a formal structure and as being for us the possible occasion of a deep and rich experience.”<sup>viii</sup> The relation between Leibniz and Pope is one of a similar upbringing and education, as well as a cultural assimilation of values. In voicing the essentialist and holistic philosophy of Leibniz – including the notions of morals, selfhood, fatalism, and divine order, Pope truly completed his magnum opus reflecting the intellectual reality of Europe during this time. The critiques that Pope has received on *An Essay on Man* indicate a shift in European culture, away from staunch positivism and philosophical poetics towards empiricism and humanism, not a flaw in Pope’s work itself.

## Context

The intellectual upbringings and educations of Pope and Leibniz were incredibly similar. Both rejected the changing schools – which at this time were turning more towards a practical education than a classical one, emphasizing the scientific, geographical, and new over the older methods of progressing through classics and history. In his overview of Leibniz’s education, Brandon Look writes:

[Leibniz] was given access to his father's extensive library at a young age and proceeded to pore over its contents, particularly the volumes of ancient history ... as the ‘modern’ philosophy of Descartes, Galileo, Gassendi, Hobbes and others had not made a great impact by this time in the German-speaking lands, Leibniz’s philosophical education was chiefly Scholastic in its nature.”<sup>ix</sup>

Leibniz was exposed, for the most part, to the Greek and Roman philosophers, just as Pope was exposed to the Greek and Roman writers.<sup>x</sup> Not allowed to attend a public school such as Eton or university as a Catholic, Pope began his education in the seclusion of Windsor Forest. On the topic of his education, Pope said, “When I had done with my priests I took to rereading by myself ... In a few years I had dipped into a great number of the English, French, Italian, Latin, and Greek poets.”<sup>xi</sup> Pope’s education was classic with the assistance of a Jesuit tutor. Given his Tory leanings toward a classical education, it is probable that his education was similar to the one that Leibniz received in university – a markedly slow march through the ancients. Their similarity of upbringing dissuades some of the claims of Pope’s direct plagiarism of Leibniz as if both were merely seeking to update ancient ideas for their own time period (unconcerned with originality), it would be reasonable to assume their works would be similar. Their unique educational style, deeply set in tradition, also marks these men as academics of the past. Though each is familiar with and deeply rooted in the culture and ideas of Europe up until this time, both resist contemporary shifts in thinking, are politically tied to the aristocracy and favor a classical education.<sup>xii</sup>

## Leibniz’s Philosophy

While they may resist some changes, both Leibniz and Pope are interested in reanimating the ideas of the ancient world to make them more palatable to the tastes of the present. For Pope, this is demonstrated in his artful translations of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* in the choice poetic form of

the period — the heroic couplet. Leibniz makes this evident in his many philosophies, though most conspicuously in his theory of causation, which fed into his theory of theology and the teleological proof of God. Simply, for Leibniz, no single entities or substances interacted on mere chance. “Leibniz put forth a theory of causation that would accommodate the Scientific Revolution’s increasing mathematization of nature, one according to which efficient causes played a dominant role. On the other hand, Leibniz also sought to integrate certain aspects of traditional Aristotelian causation into his philosophy.”<sup>xiii</sup> In Leibniz’s view of causality and harmony, he believed that no bodies or minds had any effect on other bodies or minds, but that there was a cause to the current state of that body or mind. These causes, states, and times were instead programmed into the entity at its conception, meaning that the relations one may see as “cause and effect” are in actuality just one harmonic orchestra of action. This accounts for the increased rationalization and mathematization of beings in the world and the discoveries of the intricate connections between them, while pulling at once from theology and from the ideas of the ancients, namely Aristotle.<sup>xiv</sup> Despite their differing fields, both Leibniz and Pope based their life’s work on the principle of appropriating the past for their present.

### Comparison of Leibniz and Pope

These principles, which are made explicit in Leibniz’s work and are implied in Pope’s, revolve around a teleological principle, and in Leibniz’s case, a complex system of logic. Leibniz’s philosophy can be broken down into four main components — the Principle of the Best, the Predicate-in-Notion Principle, the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, and the Principle of Continuity.<sup>xv</sup> Though there is a fluidity of Leibniz’s work that cannot be dismissed, Pope’s *An Essay on Man* primarily reflects the ideas found in the Principle of the Best, the Principle of Sufficient Reason, and the Principle of Continuity. The Principle of the Best is the theory that is parodied by Voltaire as “the best of all possible worlds.” This theory stands on the Cartesian notion of God as the best and most perfect of all beings: God is the best of all beings, thus God must create the best world. The notion of God creating the best possible world is also exemplified in the Principle of Sufficient Reason, which essentially states that nothing is without reason, though these reasons are usually unknown to human beings. Therefore, each event, reason, and ontological rank feeds into the next, creating the Principle of Continuity. Though Leibniz used this principle to distill an infinity of possible worlds, it can also be applied to the idea of a preprogrammed world: A world ruled by God in which each event is calculated. These principles create what many refer to as the “optimism” of Leibniz’s and Pope’s works — the principle that is so highly critiqued in both.

