A comparative analysis of pope's “essay on man” and Voltaire's “discours en vers sur l’homme”

Annie Bernice Wimbush

Atlanta University

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POPE'S "ESSAY ON MAN"
AND VOLTAIRE'S "DISCOURS EN VERS SUR L'HOMME"

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
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FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS

BY
ANNIE BERNICE WIMBUSH

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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In the annals of posterity few men of letters are lauded with the universal renown and fame as are the two literary giants, Voltaire and Pope. Such creative impetus and "esprit" that was uniquely theirs insures their place among the truly great.

The histories and literatures of France and England show these two men as strongly influential on philosophical thinking. Their very characters and temperaments even helped to shape and transform man's outlook on life in the eighteenth century and onward.

On the one hand, there is Voltaire, the French poet, philosopher, historian and publicist whose ideas became the ideas of hundreds of others and whose art remains with us today as monuments of a great mind. On the other there is Pope, the English satirical poet and philosopher, endowed with a hypersensitive soul, who concerned himself with the ordinary aspects of literary and social life, and these aspects he portrayed in his unique and excellent verse.

Both men were deeply involved in the controversial issues of the time. Both men wielded their mighty pens as very powerful weapons against the hypocrisies, abuses and evils of the societies in which they lived. Each became intricately concerned with the problems of man, his ever questioning mind concerning God, his own existence and the world about him. Each sought to analyze these questions, (if not answer them in part), tempering them with the fever of their rational minds, acolytes of truth and reason.

In this study the writer proposes to present a comparative analysis of Pope's "Essay on Man" and Voltaire's "Discours En Vers Sur L'Homme."
The writer expects to see the immense influence which Pope had on Voltaire in the writing of his "Discours" as well as the stubborn independence that the French philosopher maintained in his own individual thinking.

The writer proposes to divide the subject into three chapters. The first will give the essential facts concerning the lives of both Pope and Voltaire, the characterizing elements in their personalities and experiences which may have influenced their works, and a general view of these men in terms of comparing their backgrounds and experiences.

Chapter Two will present a resume of the two works, emphasizing the basic ideas of each, and the characterizing elements which make them memorable monuments in literary history. Chapter Three will set forth a general comparison of the basic ideas and themes of each, with special attention given to their similarities and differences. The writer also expects to show how much Voltaire differed from Pope, relating this to his own unique philosophy of life as well as how much he was influenced by the English writer in his own thinking.

The writer wishes to express her sincere gratitude to Dr. Thomas D. Jarrett, Dean of the Graduate School, for his assistance and helpful suggestions which made the completion of this work possible. Very special thanks is extended to Dr. Benjamin F. Hudson, Head of the Department of French, for his untiring efforts and kind assistance that he rendered during the writing of this work, and to my friends and family whose encouraging words inspired me constantly to continue in this endeavor.
CHAPTER I

THE MEN AND THEIR WORKS

It is ironical to note that the great English literary genius, Alexander Pope, who exemplified masterful craftsmanship in writing unique and distinctive verse, has been misunderstood and misjudged more than any of the other major English poets. Theories concerning his personality present a strange history which reveals contradictions and inconsistencies. This history, even in the early stages of its development, was accompanied by hostile and often subjective speculation which combined fact and fiction.

The character and personality of Pope was complex. This riddle, presented by gross ambiguities, is often puzzling even to the master minds of wit. Even today, Pope's reputation has not fully recovered from blighted estimates that have existed over the years. Yet his personality and character, however they may be defined, are seen first and foremost in his art. For this reason, one must study the man before attempting to understand his works.

Alexander Pope was born in London, on May 22, 1688. His father was a London merchant, and a convert to Catholicism. His mother, one of seventeen children, was sister-in-law to Cooper, the well-known portrait-painter.¹

Pope's father retired from business and settled at Binfield, a village two miles from Wokingham, about the same time the poet was born.

Here the household remained quietly for some twenty-seven years.

During his early years, Pope was somewhat of a household favorite. He was the only child of his mother, although he had a half-sister, whose mother died nine years before he was born. Born to his parents in their forty-sixth year, Pope was showered with affection and attention. From his mother he inherited headaches; his crooked figure came from his father. As a child, Pope was known to be sweet-tempered in spite of being sickly as well as spoiled.¹

In terms of religion, Pope's family was Catholic. This tended to make it even more secluded from the world for at this time Catholics were a very much hated minority group. They were even forbidden to publically exercise the Catholic religion, and a proclamation issued in 1774 forbade the appearance of Catholics within ten miles of London.²

It is evident that Pope's character was affected in many ways by the fact that he belonged to a sect that was so harassed and restrained.³ In this respect, Pope developed a strong love for tolerance but an intense hatred of oppression was also developed in him.

There were other handicaps that Pope suffered as a member of a minority sect. He was barred from the ordinary schools and was forced to attend second rate schools. Some of his learning he was able to obtain from the family priest. He was also sent to a school at Twyford, where it is said that he got into trouble for writing a satirical poem against

²Ibid., p. 3.
³Ibid., p. 4.
his master. He went for a short time to another school in London, where he demonstrated his poetic genius. It was at this school that Pope put together a play that was acted by his schoolfellows.

These brief intervals of schooling lasted until the poet was twelve years old, at which time he returned home and settled down to a period of prolonged reading. This he engaged in with so much ardor that his feeble constitution almost gave way when he was about seventeen.

Not much more than four feet six in height, Pope's meagre frame could not stand the strain of these long vigils over books. He suffered from Pott's disease, a tubercular infection which later made him a cripple.

At this time, Pope studied philosophy, theology, Locke, and even a collection of the controversial literature of the reign of James II. His greatest interest, however, was in poetry and pure literature. It is said that he learned languages in order to read literatures of other countries if a translation was not available. During this time, he studied all the best critics, the famous French, English, and Latin poems, Homer and some of the greater Greek poets in the original, and Tasso and Ariosto in translations.

It was from his wide reading that Pope acquired an extensive knowledge of English poetry. His favorites were Waller, Spenser, and Dryden and he found the Faery Queen delightful. Dryden, however, had perhaps the greatest influence upon him. It was this great English writer from whom he learned

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1 Sitwell, op. cit., pp. 28-30.


3 Stephen, op. cit., p. 5.
versification.

A man's character is often revealed through his contact and relationship with his friends and foes. This is no less true for Pope. His first literary patron was Sir W. Trumbull, who had been ambassador at the Porte under James I and Secretary of State under William III. It was he who encouraged Pope to imitate Milton and to follow in his footsteps. He is also credited with suggesting to Pope that he translate Homer. Pope later had another patron, William Walsh, a fashionable country gentleman of Worcestershire country. It was this patron who instilled within Pope the aim for correctness as a poet. During this period, Pope also had intercourse with Wycherley and Henry Cromwell. It is believed that through them Pope was first introduced to the literary circles of London.

On May 2, 1709, the sixth volume of Tonson's *Political Miscellanies* appeared in which was included some pastorals of Pope, his translations of a tale of Chaucer and a portion taken from Homer.

It was during these early years of Pope's poetical career that his literary genius was developing and taking shape. At this time, he wrote elaborate paradoxes and epigrams of the conventional epistolary style. He had already retired to the country where he could be nearer his muse of inspiration.

In 1711, Pope's famous "Essay on Criticism" was publically introduced to the literary world. Although the work was a summation of the neo-classical position, the ideas were not new. The genius of the work, however, lies in the poet's ability to coin aphorisms and compactly present them in epigrams. Yet, the work was received with a moderate bit of praise and acclaim.

The "Rape of the Lock," a poem of 334 lines in two cantos appeared in
1712. A mock-heroic epic, this poem parodies a real life incident of the day. A minor quarrel between two families resulted after a male admirer severed a lock of hair from the head of his sweetheart.

