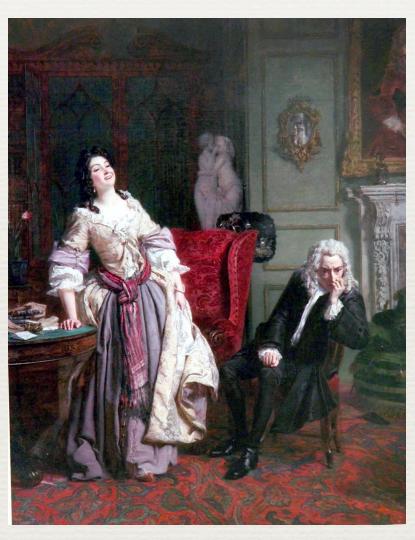
Humanities 4: Lecture 12

Enlightenment Poetry: Alexander Pope

Outline of Lecture

- A.Biography/Historical Context
- B. Epistles in Essay on Man
- C. Analysis of Epistle I
- D. Analysis of Epistle II
- E. Comparisons
- F. Significance

Alexander Pope



- (1688-1744)
- Catholic, TB at 12, 4'6",
 Never married
- Founded Scriblerus
 Club with Swift & Gay
- Poet, Editor of Shakesp., Translator of Iliad and Odyssey
- "The Essay on Criticism" (heroic couplet), "The Rape of the Lock"

Intellectual Context

- -No direct knowledge of Leibniz
- -Shaftesbury's Moralist via St. John

Bolingbroke

- -Shaftesbury's Principle of Harmony and Balance
- -Influenced Voltaire (for a while)

Essay on Man: Four Epistles

- I. On the Nature and State of Man, with respect to the Universe
- II. On the Nature and State of Man, with respect to Himself as Individual
- III. On the Nature and State of Man, with respect to Society
- IV. On the Nature and State of Man, with respect to Happiness

Epistle I

Intro: Consider the world and see if we can vindicate the ways of God to man -contrast with Milton's *Paradise Lost*

- I. Epistemic Limitations
 - -only what we know of this, not other worlds
 - -no inference from part to whole
 - -Is envisioned order God's or man's?*
- II. Our (imperfect) grasp of perfection
 - -Why not greater? Why not lesser?
 - -We may not understand how we contribute to perfection of whole.*

Epistle I, cont.

- III. Ignorance and Hope
 - -we are ignorant of future & that is good.
 - -hope is essential to human life.*
- IV-VI. Sources of Error
 - -Pride and Reason*
 - -Man is no exception*
- VII-IX. The Great Chain of Being*
 - -creatures are ordered according to their degree of perfection.*
 - -the order of nature cannot be different.*

Epistle I, cont.

- X. Consequences of Proper Understanding
 - -cease calling order imperfection.
 - -submit to the security of God's benevolence
 - -"Whatever is, is right."

Epistle II

- I. Focus on Man
 - -know man, not God.*
- II. Two Principles of Human Nature
 - -Self-love
 - -Reason*
 - -several contrasts, but common aim.*

III-IV. The Passions

- -passions can become virtuous, with help.
- -virtue and vice, though different, are in us and unite to promote a single mysterious end.*

Epistle II, cont.

V. Vice

- -everyone thinks himself virtuous, not vicious.
- -everyone has both virtues and vices to different degrees.
- VI. The Usefulness of Vice
 - -our mutual dependence leads to benefits*
 - -self-love itself has uses*

Comparisons?

- -with Voltaire's Candide?
- -with Leibniz's Optimism?
- -with Hume's position?

Pope's Significance

- -Artistic expression of broadly Enlightenment perspective
 - -science of man
 - -order to world and man's place in it
 - -establishment of heroic couplet and artistic standards