

## A Comparative Study of the Concept of Compatibilism in David Hume's *Enquiries* and Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*

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### Abstract

The discovery of the motives behind human actions turned into a controversial issue among philosophers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While supporters of libertarianism maintained that human actions stemmed from an inner will, the Necessitarians, on the other hand, believed human actions were an effect of previous external causes. David Hume, however, came up with a middle-way solution for this dispute which he named his Reconciling Project. This comparative study aims to discover the concept of the Reconciling Project in the works of Alexander Pope. To achieve this the article would elaborate upon Hume's thoughts on the theme mentioned above expressed in the eighth chapter of his book *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* entitled *Of Liberty and Necessity*. It would trace it to the works of Pope by analysing Pope's views in *Essay on Man* and his notion of *The Ruling Passion*. It would be argued and concluded through a comparative method that Hume's thoughts had found their way into the works of Pope, and both thinkers found human instincts as the real motive behind human actions. Through an intertextual analysis, it would also be concluded that this was either the direct effect of Hume's thoughts on Pope or that both figures were influenced by the same intellectual currents of the eighteenth century, Enlightenment, and secularisation.

**Keywords:** Libertarian, Necessitarian, Ruling Passion, Reconciling Project, Enlightenment

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## 1. Introduction

The seventeenth century saw the emergence of new secular ideologies or the revival of the ones blurred by the heavy shadow of Christianity during the Middle Ages. Among these emerging ideologies was Humanism. Attention had been turned to mankind rather than religion, with the human body and behaviour becoming a major subject of interest for philosophers and scientists. The various scientific discoveries of that period were also influential in raising the interest of the philosophers to probe into the nature of the human psyche, and the roots of his behaviour (Noggle 2012:1350). Two antagonistic views on the motive behind human actions were cherished by different groups of philosophers. The first group believed human actions were based on their free will and internal decisions, and external factors played no role in the decision-making process, the second group, however, maintained that human decisions were based on previous causes or circumstances around them and not their will (Harris 2005: 7).

As mentioned before both ideas about the roots of human actions had their supporters among the philosophers of that era. The supporters of free will became known as the Libertarians and the others as Necessitarians. While Libertarians believed humans were free to choose whether to take a certain action or refrain from taking it, it all depended on their own will, the necessitarians on the contrary believed whatever conduct one has is the effect of previous external causes (7). There were, however, philosophers who believed in a third approach which would encompass the arguments presented by both sides, bringing reconciliation among these antagonistic thoughts.

David Hume was among the philosophers who attempted marriage between these two competing ideologies by presenting compatibilism and his Reconciling Project (67). He maintained that both theories could co-exist side by side in the way that one could be under the influence of the circumstances forcing him to take a certain action, and in the meantime have the will to decide whether to take that certain action or not. Hume was not convinced that every effect was a consequence of a certain cause, and in the meantime believed that no matter how experienced a person is he will never be able to make the right future choice based on his previous experiences. He saw the root of one's actions in his instincts. Hume's approach became known as his Reconciling Project, where he found a reason for human actions that neither matched the Libertarians' reasonings nor the Necessitarians' argumentations. (104)

Alexander Pope is among the authors who shared Hume's ideas concerning the motives behind human actions. Pope assumed that God had no favouritism for man, and man was just a creation like all other creations controlled by his instincts and passions (Laird 1944: 289). He also believed that Passions were the originators of all human actions, and their objective was immediate pleasure. He also recognized one "Ruling Passion" in every individual that was born with that person and would determine his destiny.

The present article would endeavour to trace Hume's ideas in Pope by investigating the similarities between Hume's ideas, and that of Pope expressed in his works through an analysis of their related works.

## **2. Review of Literature**

In this study, both Hume's and Pope's views will be studied and compared together. The books that the researcher has found most important and are closest to the subject are *The Oxford Handbook of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (2013), and *The Oxford Handbook of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy* (2013) which provide background information on the subject by analysing the main philosophical currents of the seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries respectively. *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy* (2005) studies the views of both Libertarian and necessitarian philosophers from Thomas Hobbes to John Locke, Thomas Reid, and other major philosophers on the mentioned subjects. The book has also dedicated one chapter to Hume and his Reconciling Project. The above-mentioned books elaborate upon the difference between Hume and his contemporaries in their approach to the subject of Liberty and Necessity. *Modern Philosophy in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (2003) discusses how Hume considered human animal, and instinctive drives as the real motive behind human actions.

Essays entitled, *Alexander Pope and Eighteenth-Century Conflicts about Ultimacy* (1944), *Pope's Images of Man* (1960) elaborate upon Pope's views on the relationship between reason, passions, and his instincts and the way Pope prioritized the role of passions over reason on the human psyche. *Alexander Pope's Catholic Vision* (2013) provides background information on Pope's religious tendencies, and also some biographical information. *The Imaginative World of Alexander Pope* (1987) is yet another book that endeavours to discover the roots of Pope's ideology, and how they shaped his character as he came to be known today.

## **3. Methodology**

Based on the nature of this study which is investigating the influence of the thoughts of a philosopher on a certain author a mixed method of analysis and comparison has been chosen to materialize this study. On the philosophical side which is studying Hume's ideas on the roots of human motives the study not only has focused on the literature composed by several critics, and authors, but also has analyzed two of Hume's books named *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) to obtain a first-hand information on Hume's views through his writings.

The same method has been applied to study the views of Pope on the mentioned subject matter. The study not only has enjoyed the study of the views of different critics, and writers on the subject, but also has done a detailed analysis of Pope's *Essay on Man* (1733) in order again to obtain first-hand information on Pope's views

on the subject in question. More space has been dedicated to the study of the works of the authors themselves, compared to the study of the views of other critics on them. Of course, this does not mean any side has received any priority, but efforts have been made to create a balance between the two sides of the study.