A year later, Pope's *Windsor Forest* appeared. This work has for its subject the forest in which he lived. Pope was influenced by the Englishman Sir John Denham as well as the classical pastorals in the writing of the work. Characteristic of Pope at this time was his feverish nervous energy, his intense spiritual vitality and a conscious effort to match the energy of the men of the taverns and council chambers.¹

Some time later, Pope wrote a prologue for Addison's famous tragedy, *Cato* (1713). After the two men quarreled, however, Pope wrote a very satirical poem, "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," in which he attacked his opponent. Addison then employed Thomas Tichell to rival Pope in the writing of a translation of the *Iliad*. Pope's version, which appeared in 1715, shows greater skill than that of Tichell.

Pope next undertook to edit an edition of Shakespeare which appeared in 1725. This endeavor was attacked on all sides. After the success of the *Iliad*, however, Pope was led to do a translation of the *Odyssey* (1725-26), along with two collaborators. In spite of the many repeated attacks on these works, Pope emerged a rich man.

In 1726, a work appeared entitled *Shakespear Restored: Cr, a Specimen of the Many Errors as Well Committed as Recommended by Mr. Pope, in his late Edition of the Poet*. Lewis Theobald, the author of this work, was a second-rate dramatist but a recognized scholar.

Pope was at a disadvantage in engaging in a literary war with Theobald.

¹Dobree, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.
because Theobald was an editor. Pope therefore decided to use his most effective weapon--his pen--and write a mock-heroic poem in which Theobald is portrayed as the King of the Dunces. The Dunciad appeared in 1728 in three books. Pope also chose this opportunity to attack all of his enemies who had attacked him over the past twelve years. The following year, The Dunciad in Four Books appeared, causing a real stir among his critics.

Between the ages of forty and fifty, Pope produced some of his best work. He wrote an imitation of one of Horace's satires in 1733, followed by other imitations of Horace as well as imitations of two of the satires of John Donne. The setting of these satires, however, is 18th century England and they show an almost perfect imitation of Horace's style.¹

In February, 1733, the first part of Pope's "Essay on Man" appeared and the fourth and final part came later in January, 1734. This work is regarded as a masterpiece of organization. It sums up the philosophy of the day and the assumptions underlying the behavior and beliefs of the vast majority of educated men.² Many critics contend that the ideas in the poem were largely based on those of Bolinbroke.

In 1728, Pope published his letters which he had written years before to Wycherly who was now dead. Later he was to publish other letters in a collection which appeared in 1737.

As the years of Pope's life drew to a close, he began to rewrite and reorganize some of his earlier works. In 1742, The New Dunciad: As it was found in the Year 1741 appeared. The poem now forms Book IV of The Dunciad.

¹Ibid., pp. 90-93.
²Ibid., p. 100.
This satire is more generalized in its attack than the earlier ones.

During this time, Pope's intellectual powers did not fail but remained vigorous and alive. His health began to fail, however, and he suffered from dropsical asthma. On May 30, 1744, he died peacefully, with his friends around his bedside.

The literary talents of Pope are extraordinary and astonishing. His life presents the ironical paradox of a man both loved and hated, of a man who loved and hated as well. His life was often a series of tempestuous storms that left as a residue some of England's greatest literary masterpieces. Today his art remains as living examples of a creative and imaginative mind.

The life of Voltaire, like that of Pope, serves as a guide line to an understanding of his literary works that still remain as panegyrics of a very versatile mind. Voltaire's life was a series of ironies and his personality was a product if not an extension of these ironies.

Voltaire's chief aim was the enlightenment of mankind, and it was to this aim that he dedicated most of his life. Although we do not classify Voltaire with the literary geniuses of artistry and merit such as Shakespeare, we remember him as a powerful satirist, an instigator of thought and a powerful mover to action. His literary works were the weapons with which he fought those who opposed him. Because of his encounter with some of life's most unusual experiences, we can best understand his literary works only after having first taken a look at the life of the man.

Voltaire was born into a family of a Parisan notary in Paris, on November 21, 1694. His father was of very good pecuniary circumstances and was able to well provide for his family. Although Voltaire was baptized
Francois Marie Arouet, he later changed his name to Monsieur de Voltaire.  

Because of the financial circumstances of his father, Voltaire was able to receive the best education then offered to a young Frenchman. His mother, who began his early education at home, died when Voltaire was seven. From that time on, he was brought up under the influence of the Abbe de Chateauneuf, who was very worldly and libertin.

Most of his studies were done under the Jesuit fathers at the College Louis-le-Grand where he stayed as a boarding student. Here he received an ample study of the classics. It was also at this time that Voltaire showed a talent for writing and he did some acting in plays which led to his deep appreciation of drama.

Voltaire later withdrew from this school and announced his desire to be a poet in spite of his father's proposal that he study law. He became friends with Abbe Chateauneuf who introduced him to a very licentious and immoral society. His father intervened, however, and sent him to Holland as an attaché of the French Embassy. He was later forced to return to Paris because of a love affair at the Hague.

In 1714, Voltaire was sent to Caumartin, Marquis of Saint-Ange, where he began his first Epic, Henriade. On November 8, 1718 his play, Oedipe, was completed after five years of work on it. In it we see his religious views exposed to the public for the first time. The play was a success and was received with great favor. Three years later, Voltaire's Henriade (of which Henry IV was the hero) was secretedly published at Rouen. This

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2 Ibid., p. 58.
work treats the themes of love, justice, peace, and reason, and sets forth the main tenets of deism. When it was secretedly brought to Paris, it became an immediate success and was later translated into the chief European languages.¹

Voltaire's drama, Marianne, which was produced in March, 1724, was a failure. It was rewritten and produced again the following year, and met with more favor than before.

A turning point occurred in Voltaire's life in 1726. While he was attending an opera he was insulted by a nobleman who spoke derogatorily of his name several times. When the nobleman raised his cane threateningly, Voltaire half drew his sword, but did not follow through. Later, however, he was severely beaten by ruffians hired by the nobleman. When Voltaire challenged his opponent to a duel, he was thrown into the Bastille. He was later released on the condition that he leave the country.² When released from the Bastille, Voltaire went to England and this exile was to profoundly influence his life and literary production.

Such a banishment did not represent the cruel hand of fate, for this visit was perhaps the most important experience in Voltaire's life. Not only did he become acquainted with some of the greatest English minds of the day, but there his political, scientific, and religious views began to take shape. He was admitted to the major literary circles, and writers such as Swift, Pope, Berkeley and Clark were among his friends.³


³ Voltaire, op. cit., p. vii.
England was the one country, at the time, which could best contribute to Voltaire's education and experience. This country offered the rare spectacle of a large measure of religious tolerance, of free debate over government policies, of arrest only on a warrant showing cause, of an early trial by jury guaranteed by the famous writ of habeas corpus.

In order to learn the English language, Voltaire withdrew to the country for a period of quiet study at Wandsworth in the company of a distinguished merchant, Falkner. While in England, Voltaire also turned his attention to the writing of history. He felt that there is a moral side to history and mankind should be able to learn from its teaching. Instead of writing the traditional history of ancient Rome, Voltaire turned his attention to contemporary history. His *L'Histoire de Charles XII*, appeared in 1731, two years after Voltaire's return from England.

After becoming royal historiographer in 1745, Voltaire had access to state archives. Although his work lacks much of the color characteristic of the Romantic period, Voltaire had no desire to write for the eyes. He wrote rather for the mind, the intelligence. His *L'Age de Louis XIV*, which appeared in 1751, conceals from view many of the shortcomings of Louis' reign, however. The importance of this work is that it is the first attempt made at writing cultural history.