In *An Essay on Man*, Pope reflects on the Continuity of Actual Existents. The Principle of Continuity, as Leibniz broadly defines it, is the continuous nature of points between two points, which may have sprung from Xeno’s paradox of infinite divisibility. In a letter to Varignon, Leibniz writes:

Continuity of Actual Existents: (c) [W]hen the essential determinations of a being approach those of another so that likewise accordingly all the properties of the first must gradually approach those of the last, it is necessary that all the orders of natural beings form only one chain, in which the different classes, like so many links, connect so closely the one to the other, that it is impossible for the senses and the imagination to fix the precise point where any one begins or ends.<sup>xvi</sup>

In this quotation, Leibniz incorporates the Great Chain of Being into his own philosophy, using the word *chain* in his definition to refer to the continuous variants between hierarchies of beings. This notion has always been prominent throughout literature from Shakespeare to Milton, though not usually under the name “Continuity of Actual Existents.” Its popularity continued in Pope’s time, as *The Spectator* No. 519 attests to:

It is wonderful to observe, by what gradual Progress the World of Life advances through a prodigious Variety of species, before a Creature is formed that is compleat in all its Senses, and even among these there is such a different degree of Perfection

in the Sense, which one Animal enjoys beyond what appears in another, that though the Sense in different Animals be distinguished by the same common Denomination, it seems almost of a different nature.<sup>xvii</sup>

In the first epistle, Pope refers to the Great Chain of Being repeatedly, “Is the great chain, that draws all to agree / And drawn supports upheld by God or thee?”<sup>xviii</sup> Here, Pope directly references the Great Chain of Being and inserts man into it, alluding to one of the main themes of the first epistle – man’s pride in thinking that he may step outside the great chain and question God, as many contemporary scientists attempted to do. As stated in Lovejoy’s study of the Great Chain of Being in the eighteenth century, “Since all gaps thus disappeared from nature, there could be none between man and other animals. He could differ from them only in degree, and from the higher animals in an almost insensible degree, and only with respect to certain attributes.”<sup>xix</sup> There is, admittedly, an irony to Pope’s and Leibniz’s declarations of the great chain in conjunction with their admittance that, as human beings, neither can truly understand God’s reasoning. However, they each appear to have reached conclusions justifying the great chain through both a cultural shroud and their own observations. But their admittance that man is not omniscient may also account for what apparent inconsistencies or gaps critics have found in their work. Just as Pope critiques the scientist who attempts to know all there is, empirical scientists critique Pope and Leibniz for not attempting to do so.

From the Principle of Continuity springs the infinity of variations of possible things. Leibniz believed in an infinity of possible worlds.<sup>xx</sup> Pope also reflects this in his poem;

Thro’ worlds unnumber’d though God be known,  
‘Tis ours to trace Him only in our own.  
He, who thro’ vast immensity can pierce,  
See worlds on worlds compose one universe.”<sup>xxi</sup>

These couplets address an infinity of possible worlds and cast the omniscient nature of God in a more ambiguous light. Pope appears to imply that these possible worlds are in existence and are part of one composite universe, yet by implying that these other worlds are worlds only to be seen by God, alludes to the possibility of these worlds existing merely in God’s conception. Pope means that these worlds are not worlds built but, as Leibniz refers to them, possible worlds.

The unknowingness of man and the Great Chain of Being are the foundations for Pope’s and Leibniz’s next rationalized transition. The Principle of the Best follows the Cartesian conception of God as a most supreme and perfect being and that which is at the top of the Great Chain of Being (something with which Pope evidently agrees). Leibniz extends Descartes’ proof of the existence of God through perfection, assuming that God, as the most perfect and best of all beings, must have chosen the best and most perfect of all worlds to create and orchestrate. This leads to the grand concept misconstrued as fatalism that is most prevalent in the works of Leibniz and in Pope’s poem. For Leibniz, the Principle of the Best means that each event, whether construed by human beings as good or bad, is beneficial for the totality of the universe and is thus the best thing that could have happened. Pope arrives at this principle at the end of his poem, in one final striking repetition:

