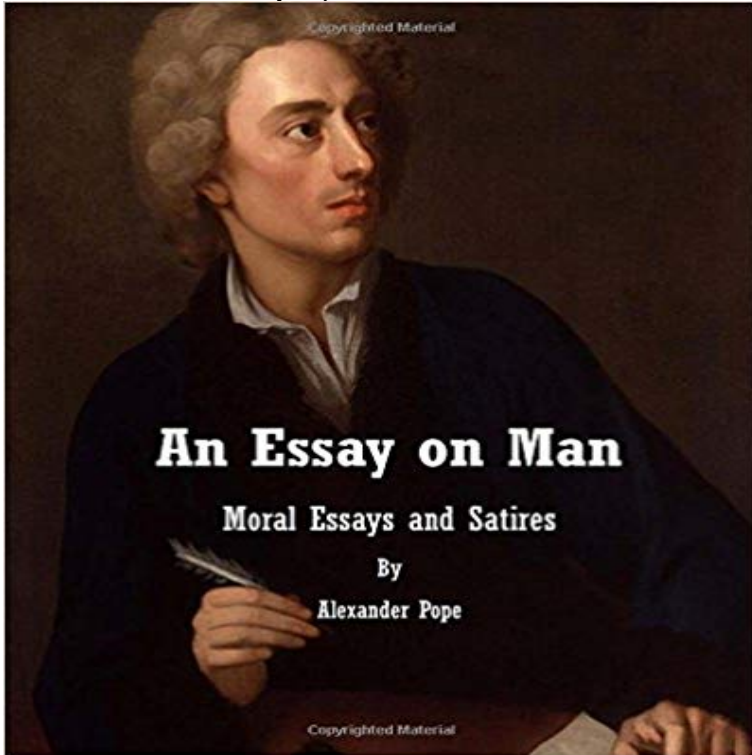


An Essay on Man: Moral Essays and Satires (An Essay on Man - Alexander Pope)



An Essay on Man is a poem published by Alexander Pope in 1734. It is an effort to rationalize or rather vindicate the ways of God to man (l.16), a variation of John Milton's claim in the opening lines of Paradise Lost, that he will justify the ways of God to men (l.26). It is concerned with the natural order God has decreed for man. Because man cannot know God's purposes, he cannot complain about his position in the Great Chain of Being (ll.33-34) and must accept that Whatever IS, is RIGHT (l.292), a theme that was satirized by Voltaire in Candide (1759). More than any other work, it popularized optimistic philosophy throughout England and the rest of Europe. Pope's Essay on Man and Moral Epistles were designed to be the parts of a system of ethics which he wanted to express in poetry. Moral Epistles has been known under various other names including Ethic Epistles and Moral Essays. On its publication, An Essay on Man received great admiration throughout Europe. Voltaire called it the most beautiful, the most useful, the most sublime didactic poem ever written in any language. In 1756 Rousseau wrote to Voltaire admiring the poem and saying that it softens my ills and brings me patience. Kant was fond of the poem and would recite long passages from it to his students.

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