Voltaire also attempted to write what he termed a "universal history." His aim was to relate the progress of mankind itself. His intent was to begin with Chalemaigne and come down to the period studied in his *L'Age de Louis XIV*. He aimed to go beyond the conventional horizon of Europe and

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1 Havens, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-177.

2 Ibid.
the Mediterranean basin in an effort to include, to some extent, the entire globe itself. This *L'Histoire Universel* appeared first as a few trial fragments in a monthly periodical, *Le Mercure de France*, during 1745 and 1746. In 1769, the work appeared under its final title, *L'Essai Sur Les Moeurs*. The work reveals Voltaire's interest in cultural history, and awakened his contemporaries to the significance of seemingly commonplace aspects of daily life through the ages. Because of his work in this respect, Voltaire is considered the first cultural historian of the western world, and the first to attempt a universal history. He was also the first to include the history of the great peoples of Asia-India, China, and Japan in universal history.

While in England, Voltaire also became deeply impressed with Shakespeare at this time. His plays, *Brutus*, *La Mort de César*, *Tancrède*, and *Zaire* were all inspired by Shakespeare's plays.

This English influence is further seen in Voltaire's *Lettres Philosophiques* (*Lettres Sur Les Anglais*), in which he presents a keen analysis of English institutions. The work is a monument of social and literary criticism. For the first time, Voltaire sets forth his ideas on freedom and tolerance. The work first appeared in English. When the first French edition appeared (without the author's knowledge), it was seized and destroyed, nearly causing its author to be sent to the Bastille.

In March, 1729, Voltaire returned to France where he lived in seclusion. His *Eriphyle* was played March 7, 1732 but was met with very hostile acceptance. He then produced *Zaire* which was attacked bitterly by

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J. B. Rousseau. This attack was answered by Voltaire with his Le Temple du Gout, a witty, jesting presentation of the foibles and weaknesses of the society of the time.

Meanwhile, Voltaire's Les Lettres Anglais was being printed at Rouen. However, to Voltaire's dismay, it appeared in Paris in April, 1734, and was publically burned. Voltaire was then forced to escape to Cirey, and he resided at the chateau of the Marchioness du Chatelet. In his efforts to help the man whom she loved, Mme du Chalelet tried to reconcile Voltaire with the court. Through her intercession, Voltaire was admitted into the L'Académie Française in 1746. Later, however, Saint-Lambert won the affections of Mme du Chatelet, and she died, giving birth to his child. Voltaire's grief was intense and he suffered greatly from his loss.

It was while he was at Cirey that Voltaire wrote some of his most successful works: Alzire, Mahomet, Mérope, and La Pucelle. For the wedding of the Infanta of Spain with the Dauphin he wrote La Princesse de Navarre, which gained for him the office of Historiographer of Franche, and later, an election to the Academy.¹

Voltaire turned to writing philosophic tales at the age of forty-five during the years 1738 or 1739. His first was Micromégas which was published in 1746, then entitled Babouc ou Le Monde Comme Il Est. The main thesis of this work is that, if there is much bad in the world, there is some good too. We should be prepared to accept things realistically as they are,² Zadig ou La Destinée, which appeared in 1748, also bears the subtitle Une Histoire Orientale. It presents the insoluble age-old problems of

¹ Ibid., p. vii.
² Havens, op. cit., p. 186.
Voltaire was much irritated by the vogue of the Leibnitzian philosophy at this time. Leibnitz affirms that the elements of existence are individual centers of force, or atoms, which he calls "Monads." God, the highest of monads, created, in accordance with a "pre-established harmony," his universe of monads, each of which is chosen by divine purpose from the infinite number existing in the region of ideas, must be the best possible, as it manifests divine perfection.

In England, this type of optimism became very prevalent. The philosophical thought of the optimist, Shaftesbury, was made widely intelligible and vastly popular by Pope, who paraphrased it in his "Essay on Man." Voltaire reacted violently against this current of optimism, after the disastrous earthquake at Lisbon in 1759. His "Poèmes sur le désastre de Lisbonne" is a bitter attack on the optimistic philosophy. Early in 1759, Voltaire published *Candide*, one of his greatest and still most widely read works. In this work Voltaire uses his wit, irony and sarcasm to refute the philosophy of Leibnitz, Shaftesbury and Pope. He discourages the acceptance of things as they are and the idea that this is the best of all possible worlds. He presents in *Candide* the world as it unhappily is, and there is an intentional piling up of horrors which are a challenge to complacency.

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After the death of Madame du Chatelet, Voltaire accepted the oft-repeated invitation of Frederick the Great to visit him in 1750. In 1752, while he was still in Berlin, Voltaire conceived the idea of what he called a Dictionnaire Philosophique. It appeared in 1764. Key articles such as "Government," "War," "Religion," and "Man" are of special interest even today. The Dictionnaire has grown by additions of similar works of Voltaire until now it is much larger than the original version.\(^1\)

After a disagreement with Frederick the Great, Voltaire left Berlin on March 26, 1753. Because a pirated edition of his L'Essai Sur Les Moeurs had appeared in Paris, he was forced to go to Switzerland instead.

On his estate near Geneva, Voltaire was able to be free and independent for a while. Here he set up a small theatre where he staged some of his own pieces with his friends. When his Pucelle, now first published, was circulated everywhere, a storm of criticism was raised. Again Voltaire had to flee, this time to his house at Monrion, near Lausanne, where he was able to have more freedom.

Besides the two great poems La Henriade and La Pucelle, Voltaire wrote odes, stanzas, satires, and epistles. Le Temple du Gout (1731) is scarcely a poem. It is rather a kind of judicious chatty lecture in prose-verse. The poems, "Discours sur l'Homme" (1738), and "Poeme sur le Desastre de Lisbonne" (1756) expose Voltaire's philosophical system. Man is free. He must not restrain his passions, but he must moderate them. It is in this way that he is happy. True virtue consists in charity. Voltaire expresses these ideas with force and clarity. The tone is serious without being

\(^1\) Havens, op. cit., p. 208.
Voltaire's condition was a strange one at this time. He was sixty years old, and the foremost literary man of his time. He had forced the barriers that separated him from the privileged nobility. He was rich, yet he had no place to really call his own. The French King did not wish him in Lyons. Although high honors had been bestowed upon him in Geneva, he was not altogether a welcome guest.\(^2\) Seeking peace and freedom, Voltaire bought the estate of Ferney, a few miles from Geneva.

Since the Edit of Nantes was revoked in 1685, a "certificate of Catholicity" was required to practice the learned professions. In 1762, a Protestant merchant, Jean Calas, was accused of having murdered his son to prevent his conversion to the Catholic faith. He was broken on the wheel after horrible torture, and then put to death. Yet, he had made no confession of guilt.\(^3\)

Voltaire heard of the affair and began to write letters to stir up public interest for a post-mortem reversal of the conviction. Finally the Parlement of Paris reversed the decision of the Parlement of Toulouse, decreed a rehabilitation of the memory of Calas, and caused an indemnity to be paid to his family. The most important contribution of Voltaire to the Calas case was his *Traité Sur La Tolérance*, published in 1753. The first chapters present the events of the case, then general questions are raised concerning religious tolerance. The work ends with a "Prière a

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2 Cohn, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

Voltaire also took part in the defense of another Protestant, Sirven, and the Chevalier de la Barre, a victim of the judges of Abbeville.

Voltaire spent his last years peacefully and quietly, writing unceasingly, and being visited by his friends. In 1778, he returned to Paris where he was received with great enthusiasm by everyone except the priests and the court. It is not difficult to see why Voltaire was thus esteemed by the people. He was a member of the Academy, a letter writer, a historian, a dramatist, a wit, a scientist, a philosopher, a philanthropist, an advocate of reforms in politics, and in religion, and an apostle of tolerance.