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.<sup>xxii</sup>

Pope here concludes the first epistle of his poem with the notion of a harmonic universe set in motion by God, regardless of whether man is ignorant of the greater scheme. However, the tone of these lines is not one of universal pessimism or fatalism, as it seems, but rather one of steadfastness and comfort: Is it not comforting to know that all is as it should be in the world? For Pope, a man who prided himself on his biting lines and political satires, this message cannot be interpreted as literal peace in the world, but rather a condoning of his personhood and the role he has in the

world around him. As a sufferer of Pott's disease and extraordinarily sensitive skin,<sup>xxiii</sup> it seems natural that Pope would search for a way to be at peace with his fate, perhaps viewing those bodily hindrances as part of the fuel for his biting satire and poetry.

The place of man and his ignorance in this system of the best is an interesting and topically ironic reading. As a philosopher, Leibniz possessed an inquiring mind and set out to outline the natures of all things in his work. As beings in the world whose existence is not like that of God's, human beings, by their very nature, cannot possibly know everything. Pope addresses this in the second epistle in *An Essay on Man*, stating that humans exist in a liminal space between the divine and the bestial. Therefore, Pope implores, "Know thyself, presume not God to scan; The proper study of Mankind is Man."<sup>xxiv</sup> Leibniz further answers this dilemma in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, "God has chosen the most perfect world, that is, the one which is at the same time the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in phenomena."<sup>xxv</sup> In the world of Leibniz, God wants human beings to rationalize and experience the world that he creates. Thus, it is the duty of people like Pope and Leibniz to do so with human modesty. However, God did not create the best possible world merely for humans, as some theologians may believe; rather, He created the best possible world for the benefit of all things in the universe.<sup>xxvi</sup> Though in the nature of his dialogue Pope is inquiring into the human role in the universe compared to God's, he comments primarily on the vanity of man in questioning God. In the last lines of the poem, Pope states, "And spite of Pride, in erring reason's spite / One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right."<sup>xxvii</sup> In this moment, Pope states that pride inhibits reason. Here there is a distinct dichotomy between reason and empiricism. Empiricism seems implicit with the pride that Pope so abhors in that empiricism is a direct investigation into nature and an assumption of superiority in that man is able to detangle it. Pope accepts that he is beneath God and so may be wrong, which could be indicated by the address of this poem to St. John, making it more of a one-sided dialogue or diatribe than a firm doctrine. Leibniz resisted empiricism as it rapidly enveloped the intellectual world around him. He famously loathed his rival Newton, as well as John Locke and other fathers of empiricism.<sup>xxviii</sup> It is evident simply from the organization of his work — the thought experiments, the logical pathways — that Leibniz is a man of reason, not empiricism. This distinction becomes important when discussing the ways Pope and Leibniz were criticized during the Enlightenment.

## The Evolution of Criticism

Though the accusation of similarity between Leibniz and Pope is evidently true, this is not to say that Pope lied about not reading Leibniz, but is, rather, an expression of the philosophical climate of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Pope most likely received some of Leibniz's doctrines through his philosophical companion Bolingbroke, as many of these doctrines were imperative to the philosophical discourse of this time. However, the more interesting phenomenon here is why Pope was "slandered" when compared to Leibniz and why Pope was attacked so harshly for what is arguably his magnum opus.

It is evident that at this point in his life, Pope understood the amount of criticism this poem would have received if published under his own name — both his satire and his political leanings had made him many enemies by this time. Thus, Pope originally published *An Essay on Man* anonymously, changing the first line from "Awake my St. John" to "Awake my Laelius" so as not to be suspected.<sup>xxix</sup> Without Pope's name attached, the poem did remarkably well — many of Pope's enemies such as Leonard Welsted and Bezaleel Morrice even commended it.<sup>xxx</sup> "[Pope] was, indeed, later to speak gleefully of the fact that his avowed enemies hailed it with hearty approbation; and until Crousaz attacked its orthodoxy, the general public took pleasure in reading what was so satisfying to the intellectual temperament of the age."<sup>xxxi</sup> Not only were the poetic devices of the poem celebrated, but also its philosophical contents. Many critics mentioned the marriage between philosophy and poetry as one strongly crafted and beautiful, noting that the philosophy was "noble": "Most reviews, following the *Weekly Miscellany's* judgment upon the publication of the third epistle, found it 'difficult to know which part to prefer, when all is equally beautiful and noble.' A correspondent from Bath lauds the *Essay* as an 'inimitable' poem 'calculated on the noblest Basis of

Philosophy and Divinity.”<sup>xxxii</sup> As Solomon mentions here, after a particular publication’s lauding of the *Essay* the rest of the critics followed suit. In modern criticism, scholars primarily focus on the poem’s composition, while disparaging the philosophical elements – possibly due to the scholastic popularity of this interpretation, rather than a candid assessment of the text.