The many activities and visitors took their toll on Voltaire's health and he became seriously ill, from which he never completely recovered. On March 30, he was met at the Louvre by the Academy which bestowed on him the highest honors and made him their president. He was also given a reception after the performance of his play, Irène, by Comedie Francaise.

With seemingly unending and tireless energy, Voltaire now set to work on a plan for the re-writing of the Dictionary for the Academy. Finally, his already much weakened body gave way from overwork and exhaustion, and Voltaire's life came to an end on May 30, 1778.

It has been said that Voltaire did not originate many new ideas. Yet he was able to present them in such a way that they were characterized by force and propensity. He wielded his mighty pen with masterful skill and all feared the biting sting of his sarcasm and irony. He had many friends and his tireless efforts in his life work won him much admiration and much regret.

1 Ibid.

2 Cabeen, op. cit., p. x.
Such is the account of the lives of the two great men, both diverse in temperament and experiences. They are similar only in several specific respects and their greatness as "hommes de lettres" is the major and unifying similarity between them. Both were born into middle class families. For Pope, an only child, attention and affection was known throughout his childhood. On the other hand, Voltaire had five sisters and brothers and was brought up with a fanatical brother and a devout father who tried to instill in him a love and a respect for religion. Voltaire's thorough early education contrasts with Pope's brief schooling at intervals which ended when he reached the age of twelve. Yet, both men engaged in wide and extensive reading and as a result became well versed in the classics.

Unlike Pope, Voltaire was very class conscious and it was this class consciousness that led him into his first major difficulty when he tried to rise above his social status. Voltaire lived in an age when there was a wide prevalence of refinement and good taste, of rationalism in thinking and action, but also in an age characterized by many social evils and abuses. As a writer, Voltaire met with some of the most profound prejudices and throughout his life he was in constant fear. Pope experienced none of this.

Voltaire was a deist, with his own unique views concerning God and the immortality of the soul. For Pope Catholicism was his family religion, and to this he remained faithful throughout his life.

Both Pope and Voltaire lived during a time when the two main objectives of many writers were to show the evils of irrationalism and also to exalt the merit of a life lived by the tenets of truth and reason. Satire and invective then became the chief weapons used by writers for exposing
"dullness" and irrationality wherever they existed. Pope became thoroughly aware of the evils around him, but he was not interested in social reform as much as he was in reform of literary art that was so much abused by the "dunces." To be certain, Pope had suffered from severe criticism by certain of his contemporaries who were envious of his genius and talent. He was attacked consistently and frequently and he had enemies on all sides.

In spite of all of this, Pope had never suffered from the kind of fanaticism and intolerance that Voltaire knew all his life. Even though Pope's family was subjected to certain prejudices because at the time Catholics were a hated minority group, this was not nearly as serious as the sufferings that Voltaire experienced. Pope never had to flee for his life from country to country, having no place where he could really be sure of absolute safety. Pope was never thrown into prison as Voltaire was, nor was he ever publically insulted and beaten because of his social status. Pope never knew the kind of disillusionment that Voltaire experienced when his noble friends turned against him when he needed them most. Voltaire was interested in relieving human suffering, because he had suffered so much himself.

In terms of their careers, Pope and Voltaire both began early their literary endeavors. While Pope's primary area of concentration was poetry, Voltaire spanned the entire field as poet, playwright, story writer, historian, and publicist. While Pope remained in England practically all of his life, Voltaire's constant forced flights from country to country exposed him to most of the great international figures of the day. In this way, he was able to introduce some of the great English writers such as Newton and Shakespeare into French literature for the first time. Voltaire soon became a legend and was known all over Europe. Pope, a man respected and
loved became a renown figure in the literary world, both in his own country and abroad.

Finally, these two literary geniuses, though different in character and personality, used their pens as their chief weapon against their enemies. Both, in spite of their enemies, were surrounded by many friends and admirers. Above all, these two masters of literary art left, as a legacy of their tireless efforts, literary monuments that posterity has acclaimed and preserved.

Now that we have seen the two men in respect to their lives and works, let us look at the two works in question from the point of view of content.
CHAPTER II

A BRIEF RESUME OF THE TWO WORKS

Pope's "Essay on Man" presents a composite expose of his thinking on some of the current questions of the day concerning man and his place in the universe. In this work, Pope attempted to systematize the best in the very diverse speculative wisdom of his time, which called for a thorough knowledge of moral philosophy as well as for powers of synthesis and logic.¹

The design of the Essay is to provide a general view of man, his nature and state, in an ideal and rational condition, and above all "to justify the ways of God to man." It was to be philosophical poetry in the same vein as that written by Lucretius. The ideas in the work are not original, however. Many of the major propositions were a heritage from classical antiquity and the Middle Ages. Others were taken directly from philosophers such as Hobbes, Newton, Locke, Montaigne, Fénelon, and Pascal.²

This philosophical poem is divided into four major sections or "epistles." Each epistle is further divided into smaller divisions, varying in number. In the first epistle of the poem, Pope focuses his attention on preparing the reader for the extension of his basic argument that is to follow in the next three epistles. There are ten divisions in this epistle, and each reenforces the other in developing the argument toward a climatic

²Ibid., p. 50.
end. The principal idea in the first division supports the proposition that man is ignorant of other worlds and systems in the universe. Because of this, he can judge only with respect to his own system and his own place in the Chain of Being. In the second division, Pope continues with the idea that man is not perfect, but he has been made to agree in accordance with the general order of things. He is what he ought to be according to his place and rank in creation. The main theme set forth in the fourth division is that man's happiness depends upon his ignorance of future events, which are mercifully hidden from him as the impending slaughter of the little lamb at play is not known to him. In the fifth division, the principal theme is the idea that the cause of man's misery is his pride in striving for more knowledge and perfection than has been preordained for him. Thus, it is wrong for man to judge his own state by comparing it with that of God.

The unreasonableness of man's complaints against Providence is the main theme in section six. On the one hand, man wants to have the perfection of angels, while on the other he demands the bodily characteristic of animals. The seventh division continues with the idea that there is order throughout the entire universe. This order is seen in a gradation in the sensual and mental faculties of each species of being, so that there is a subordination of creature to creature and all of these creatures are subordinated to man. Man alone has the faculty of reason which is supreme over all of the others.

In the eighth division, Pope introduces one of the main ideas that pervades the poem throughout. Man is placed in his proper place in the Chain of Being. His observance of the necessity of remaining in his proper place affects the unity of the Chain, and harmony in nature and in the universe depends upon this same unity. In the next division, Pope continues
with this idea by saying that it is madness to even think of wanting to rise above one's designated place in the Chain. This epistle ends with the reminder that each should know his proper place and submit to it. It is here that Pope states an idea that is a theme that pervades the entire poem -- "Whatever is, is right."

In Epistle II, the central theme is that of the "nature and state of man with respect to himself, as an individual." This idea is developed over six sections, emphasizing again the need for man to refrain from comparing his state with that of God, but to study himself. This idea is introduced in the first section of the first epistle. In Pope's opinion, man alone is the measure of man. He is placed in his "middle state," between God and beast, endowed with the proper powers and frailties that are appropriate to him.

The second section of this epistle treats the subject of Self-love and Reason, two principles that are necessary to man. The purpose of Self-love is to urge while the purpose of Reason is to restrain man. Each has its purpose and end, but Self-love is the stronger of the two. In the third section, Pope continues with a presentation of the Passions, which, if controlled by Reason, are good. Pride is regarded as the ruling passion, yet it is necessary in directing men in different activities.

Vice and Virtue, which are mixed together within us, is the subject in the fourth section. In the fifth section, the odious nature of vice and how we are deceived by it is discussed. The epistle ends with a discussion in the sixth section of how useful passions and imperfections are to the individual, to society, and in all phases of life.