Only after Lord Henry St. John Bolingbroke’s name was inserted into the text and Pope’s identity was revealed did the criticism of the poem’s philosophical elements begin. Among the critics were Lord Hervey, Robert Walpole’s literary comrades, Lady Mary Wortley Montague, and most prominently, Crousaz. Crousaz did not participate in the initial critiques of *An Essay on Man* because it was not translated into French until 1736 by Etienne de Silhouette with Pope’s name attached.<sup>xxxiii</sup> It is Crousaz who attacks the coherence of Pope’s verse and reduces him, in literary memory, to a good poet who tactlessly rippled the philosophical pond – disturbing those already agitated creatures within. However, one of the prominent reasons that Crousaz chose Pope’s works over the numerous other English poets who wrote on Leibniz’s philosophy may be because Pope was a Catholic and Crousaz was a Protestant.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Crousaz “inherited a philosopher’s allegiance in the antique antagonism of Plato to Homer” – just as Pope had – “and like Hobbes and Locke, distrusted poetry.”<sup>xxxv</sup> It is Crousaz’s love of Hobbes, Locke and other contemporary philosophers that divides him from Pope. Pope is a relic, not of his own accord, but rather because of his upbringing, education, and religious beliefs. He is interested more in preserving the old in a contemporary manner than in taking part in the philosophical enlightenment that is blossoming around him.

*An Essay on Man* continued to be critiqued throughout the rest of Pope’s life, primarily for its inconsistencies and inaccuracies. Crousaz attacks Pope’s comments on the pride of man:

We are very far from being nothing but weakness; for, with regard to the Body, Man has invented Machines, by the Means of which he can lift and transport Burdens too heavy for the strongest animal; and as to the Mind, to what Length have Discoveries already been carried, and how large a Way is opened for those who are willing to use their Endeavours to extend them Further! <sup>xxxvi</sup>

Crousaz’s attack is not merely against Pope as a person, but rather against what Pope represented. Pope accused men of pride upon their questioning of God and their assumption of their right to rule Earth. On the eighteenth century conception of pride, Lovejoy writes:

The featherless biped, it was observed, has a strange tendency to put himself in the center of the creation, to suppose himself separated by a vast gap from all other and ‘irrational’ creatures, to credit himself with the possession of virtues of which he is inherently incapable and to attempt tasks, especially intellectual tasks, which he has in reality no power to accomplish. <sup>xxxvii</sup>

Pope and some of his contemporaries in the early eighteenth century found that pride, though an inherent human characteristic, resulted from the assumption that human beings are somehow separate from the continuity of the Great Chain of Being – as Crousaz perfectly demonstrates in his criticism of Pope. For Crousaz and many men of the High Enlightenment, the universe seemed to offer itself up for human understanding. At the advent of modern science, it was not known that the universe had limitations, as scientists and philosophers are discovering today. It is due to this phenomenon that wild experiments such as those satirized in Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* arose.<sup>xxxviii</sup> As stated in R.F. Jones’s background on science in the Augustan age:

For the chief sin which the satirists find in the experimentalists was the glaring fault of judgment which failed to distinguish between the worth of things and which proposed silly and impossible projects. The importance ascribed to small and insignificant matters by the scientific emphasis upon non-rational observation violated the hierarchy of values upon which neo-classical writers insisted. <sup>xxxix</sup>



This then gives way to the nineteenth century's wild, if impractical, inventions and ventures into the paranormal. In *An Essay on Man*, it is evident that Pope wholeheartedly believes that man will be forever in the dark and that it is not in the ability of human beings to place the entire contents of the universe inside an encyclopedia, nor should it be. Pope explicates this notion in the Second Epistle of *An Essay on Man*:

Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,  
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:  
With too much knowledge for the skeptic side,  
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride. <sup>xi</sup>

According to Pope, man sits between the bestial and the angelic and differs from each only in degrees (as detailed in the Principle of Continuity), thus though man has the powers of reason he will always be ignorant to some degree. The bestial and angelic can also be viewed as a metaphor for the passions and reason, furthering the idea that man has access to both without fully embodying one or the other. Leibniz, at times, certainly appeared to try to quantify the universe, but it lies at the heart of his philosophy that God is the best of all beings. The best God is the omnipotent God, and though humans may always try to be like God, it is not in the nature of human beings to be able to attain that goal without disrupting the entire platform of Leibniz's philosophy.