The argument in Epistle III is centered around the nature and state of man with respect to society. This epistle is divided into six sections, in which man is seen as a social animal. The first of these sections sets
out to prove that the whole universe is one systematic society, in which each being is made for another as well as for himself. Each person is therefore dependent upon the other. In the second section, Pope shows how Reason and Instinct both work for the good of the individual, as well as for society. In the third section of this epistle, he shows how important instinct is to animals, and how vital reason is to man.

A description of man in what Pope calls "a state of nature," is presented in the next section. Man, knowing no pride in this previous state, walked with beast, peacefully and unafraid. Unlike the man of times to come, he knew no murder and he was a child of nature. Nature instructed him to learn from the creatures around him, and to let Reason instruct him.

Section five deals with the origin of political societies, monarchy, and patriarchal government. In section six, Pope continues with this same subject and shows how religion and government both rose from the principle of love, while superstition and tyranny rose from the principle of fear. He shows how Self-Love operates for the good of society. Although there are different kinds of government, the true end of all of them is charity.

Epistle IV concludes the Essay with a discussion of the nature and state of man with respect to happiness. The first section deals with the false notions of happiness. In the second section, happiness is described as being the end of all men, and attainable by all. God intends happiness to be equal to all, says Pope. Therefore, it must be social, since all particular happiness depends on general laws. The two passions, hope and fear, keep happiness balanced among mankind.

The subject of the third section is Pope's philosophy concerning happiness, which may be defined by the three words, "Health," "Peace," and "Competence." It is a grave error to impart to virtue what are only
calamities of nature or of fortune. In the following section, Pope continues with the idea that it is foolish to expect that God should alter his general laws in favor of particular ones.

In section five, Pope advances the idea that we are not judges of who are good, but whoever they are, they must certainly be very happy people. Virtue is the subject of section six. External goods are not the proper rewards of virtue, says Pope, for they are often inconsistent with and destructive of it. Pope ends this epistle in section seven with the idea that virtue then constitutes a happiness whose object is universal and whose prospect is eternal. Virtue and happiness consist in a conformity to the order of providence here, and a resignation to it here and hereafter. The concluding idea, whatever is, is right, has pervaded the poem throughout and now serves as a reinforcement of the general principles that have been set forth by the poet in his arguments.

And now let us look at Voltaire's poem which deals with a subject similar to that of Pope.

Voltaire left to his own generation and every generation that followed a spirited reservoir of ideas that were based on truth and reason. He touched on a wide range of subjects and the ideas in his works are based on all of the major issues of the day. In his "Discours En Vers Sur L'Homme," a composite resume of the poet's ideas concerning man as a social animal, an aspect of creation, and a living being in the vastness of the universe in which he finds himself, is presented. The work consists of seven "discours" or divisions, each treating some discourse, entitled "Of the equality of condition," Voltaire begins with a technique of argumentation which he follows throughout the poem. He presents certain existing opinions and arguments concerning the subject, then with irony and often sarcasm, he
presents opposite points of view which refute these opinions and arguments, and make them seem ridiculous and invalid.

The design of the first discourse is to show that all men are equal. Special emphasis is placed on the vanity of one thinking that he is better than another. All men are equal, meted out with both good and bad in equal measure. The king is no better off than his subjects, for he experiences pain and boredom which are often prevalent in his life.

Voltaire continues with the idea that God has given us an equal portion of pleasure and pain. The poet ends with an episode depicting one person who envies the supposedly good fortune of another, who in the final analysis is seen as a weeping victim of fortune and bad luck. We all have our moments of pleasures as well as our days of torment, concludes Voltaire, but God weighs them equally and in the same balance.

The second discourse treats the subject of liberty. To the rhetorical question, "Does liberty exist?" Voltaire answers in the affirmative. He defends his argument by making the following points: (1) Without liberty, morality would no longer be meaningful. (2) There would be neither virtue nor vice, since man would be no longer responsible for his acts. Voltaire continues by saying that the passions dominate man because he is imperfect. He compares the passions to maladies, but liberty, he says, is like health. Although one may lose liberty momentarily, it returns again. Voltaire ends this discourse with an exhortation to us to raise ourselves above philosophical disputes and believe in liberty.

Envy is the theme of the third discourse. Envy is described figuratively as a child of pride, given his being "on the breast of folly." Voltaire then moves to a personal testimony of his own experiences. He describes "courtisans drunk with false glory," who are victims of envy. His
exclamation, "Jealous heart!" momentarily halts the poem but also expresses
the poet's own personal scorn for victims of this evil. Next comes a
striking example, tinged with sarcasm and irony, of envious people who are
provoked to "tears of rage" rather than of happiness when they see actors
engage in a splendid performance. "The happiness of another tears their
hearts," says Voltaire. He continues with a reprimand to "bad poets." He
advises them to "let your jealous pride speak a sweeter language." He
counsels them to surpass these superior poets whom they envy, rather than
attack them. One does not elevate himself while blaming his rival.

Voltaire now turns to a description of certain writers—Malbrance, who
is "spinosiste," Locke, who from the poison of Epicurus, infects the minds,
and finally Pope, a "seclerat," who foolishly pretends that God loves us all
and that here all is well. L'abbe Desfontaines is depicted as a blunderer
in verse and Despreaux as joining the art of pleasing with the misfortune of
slander. Further references are made to Corneille and the "Quarrel of The
Cid." Voltaire praises Chapelain who was broadminded enough to think like
a great man in his criticism of Corneille. The discourse ends with examples
of men such as Chapelain, Colbert, Berni, and Perrault whose hearts are
freed of envy and who were able to judge and praise others, without prejudices
or biases.

In the fourth discourse, which is entitled "Of moderation in everything,
in study, ambition and pleasures," Voltaire describes the man who is wise
because of moderation. He knows how to regulate his tastes, work, pleasures,
how to have purpose in business and to limit his desires. The love of
science has guided his youth since infancy. Nature is his book, and reason
is his guide.

The author now poses a series of questions: Why is it that the hideous
aspic, the tiger and the panther have never toned down their cruel character? Why does the dog, recognizing the hand that nourished it, lick the hand of his master as he dies? Why does the seemingly useless caterpillar change into a butterfly? The so-called "doctors" of the day cannot answer these questions. To the "courriers of physics," Voltaire says that they have confirmed "in the mountains and over the waters what Newton knew without leaving his house." He further says that they measure the universe and do not know it. They lack moderation in their pretension of knowing everything, yet they cannot answer these questions.

We should moderate ourselves in our ambition, continues Voltaire, for this is the greatest passion in the heart of humans. In order to be happy, live without a patron or master, for one can be taken in by the statement, "I love you." Moderation should also be observed in pleasure-seeking. The discourse ends with a praise of friendship, which has taught the poet "to know, to sing happiness."

In the fifth discourse, which deals with the nature of pleasure, Voltaire advances the idea that God is not a hard master, as certain people consider Him to be. He is good. He has given man the pleasure of resting in his sleep, nourished his body and multiplied him. Even sadness proves the goodness of God, for it is a defense against the dangers that menace our lives. God has also given us passions in order to elevate the soul. Voltaire refers to Janseniste austerity as only pride and true impiety. The passions are good, says the poet, on the condition that they are moderated.

Voltaire ends this discourse with thanks to God for the desires that He has given him and he identifies them as "taste for friendship, ardor for study, love for fine arts and solitude."

It is in the sixth discourse that Voltaire is concerned with the nature
of man in general. He begins by listing others who have explored this subject--Boileau and Pascal satirized on this subject. Pope and Leibnitz, less included to scorn, seem to take the middle course in their writing. Voltaire now proceeds to show how man looks upon nature and regards himself as the masterpiece and end of God's works. Farther away, however, a group of animals are saying the same thing about themselves. Still above, the angels are looking down on man with the same feeling of superiority. All three are mistaken, for God answers that they are all made for Him. God Himself is the only center of the universe. Nothing is either great or small. Everything is what it should be. Let us content ourselves then with the goods that are destined for us. Voltaire admonishes us therefore to observe what the world is, and gather the fruit of the treasures that it encloses and the goods that it produces. Voltaire, a tireless worker and thinker himself, advocates that others follow his example. Voltaire describes himself as having "followed nature, and sought wisdom" in his writing. He criticizes the writer who "always wishes to instruct," for the secret of boredom lies in saying everything. Thus he has paid tribute to his muse by writing simply.

Virtue is the subject of the seventh and last discourse. Voltaire begins by mentioning the fact that the name of virtue is heard everywhere. A beautiful word in itself, virtue is pleasant to be heard, easy to pronounce, but difficult to understand. The difficulty encountered in trying to define the term virtue is emphasized by examples of different definitions that have been given for it. Even Jesus, when asked, "What is truth?" refused to answer. His eloquent silence said enough, says Voltaire, for it indicated that this truth so much sought for was not made for us. The supreme law for man to observe is to love God and his fellowman.
Finally, the poet ends by giving thanks to heaven for friends in the time of injustices. In spite of the envy that he has known for forty years because of jealous enemies, virtuous friends have consoled him. Voltaire expresses his gratefulness for this fidelity.

The vast reservoir of ideas in these two works may now be seen in a better relationship by comparing them in the following chapter.
CHAPTER III

A COMPARISON OF THE TWO WORKS

The first point to be considered in comparing the poems of Pope and Voltaire concerning man is the purpose that each had in writing his work. For Pope, the primary aim was to "justify the ways of God to man," and to depict man in all of his aspects—his nature, state, and his position in an ideal and rational condition. Unlike Pope, Voltaire gives no "argument" at the beginning of his poem, stating his purposes for writing. His main objective, however, was to expose his ideas concerning man in his many aspects as a social being.

There are certain basic themes that are seen in both poems, which may be listed as follows: (1) Man's place in the universe and his relationship with God, (2) "Whatever is, is right," (3) Happiness, (4) The Passions, (5) Virtue.

Both Pope and Voltaire seem to be at one accord concerning man's place in the universe and his relationship with God. Pope's theory is that since we are ignorant of other systems, we can judge only with respect to our own. Our system is but one part of the entire universe in the whole chain. Because of our limited faculties, we can know only our system:

Say first, of God above, or Man below,
What can we reason, but from we know?
Of man, what can we see but his station here,
From which to reason, or to which refer?\(^1\)

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\(^1\) Alexander Pope, The Best of Pope, ed. George Sherburn (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1929), p. 117. Unless otherwise indicated, all further references are taken from this volume.
Voltaire's theory concerning this same idea is very similar to that of Pope. It should be mentioned here that while Pope goes into detail concerning these basic themes, Voltaire briefly summarizes the existing theories of the day, including those of Pope, then lists some of the questions that concerned the philosophers of the time:

Pourquoi suis-je en un point resserré par le temps?
Mes jours devraient aller par delà vingt mille ans;
Ma taille pour le moins dut avoir cent coudees;
D'où vient que je ne puis, plus prompt que mes idées,
Voyager dans la lune, et réformer son cœur?
Faire au moins en trois mois cent enfants à ma femme?
Pourquoi fus-je en un jour si las de ses attraits?\(^1\)

He admits that many of these metaphysical questions have not been satisfactorily answered and even he cannot supply the proper answers to them:

Vous me pressez en vain; cette vaste science,  
Ou passe ma portée, ou me force au silence.  
N'a point la liberté des Grecs et des Anglais.  
Pope a droit de tout dire, et moi je dois me taire.\(^2\)

This last line shows the immense respect that Voltaire had for Pope at the time and the very high regard he had for Pope's opinions.

Voltaire, like Pope, advocates that man should be satisfied with his place in the universe. Instead of posing vain questions to which he has no answer, man should adjust himself to his proper rank in creation and there be content:

Contentons-nous des biens qui nous sont destinés,  
Passagers comme nous, et comme nous bornés.  
Sans rechercher en vain ce que peut notre maître,

\(^1\)Voltaire, *Oeuvre Poétique*, ed. H. Legrand (Paris: Bibliothèque Larousse, 1936), p. 60. Unless otherwise indicated, all further references are taken from this volume.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 58.
Ce que fut notre monde, et ce qu'il devrait être,
Observons ce qu'il est, et recueillons le fuit
Des trésors qu'il renferme et des biens qu'il produit.¹

Both poets seem to agree therefore that it is unreasonable for man
to make complaints against Providence in terms of his present state and
condition. Man should not endeavor to put himself in the place of God, nor
should he judge his own state by comparing it with that of God.

The "Whatever is, is right" theme occurs in both works. Pope saw
universal order throughout the visible world. Each species of creation had
its own designated place in what he termed the "Chain of Being." There is
no imperfection from one rank in the Chain to another, for everything is as
perfect as it ought to be.

Presumptuous Man! the reason wouldst thou find,
Why formed so weaker, blinder, and no less?
Ask of thy mother earth, why oaks are made
Taller or stronger than the weeds they shade?

Then say not Man's imperfect, Heaven in fault;
Say rather, Man's as perfect as he ought:
His knowledge measured to his state and place;
His time a moment, and a point his space.²

It is only in aspiring to rise above his rank in creation that man experiences
unhappiness. It is in this way that a link in the great chain is broken and
universal disorder takes place:

The least confusion but in one not all
That system only, but the whole must fall.³

Therefore, everything in creation has its own purpose and end, though
unknown to man:

¹Ibid., p. 61.

²Pope, p. 117.

³Ibid., p. 123.
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, in spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,
One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right.

Voltaire does not speak of order in the entire universe as being
regulated by order in a "chain of being," as does Pope. While he does not
explicitly say that such does not exist, he does express his doubt con-
cerning its existence:

Montre-moi, si tu peux, cette chaîne invisible
Du monde des esprits et du monde sensible;
Cet ordre si caché de tant d'êtres divers
Que Pope après Plato crut voir dans l'univers.²

he does agree with Pope that things have been created according to a divine
plan:

Rien n'est grand ni petit; tout est ce qu'il doit être,
D'un parfait assemblage instruments imparfaits,
Dans votre rang places demeurez satisfaits.³

Voltaire places much emphasis on his belief that everything is what it ought
to be, and that each being has his own place and rank in society. Like Pope
Voltaire agreed that man should not complain to God because of his so-called
"imperfections." There are some questions that cannot be answered except
with the response that "This is the way it ought to be."

The theme of happiness is another element that is seen in both poems.
Both Pope and Voltaire present some of the existing false notions concerning
what constitutes happiness and who among mankind are the happiest. Both
Pope and Voltaire show how some people falsely declare kings and rich men

¹Ibid., p. 124.
²Voltaire, p. 58.
³Ibid., p. 60.
as the only truly happy beings. Pope advocates that happiness is equal in all of us. Those who are happy now will also see days of misfortune and pain. Pope refutes the common idea that kings are the happiest because of their station in life:

Bliss is the same in subject as in king,
In who obtain defence, or she defend,
In him who is, or him who finds a friend;
Heaven breathes through every member of the whole
One common blessing, as one common soul.1

Pope sees a positive value and purpose in misfortunes that man experiences. This is only a part of the whole plan for the universal good:

God sends it not ill; if rightly understood,
Or partial ill is universal Good,
Or Change admits, or Nature lets it fall;
Short, and but rare, till Man improved it all:2

It is here again that Pope emphasizes the "Whatever is, is right" theme.