Pope, meanwhile, equates the human attempt to quantify all of nature to human pride. Throughout the First Epistle, Pope alludes to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. By weaving this English classic into his work and updating its ideals with his own style, Pope equates the human struggle for omnipotence with the attempt by Lucifer and Eve to disrupt the natural chain of being. It should also be noted that Pope, outside of the *Essay*, has an antiquated relationship with science. In their examination of Pope, disease, and science, Nicolson and Rousseau found that "Like poets of any period, Pope frequently used conventional figures that had become scientifically outdated by his time."<sup>xli</sup> While this does not prove that Pope did not read or acknowledge modern scientific discoveries,<sup>xlii</sup> it does demonstrate that the way he related to science was as a poet, just as he related to life. He believed that it was more fruitful for man to meditate on himself rather than on the rest of creation, as evident in the first few lines of Epistle Two – "Know thyself, presume not God to scan / The proper study of mankind is Man."<sup>xliii</sup> This relationship was one that was fading fast, as Crousaz's mistrust of poets alludes to. The age of the fluidity of disciplines was over, replaced by a fracturing in academic thought still present in university systems today. Thus, Pope rejects this new science of pride and exaltation of reason that could not account for the extent of human life and divine power. In turn, Crousaz rejected both Pope and Leibniz from the philosophical climate, continuing his unsanctified crusade into the empiricization of human spirituality. <sup>xliv</sup>

It was not simply Pope's rejection of the newfound scientific climate of his day that caused the division between him, his critics, and modern scholars, but also the events that brought into question the best of all possible Gods that Leibniz so adored. Douglas White explains this transition in his analysis of Pope's use of Leibniz's philosophy:

The idea that the world is the best possible one is a particularly informative example of that troublesome and slippery concept called by A. O. Lovejoy a "unit idea." The range of contexts contemporary with Pope through which the idea was used shows that it was a virtually neutral assertion, though nonetheless, a volatile one; for its whole force changed radically with variation in the system that supported, defended, and explained it. <sup>xlv</sup>

This transition is starkly depicted by Voltaire. As is evident in his array of satiric works, Voltaire was an admirer of Pope in his younger days. From 1726 to 1728 Voltaire visited London, presumably on one of his many banishments from France,<sup>xlvi</sup> and visited his hero Pope. Voltaire was also one of the first translators of the *Essay* into French and found it to be one of the most beautiful philosophies he had ever read, and impeccably written.

Voltaire received Pope's poem (presumably only the first two epistles) as early as May, 1733, 1 if this undated letter to Du Resnel is correctly classified. For about seven or eight years thereafter (1733-1740) Voltaire, in his correspondence, commented rather frequently upon Pope and, in 1738 and 1739, paid him the homage of free imitation in his *Discours sur l'Homme*.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Even at this time, Voltaire admired Leibniz's optimism. This may have been due to the influences of his then mistress, Mme du Châtelet. More likely, it was because Voltaire was not yet world-weary, nor was European culture. Voltaire grew steadily more jaded as he grew into decrepitude, as many men do, though it was ultimately Lisbon that irrevocably shifted Voltaire's and the overall culture's attitude towards Leibniz's positivism and thus Pope's *Essay*.

The earthquake of Lisbon occurred in 1755, eleven years after Pope's death. An estimated 60,000 people were killed in Portugal's port city as it fell to ruins.<sup>xlviii</sup> Ironically, the earthquake coincided with All Saints Day<sup>xlix</sup> and was one of the worst tragedies Europe had seen since the plague. The aftershocks of the earthquake were felt throughout the political, cultural, and philosophical landscapes. While the rapidly growing Scientific Revolution contributed somewhat to the devaluing of Leibniz's philosophy and Pope's poem, the earthquake of Lisbon inextricably altered the European world's perspective on evil and optimism. The events of Lisbon reignited dialogues about the nature of evil and a very human question in the face of tragedy — Why would God create and allow evil? The earthquake makes a cameo appearance in *Candide*:

When they'd more or less recovered, they walked toward Lisbon.... Hardly had they set foot in the city, still weeping for the death of their benefactor, when they felt the earth shaking under their feet. The sea boiled and swirled, smashing every ship anchored in the harbor. Fire blew up in whirlwinds, ashes and cinders covered streets and public places; houses collapsed, roofs flattened down to foundations, and foundations smashed and were scattered. Thirty thousand people, of both sexes and of all ages, lay crushed in the ruins.<sup>l</sup>