In Voltaire's poem, we see an almost exact duplication of these ideas. He points out that all mortals are equal in terms of the degree of happiness of misfortune that is allotted to them. It is only in our various occupations and life careers that we differ. Like Pope, Voltaire shows how people tend to envy kings, believing that they alone are truly happy:

"Etre heureux comme un roi, dit le peuple hébété
Hélas! pour le bonheur que fait le majeste?
En vain sur ses grandeurs un monarque s'appuie;3

but the king is like his subjects in his equal allotment of pleasure and pain:

Il gemit quelquefois, et bien souvent s'ennuie,
Son favori sur moi jette à peine un coup d'œil.
Parle; qu'as-tu gagné dans la chambre du roi?
Un jeu plus de flatteurs et d'ennemis que moi.1

Voltaire advocates that all of mankind have their joys and their sorrows in equal measures. Where there is happiness today, tomorrow may be replaced with misfortune. The king has problems just as his subjects, and the rich suffer sometimes as do the poor. Therefore, there is no perfect state where happiness reigns supreme at all times:

Tout est égal enfin: la cour a ses fatigues, 
L'Eglise a ses combats, la guerre a ses intrigues: 
Le mérite modeste est souvent obscurci; 
Le malheur est partout, mais le bonheur aussi.2

No one suffers more than another or experiences happiness in greater proportions than another. Each has his own time for both pleasure and pain and God has regulated the balance of each and has made them equal.

Both Pope and Voltaire give examples of how people failed to understand the nature of happiness and were deceived. Pope shows how material goods were often taken as the basis of happiness, and kings and rulers, in spite of all their riches, were seen to fall. Virtue then is the sole basis for happiness, according to Pope. This is the only true happiness. In this same respect, Voltaire gives an illustration of how one person looks upon another, envying his happiness and good fortune, but later he witnesses dire misfortune enter in the life of his neighbor. In turn, the man who was once envied by his neighbor now looks upon his friend as being much happier and more fortunate than he. Voltaire points out that both are wrong. We all have our moments of pleasures as well as our days of torments. God would be unjust to give more happiness to some than to others. The clerk in

1 Ibid., p. 44.
2 Ibid., p. 46.
his meagre garments is no more than men of the church in their red or green:

Tout est a ses maux, tout homme a ses revers.
Moins hardi dans la paix, plus actif dans la guerre,
Charles aurait sous ses lois retenu l'Angleterre;
Dufresny, moins prodigue, et docile au bons sens,
N'eût point dans la misère avili ses talents.
Tout est égal enfin: la cour a ses fatigues,
L'Eglise a ses combats, la guerre a ses intrigues;
Le mérite modeste est souvent obscurci;
Le malheur est partout, mais le bonheur aussi.¹

Voltaire does not go into detail as to what constitutes true happiness as does Pope. Once again he recounts some of the existing opinions and misconceptions, then proceeds to give his own views on the subject:

Le ciel, en nous formant, mélangea notre vie
De désirs, de dégoûts, de raison, de folie,
De moments de plaisirs, et de jours de tourments;
De notre être imparfait voilà les éléments;
Ils composent tout l'homme, ils forment son essence;
Et Dieu nous pesa tous dans la même balance.²

On the other hand, Pope formulates a definition in terms of what constitutes "true happiness," then he proceeds to show how it cannot exist in the external or material possessions such as riches or fame, which are only products of fortune or chance. Happiness can be found only in virtue, which is, for Pope, the triumph of reason. All are equal in their portions of happiness:

Condition, circumstances is not the thing;
Bliss is the same in subject or in king,
In who obtain defence, or who defend,
In him who is, or him who finds a friend:
Heaven breathes through every member of the whole
One common blessing, as one common soul.³

Pope and Voltaire also seem to agree on the nature of the passions.

Both seem to feel that the passions, if properly controlled by reason, are

¹Ibid., p. 46.
²Ibid., p. 47.
³Pope, p. 145.
good. Pope terms passion as only modes of self-love but they must be made to come under the care and influence of reason:

Passions, though selfish, if their means be fair, List under Reason, and deserve her care.\(^1\)

These passions may destroy man if he does not keep them under control. Pope singles out one passion, Pride, and regards it as the strongest of all of the others, and therefore the most destructive if left unchecked and unrestrained.

And hence one Master Passion in the breast, Like Aaron's serpent, swallows up the rest. Yes, Nature's road must ever be preferred; Reason is here no guide, but still a guard: 'Tis hers to rectify, not overthrow, And treat this passion more as friend than foe:\(^2\)

Voltaire alludes to this same idea in his discussion of moderation in pleasures and ambition. Unlike Pope, Voltaire does not single out one of the passions as being deadlier than the others, but he does see some good in them and advocates that they should not be restrained:

Je ne conclus donc pas, orateur dangereux, Qu'il faut lâcher la bride aux passions humaines. De ce coursier foudroyer je veux tenir les rênes; Je veux que ce torrent, par un heureux secours, Sans inonder mes champs, les abreuve en son cours: Vents, épurez les airs, et soufflez sans tempêtes; Soleil, sans nous brûler, marche et luis sur nos têtes.\(^3\)

In terms of the theme of Virtue, while Pope tends to show what the term means, Voltaire mentions that there are many different definitions of it and

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 128.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 129.

\(^3\)Voltaire, p. 56.
that it is difficult to understand. For Pope, virtue is the triumph of reason. In such a state, self-love has been transformed into a love for all things. This leads to a kind of universal benevolence with emphasis on that which is noble and lofty. According to Pope, virtue seeks no reward of its own but praise:

That, Virtue's ends from Vanity can raise,  
Which seeks no interest, no reward but praise;  
And build on wants, and on defects of mind,  
The joy, the peace, the glory of Mankind.¹

On the other hand, Voltaire endeavors to show the difficulty in understanding what virtue is. He shows how even Jesus refused to define the term when asked by Pilate. Voltaire states that this shows how this truth (virtue) was not made for us. Voltaire endorses the supreme law of God as our answer in terms of virtue:

"Aimez Dieu, lui dit-il, mais aimez les mortels."²

Although there are parallel ideas in both poems, it is evident that Pope is the greater master of verse form and thereby the greater poet. His rhymed couplets, exquisite in style and form, are far superior to Voltaire's verse which is often little more than rhymed prose.

Pope uses decasyllabic lines with both the open and closed couplet form. Voltaire chose the alexandrin which he also rhymes in couplet form. Compare the succinct yet penetrating and refined style of Pope:

Know thyself, presume not God to scan  
The proper study of mankind is man.³

and:

¹Pope, p. 132.  
²Voltaire, p. 64.  
³Pope, p. 125.
Why has not Man a microscopic eye?
For this plain reason, Man is not a fly. ¹

with the almost "prose verse" of Voltaire:

*Tout Vouloir est d'un fou, l'exces est son partage:
La moderation est le tresor du sage.*²

or:

*Si l'homme est creé libre, il doit se gouverner;
Si l'homme a des tyrans, il les doit détrôner.*³

Notice also the difference between the way Pope states one of the basic themes in the poems:

*And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,
One truth is clear, *Whatever is, is right.*⁴

and Voltaire's version of the same idea:

*Des destins et du temps connaissez le seul maître
Rien n'est grand ni petit: tout est ce qu'il doit être.*⁵

While Voltaire seems to include many of the themes that are embodied in Pope's work, he is not as systematic nor does he keep to the point in question as does his English contemporary. There is a tendency for Voltaire to stray occasionally from the subject and consequently there are digressions throughout his work. Therefore, the point that he is making is often obscured and the objective for writing the work is thereby hidden from view. On the other hand, Pope has an "argument" to introduce each epistle wherein he states the major points discussed in each of the major divisions of the epistle. Pope

²*Voltaire*, p. 52.
⁴*Pope*, p. 125
⁵*Voltaire*, p. 60.
follows this "outline" very closely, without unnecessary digressions or illustrations. One may therefore read the "arguments" and get a complete resume of each of the epistles.

There also seems to be a hesitancy on the part of Voltaire to expose his own ideas and opinions concerning the questions treated in his work. Instead, he summarizes the opinions held by others before making any comments of his own, which for the most part, do not differ markedly from the others that he presents.

We move now to a discussion of the poetics of the two writers so that their similarities and differences may be further seen.

Both Pope and Voltaire make frequent use of inversions throughout their poems. Figures of speech are also to be found in abundance. Personification seems to be the most frequently used form, although metaphors are also prevalent throughout. Pope refers to animals as "nature's children." An example of metonymy is seen in Pope's reference to God as "Heaven." Frequent examples of the apostrophe are seen in his direct address to man. Personification of pride, reason, nature, and self-love pervades the poem throughout. Similies are also seen from time to time, one of the most vivid being Pope's comparison of matter, as it is produced by the earth only to return to it again in the form of decaying materials, to bubbles in the sea:

All forms that perish other forms supply,
(By turns we catch the vital breath, and die,)
Like bubbles on the sea of Matter born,
They rise, they break, and to that sea return.¹

Voltaire also uses an abundance of images and figures of speech. Nature is referred to as a book, and he continues with a series of images which

appeal to the imagination:

La nature est ton livre, et tu prêtes y voir
Moins ce qu'on a pensé que ce qu'il faut savoir.
La raison te conduit: avance à sa lumière;
Marche encore quelques pas, mais borne ta carrière.
Abord de l'infini ton cours doit s'arrêter;
La commence un âme: il faut respecter.¹

He describes his experiences at the court as a "vessel shipwrecked on the seas of these sirens." He refers to pleasures as "flowers that our divine Master caused to be born around us in the branches of the world:"

Les plaisirs sont les fleurs que notre divin maître
Dans les ronces du monde autour de nous fait naître,
Chacune a sa saison, et par des soins prudents
On peut en conserver pour l'hiver de nos ans.
Mais s'il faut les cuillir, c'est d'une main légère;
On flétrit aisément leur beauté passagère.²

Pleasure is described by Voltaire as having "slept on the breast of laziness."

A description of the uncomplicated nature of his verse is described as "singing to his muse with simplicity." Apostrophes are also seen occasionally and metaphors are in abundance.

An example of Pope's ability to vividly portray his ideas is seen in his description of order in the universe regulated by the "chain of love:"

See plastic Nature working to this end,
The single atoms each to other tend,
Attract, attracted to, the next in place
Formed and impelled its neighbour to embrace.
See Matter next, with various life endued,
Press to one centre still, the gen'r al Good.
See dying vegetables life sustain,
See life dissolving vegetate again:
All forms that perish other forms supply,
(By turns we catch the vital breath, and die, )³

¹ Voltaire, p. 52.
² Ibid., p. 55.
³ Pope, pp. 134-135.
There seems to be an absence of this kind of creativity in Voltaire but the verse often retains a special charm of its own:

La voix de la vertue préside à tes concerts;  
Elle m'appelle à toi par le charme des vers.  
Ta grande étude est l'homme, et de ce labyrinthe  
Le fil de la raison te fait chercher l'enceinte.  
Monstre l'homme à mes yeux; honteux de m'ignorer,  
Dans mon être, dans moi, je cherche a pénétrer. 

In his Essay on Man, Pope seems less ironic and sarcastic than Voltaire in his Discours; Pope seems not to be concerned with attacking personal enemies or holding them up to ridicule. On the other hand, Voltaire often reverts to "name calling" and personal references are seen throughout his work. Voltaire's brilliant wit is often revealed in his poem, and the biting sarcasm of his choice of words is penetrating and forceful. An example of this is seen in the poet's discussion of some of the philosophers of the day:

Souvent dans ses chagrins un miserable auteur  
Descend au rôle affreux de calomniateur:  
Au lever de Sejan, chez Nestor, chez Narcisse,  
Il distille à longs traits son absurde malice.  
Pour lui tout est scandale, et tout impiete:  
Assurer que ce globe, en sa course emporte,  
S'éleve à l'équateur, en tournant sur lui-même,  
C'est un raffinement d'erreur et de blasphème.  
Malbranche est spinoiste, et Locke en ses écrits  
Du poison d'Epicure infecte les esprits;  
Pope est un scélérat, de qui la plume impie  
Ose vanter de Dieu la clémence infinie,  
Qui prétend follement (ô le mauvais cheretin!)  
Que Dieu nous aime tous, et qu'ici tout est bien. 

In Pope's poem, many of the couplets (and sometimes several couplets) form proverbs in which the ideas are clear and forceful in spite of the brevity of the lines:

Seek and confess, one comfort still must rise,
'Tis this, Though Man's a fool, yet God is wise,\textsuperscript{1}

God sends not ill; if rightly understood,
Or partial ill is universal Good,
Or Change admits, or Nature lets it fall;
Short, and but rare, till Man improved it all.\textsuperscript{2}

That Virtue only makes our Bliss below:
And all our Knowledge is, ourselves to know.\textsuperscript{3}

There is an absence of this kind of epigramatic style in Voltaire. Even when his couplets do embody ideas in this pithy and concise form, they seem to lack the musical quality seen in Pope:

\begin{quote}
Les plaisirs sont les fleurs que notre divin maitre
Dans les ronces du monde autour de nous fait naître.\textsuperscript{4}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Le mérite modeste est souvent obscurci;
Le malheur est partout, mais le bonheur aussi.\textsuperscript{5}
\end{quote}

Both poets develop their arguments by giving examples of existing opinions, and then presenting the opposite side of the question to prove these opinions as questionable, if not invalid. They both frequently quote what others have said which often serves as a parallel to what they have to say. Both poems are philosophical, but the didactic element, though not strongly pronounced, is not absent in either of the poems. These numerous illustrations and examples pervade the poems throughout. The style is therefore conversational, characterized by simplicity and clarity.

\textsuperscript{1}Pope, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 147.
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 154.
\textsuperscript{4}Voltaire, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., p. 46.
The complete objectivity and impersonal treatment of the subject matter in Pope's work contrasts with Voltaire's tendency to insert himself and his experiences in his works. At times, Voltaire becomes almost lyrical because of this. To him, poetry was not a distant, cold, completely impersonal philosophical medium. Instead, it was a means of projecting one's own ideas and feelings to a public for whom he had great esteem and which he was endeavoring to enlighten. In a sense, Voltaire was a rational humanist, deeply concerned with mankind, while Pope was immensely disdainful of the human species.

It is evident that since Voltaire knew, read and admired Pope, his "Discours" was greatly influenced by Pope's "Essay on Man." Many of the ideas seen in Voltaire's poem are an exact parallel of those of Pope. While Pope tends to speak out and give definite opinions of his own, Voltaire's technique is often to present certain existing opinions before giving those of his own, if at all. Voltaire's specific references to Pope in his poem also indicates that he was influenced by the English poet.

Although the writer holds both poets in great esteem and is highly cognizant of the immense merit and influence of each, she feels that Pope is the better poet and that his poem is far superior to that of Voltaire. It has been generally established that although Voltaire was hailed by his contemporaries as one of the foremost poets of the day, we now do not consider him as a genius in this area. Pope is obviously superior to Voltaire, for his skill in handling the heroic couplet has been unsurpassed.

Yet, and in spite of what dissimilarities there may be in terms of the two poems in question, both are philosophical and deal with the major problems that confronted the great minds of the eighteenth century. Above all, these two works which posterity has preserved, have as their creators two of the greatest intellectual wits that the literary world has ever known.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