This passage immediately follows a spiel by the philosopher Pangloss, the hapless guide to the protagonist Candide, who claims that all is for the best — following the philosophies outlined in Leibniz's *Theodicy*.<sup>li</sup> Pangloss claims that the Portuguese harbor was made to drown the pair's benefactor, the Anabaptist, and later claims the same about the city of Portugal. It is the best of all possible worlds concept popularized by Leibniz and echoed by Pope. They, like Pangloss, stated that the reason evil exists is because small evils were the best possible option God could have chosen for the universe. It is evident that Voltaire, who once loved this teleological optimistic philosophy, finds it flawed. In *Candide*, he demonstrates this with the brutal genocide of his background characters, all of which Pangloss (the caricature of Pope and Leibniz) happily ignores or proclaims is "for the best!"<sup>lii</sup> Evidently, the earthquake at Lisbon profoundly changed Voltaire, as it did the rest of Europe. Though some saw the events at Lisbon as a punishment for superstition, immoral behavior, or Catholicism (as opposed to Protestantism), others such as Voltaire began to question the church in itself. Whether one believed the earthquake was divine intervention or proof of atheism, it brought an end to Pope and Leibniz's era of the good and absent God who set the world in motion and had not touched it since. Thus, the philosophy of the age that was praised by the initial critics of Pope's work had all but died out in the academic setting, and *An Essay on Man* rang hollow in the ears of critics.

## Conclusion

Pope's *Essay on Man* has often been viewed as an inherently flawed work, one that is ironic and self-contradictory in its very nature. As Pope himself admits, its ideas are often ambiguous. He writes to Warburton in a letter to follow up Warburton's second defense of his work from Crousaz, "I can only say you do him too much Honour, and me *too much Right*, so odd as the expression seems, for You have made my System as clear as I ought to have done and could not."<sup>liii</sup> However, this does

not account for the discrepancy between the initial philosophical praise for the poem and the subsequent demolition of it. As any student of philosophy understands, most philosophical works are full of ambiguity and seeming inconsistencies, so it is hypocritical to attack Pope alone for his reflection of Leibniz.

Pope's *Essay on Man* evidently echoes the ideas of Leibniz's philosophy. This was probably not due to a direct influence, but rather because anyone occupied with the thought of the Augustan age would have been engaged with Leibniz's philosophies. This resemblance is also due to similarities in education and perspective. The rejection of Pope and Leibniz indicates a larger philosophical and cultural change in Europe during the mid-eighteenth century. As exemplified by Crousaz and Voltaire, there are a variety of factors that led to this shift: There is a shift towards empiricism near the end of Pope's life, which Pope rejects in the poem; the events at Lisbon irrevocably shifted European intellectuals' view on the theory of the best of all possible worlds; and the imitation of nineteenth century critics solidified the view that *An Essay on Man* is a philosophically weak work. These propositions thoroughly inquire into the literature regarding the *Essay*, though there are other possible factors contributing to the conflict of criticism surrounding the poem.

Ultimately, the criticism of the philosophy in *An Essay on Man* comes from a relativistic perception. The original reviews of the essay are overwhelmingly positive, accurately stating that it embodies the philosophies of the time. However, with the coming of the High Enlightenment, these philosophies fell quickly out of fashion and Western intellectual culture has rarely returned to them. In Douglas White's analysis of Pope's use of philosophy in the *Essay*, he states, "[Pope] frees God of any blame for not having made the creation better, and he glorifies Him for having chosen the existent world for its positive excellence rather than its appeal to his arbitrary will. God receives credit for having willed the best, and creation receives credit for being the best."<sup>iv</sup> Pope not only navigates the philosophies taken for truth in his time, but also balances (in the tradition of the eighteenth century) his acknowledgement of the best God with the best possible world. For this reason, *An Essay on Man* is Pope's magnum opus, as it becomes a time capsule for the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. By observing the change in criticism over the short period of Pope's life, the significance of capturing this finite and turbulent portion of history become evident. *An Essay on Man* is possibly the last great theodicy to reflect this tempered and optimistic perspective on the nature of God, evil, and the universe before the earthquake of Lisbon irrevocably transfigured Western culture.

## Notes

- i Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism," In *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, edited by John Butt, (London: Methuan & Co), vv. 68-71. All further references to this poem and *An Essay on Man* will be to this edition.
- ii Joseph Addison, "No. 253," In *The Spectator*, ed. Gregory Smith, 251-54, Vol. 2 (London: Aldine Press, 1970), p. 253.
- iii James Sutherland, *A Preface to Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p.34 states "there was no widespread feeling against imitation." Sutherland quotes from a 1706 letter by Pope: "A mutual Commerce makes Poetry flourish; but then Poets, like Merchants, should repay with something of their own what they take from others, not, like Pirates, make Prizes of all they meet," p.34. The Augustan writers not only educated themselves through the imitation of previous authors, but virtually turned imitation into a genre. Dryden, Swift, Johnson, Pope among other great writers of this time wrote and published imitational works.
- iv Bernard Fabian, "Pope and Lucretius: Observations on *An Essay on Man*" *The Modern Language Review* 74, no. 3 (July 1979): 524-37, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3726701>, p. 534.

- v Crousaz was Swiss, but participated in academic circles across the Europe. He was a professor and worked at the academies of Lausanne, Groenigen, and Cassel. There, he studied philosophy, mathematics, and theology and sought to refute many archaic ideas, including Leibniz's. Although today he remains mostly forgotten by history, his epistolary legacy has helped eighteenth-century scholars define the ideals of his time.
- vi Alexander Pope to Warburton, February 2, 1739. In *Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, Vol. IV, ed. George Sherburn, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 163-164.
- vii John Gay, John Arbuthnot, Henry St. John, Thomas Parnell, and Jonathan Swift.
- viii J. Cameron, "Doctrinal to an Age: Notes Towards a Reevaluation of Pope's *Essay on Man*," In *Essential Articles for the Study of Alexander Pope*, edited by Maynard Mack, 353-69, (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1968), p. 360.
- ix Brandon Look, "Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz," Stanford University, July 22, 2007, Accessed May 02, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/leibniz/>.
- x Which for most intents and purposes were the same, as the ancients did not bother with the divisions we have made in the modern university system and instead accepted the connection between the philosophical and the poetical.
- xi I.R.F. Gordon, *A Preface to Pope* (London: Longman, 1976), p. 5. Previous to his family's relocation from London, Pope did attend a formal school (Twyford School). However, he was expelled after a year due to a satire he had written on his school master.
- xii R. S. Woolhouse, *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Critical Assessments* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 134.
- xiii Laurence Carlin, "Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Accessed April 29, 2016, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/leib-cau/>.
- xiv The relationship between Aristotle and Christianity should also be clearly defined. Though not a Christian himself, Aristotle's ethics as well as his other works have been appropriated by Christianity.
- xv Look, "Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz."
- xvi As Quoted in Larry M. Jorgenson, "The Principle of Continuity and Leibniz's Theory of Consciousness," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47, no. 2 (April 2009): 223-248, Accessed April 17, 2016. doi:10.1353. p. 226
- xvii Joseph Addison, "No. 519," In *The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond, 512-516, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 514.
- xviii Pope, "*An Essay on Man*," vv. 33-34.
- xix Arthur Lovejoy, "'Pride' in the Eighteenth Century," In *Essays in the History of Ideas*, 62-68, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1948), p. 64.
- xx "Possible World" refers to a world that is composed of those finite things that God could have brought into existence if He had decided to, rather than the more modern meaning associated with string theory.
- xxi Pope, "*An Essay on Man*," vv. 21-24.

- xxii Pope, "An Essay on Man," vv. 289-292. In the first line of this section, Pope states that all nature is art. Nature is not meant in the sense of the outdoors, but refers to the universal components of human experience. By calling it "art," Pope not only ascribes an innate beauty to nature, but also indicates that it is something that was once created and planned out — rather like the way one might compare a meadow to a garden. The second and third lines, stating that chance is direction and that discord is harmony, continue the theme of a larger inert plan. Although humans may not be able to observe it, God has evidently orchestrated the world to be exactly the way it is. The final line — "All partial evil, universal good" — applies the already established thesis directly to the question of evil in a Christian context. In this case, what may seem evil from a narrow perspective will, in time, lead to a greater good.
- xxiii Gordon, I. R. F. *A Preface to Pope* (London: Longman, 1976), p. 6.
- xxiv Pope, "An Essay on Man," vv. 1-2 .
- xxv As Quoted in Look, "Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz."
- xxvi Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being; a Study of the History of an Idea*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), p. 150.
- xxvii Pope, "An Essay on Man," vv. 293-294.
- xxviii Look, "Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz."
- xxix Harry Solomon. *The Rape of the Text: Reading and Misreading Pope's Essay on Man* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), p. 7.
- xxx Solomon, *The Rape of the Text: Reading and Misreading Pope's Essay on Man*, p. 7. Welsted was later satirized by Pope in the Dunciad for the mistake. However, the fact that the pair did not recognize Pope's singularly crafted heroic couplets (despite the unusual subject) is truly a testament to their dullness.
- xxxi Wilbert Macdonald, *Pope and His Critics; a Study in Eighteenth Century Personalities* (London: Dent, 1951), p. 129.
- xxxii Solomon, *The Rape of the Text: Reading and Misreading Pope's Essay on Man*, p. 8.
- xxxiii O. M. Brack, "Samuel Johnson and the Translations of Jean Pierre De Crousaz's Examen and Commentaire," *Studies in Bibliography* 48 (1995): p. 60.
- xxxiv The war between the Protestants and the Catholics was at this time settling down, but was still quite vicious. Another reason why Pope's Catholicism could have incriminated his philosophy to Crousaz is the Catholic tradition of executing and banishing radical scientists.
- xxxv Solomon, *The Rape of the Text: Reading and Misreading Pope's Essay on Man*, p. 16-17.
- xxxvi As quoted in Brack, "Samuel Johnson and the Translations of Jean Pierre De Crousaz's Examen and Commentaire," p. 79.
- xxxvii Arthur Lovejoy, "'Pride' in the Eighteenth Century," p. 63. Lovejoy states that literature such as Pope's may not have expressed these intricacies of the nature of pride, however, through his connection with Leibniz and the intellectual narrative of the early eighteenth century, it is implied that Pope would have agreed with this statement. In *The Great Chain of Being*, Lovejoy states, "In spite of Pope's reversion to a more conventional strain in these last lines he elsewhere attributes man lapse from the 'state of Nature' which was the 'reign of God,' to the sin of pride — not that which caused man's fall in the biblical narrative, but a pride which led him to separate himself unduly from other animals."

- xxxviii In the third book of *Gulliver's Travels*, Gulliver meets the scientists of the Laputans who are performing absurd scientific experiments such as attempting to turn excrement into food, blowing air through people and animals to cure them, and trying to derive sunbeams from cucumbers.
- xxxix R. Jones, "Background of the Attack on Science," In *Pope and His Contemporaries: Essays Presented to George Sherburn*, ed. James L. Clifford and Louis A. Landa, 96-113. (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 112.
- xl Pope, "An Essay on Man," vv. 3-6.
- xli Marjorie Nicolson and G. S. Rousseau, "This Long Disease, My Life": *Alexander Pope and the Sciences* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 239.
- xlii Pope is said to have an interest in Newton and other contemporary scientists, as evident in his allusions to effluvia and his medical metaphors in *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, to name a few. Neither of these, however demonstrate an intimate knowledge of science, but rather the tendency of many poets to humanize scientific notions in poetic language for their own purposes.
- xliii Pope, "An Essay on Man," vv. 1-2. This passage alludes to a Platonic understanding of the role of mankind. Plato, as evident in the dialogues, particularly *The Republic*, claims that the pathway to true fulfillment begins by studying and knowing oneself.
- xliv Pope, having read Crousaz's work, commented in a letter to Warburton, "I fear indeed [Crousaz] did not Attack me on quite so good a Principle: Whenever I see such a Vein of Uncharitableness & Vanity in any Work, whether it concerns me or another, I am always ready to thank God to find it accompanied with as much Weakness."
- xlv Douglas White, "The Best of Possible Worlds," In *Pope and the Context of Controversy: The Manipulation of Ideas in An Essay on Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 20.
- xlvi "Voltaire's Early Life and Works," University of Oxford, Accessed May 03, 2016. [http://www.voltaire.ox.ac.uk/www\\_vf/about\\_voltaire/early.ssi](http://www.voltaire.ox.ac.uk/www_vf/about_voltaire/early.ssi).
- xlvii George Havens, 1928, "Voltaire's Marginal Comments Upon Pope's *Essay on Man*," *Modern Language Notes* 43 (7): 429-39, doi:10.2307/2914234, p. 429. It should also be noted that while Voltaire exalted the poems and imitated them, he did indicate that the poem contained some obscurities. However, for Voltaire this evidently did not hinder the overarching philosophical proposal of the poem.
- xlviii The Editors of *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Lisbon Earthquake of 1755," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, Accessed April 29, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/event/Lisbon-earthquake-of-1755>.
- xlix All Saints Day is a Catholic holiday on November 1.
- l I Voltaire. *Candide: Or, Optimism*, Translated by John Butt 1759:(London: Penguin Books, 1947), p. 15. Further references to this satire will be to this translation and edition.
- li The *Theodicy* was written in 1709 by Leibniz and was dedicated to his studies on the question of evil in a Christian context.
- lii Voltaire. *Candide: Or, Optimism*.
- liii Alexander Pope to Warburton, April 11, 1739, In *Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, Vol. IV, George Sherburn, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 171-172.
- liv White, "The Best of Possible Worlds," p. 40.

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