Finally, a comparative method has been applied to the study to trace Hume's thoughts in Pope's works by comparing Pope's views expressed in his works with those of Hume in his Books.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Hume on Passions in *The Treatise*

David Hume expressed his views on Liberty and Necessity in two of his books *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) which for the sake of abbreviation will be called *The Treatise*, and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) which will be called *The Enquiry* in this article.

He wrote *The Treatise* ten years before *The Enquiry*, and it seems he expressed different views on Reason and passions compared to those expressed in *The Enquiry*. In *The Treatise*, Influenced by Deism like Pope, Hume embarks on the daunting task of proving the reason to be the slave of passions:

I shall endeavour to prove first, that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will; and secondly, that it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will. (413)

Hume finds the pleasure and the pain we gain from any external, and internal stimulus as the real motive behind our actions, and reason only as a guide for us either to reach that pleasure or get relief from that pain. Hume says:

Tis from the prospect of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises towards any object.... And 'tis plain, that as reason is nothing but the discovery of the connexion, it cannot be by tis means that the objects can affect us. (414)

Next Hume goes right to the point more directly:

Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. (415)

He does not see any falsehood or lack of proper guidance in one's passions, and if passions prove wrong in their guidance of someone to direct his will, the misunderstanding from the passions is to be blamed, and not the original passion itself.

In short, a passion must be accompany'd with some false judgment, in order to its being unreasonable; and even then 'tis not the passion, properly speaking, which is unreasonable, but the judgment. (416)

Here the importance Hume ascribes to the passions and their righteousness in steering the will towards its desired goal can be seen. Hume's views in *The Treatise* on the role of reason and passions in humans are rather radical and he finds reason the

slave of passions, but when he wrote *The Enquiry* nearly ten years later it seems his views had changed, and it was there where he introduced his Reconciling project in a chapter of the book entitled *Of Liberty and Necessity*. But Hume's approach to the relationship between reason and passions was different from his contemporaries.

James Harris in *The Oxford Handbook of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy* also asserts that Hume's approach to the issue of Liberty and Necessity was different from his contemporaries:

I argue that Hume's treatment of liberty and necessity in both the Treatise (1739-40) and the first Enquiry (1748) is meant to undermine the general approach to this topic taken by Clarke and shared by other eighteenth-century British philosophers (174)

He goes on to elaborate more on this 'undermining of the general approach to this topic' in another book of his entitled *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy*:

His concern in the later treatment of the question not to argue against liberty by arguing for necessity, but rather 'to make it appear, that all men have ever agreed in the doctrines both of necessity and of liberty, according to any reasonable sense, which can be put on these terms; and that the whole controversy has hitherto turned merely upon words. He declares that his is a reconciling project. (67)

Through the last two quotes Harris not only further elaborates upon the notion of Hume's reconciling Project, but also confirms that Hume was the first philosopher who introduced the idea. Hume's views on Liberty and Necessity and his interpretation of these ideas will be discussed next.

## **4.2. Of Liberty and Necessity**

### **4.2.1. A Universal Definition of Liberty and Necessity**

Hume begins this chapter of *The Enquiry* with an argument concerning the different understanding philosophers have of the terms that are the subject matter of the dispute. He asserts that philosophers have disputed these subjects for nearly two thousand years without having a unified understanding or a standard definition for these terms. It could have been easy for scholars to agree on a single definition for the terms in question using their reason, but if this thing has not taken place all through history it means there is ambiguity in the understanding everyone has of these terms.

But if we consider the matter more narrowly, we shall be apt to draw a quite opposite conclusion. From this circumstance alone, that a controversy has been long kept on foot, and remains still undecided, we may presume, that there is some ambiguity in the expression, and that the disputants affix different ideas to the terms employed in the controversy (58).

The properties of the mind are the same in everyone Hume claims, so if people succeed in coming to a general definition for any disputable terms, then there will be no reason to continue any controversy unless each side of the dispute seeks to find, or better to say improvise reasons to claim victory against their antagonists for other reasons such as enmity toward any certain individual. As Harris concludes in *Of Liberty and Necessity* :

What Hume does is show that all the doctrine of necessity amounts to, when properly understood, is something that the libertarian already concedes: that there is certain motives are regularly followed by certain actions, such that human action is largely uniform and so predictable. (13-14)

Harris reaffirms Hume's belief that Liberty and Necessity are the ends of the same rope, and the dispute of the philosophers upon this subject comes from their lack of having a proper understanding of these philosophies.

#### **4.2.2. Examining the Doctrine of Necessity**

At this point in the chapter in his *Enquiry*, Hume begins 'examining the doctrine of necessity' as he terms it. This is the first step he takes in his efforts toward reconciliation between these antagonistic views, and their followers. Because, as mentioned earlier, in Hume's view if everyone agrees on what these terms mean or signify resulting in a universally acknowledged definition, then there will be no more dispute around them. He begins by examining the doctrine of necessity.

As the first step in defining necessity, Hume takes for granted the presupposition that whatever happens is the result or consequence of a previous cause, and the effect could not have happened differently.

It is universally allowed, that matter, in all its operations, is actuated by a necessary force, and that every natural effect is so precisely determined by the energy of its cause, that no other effect, in such particular circumstances, could possibly have resulted from it. (59)

So if all agree on this principle, then Hume goes to the next step of his interpretation of the cause and effect phenomenon. The direction and the impact of every effect are determined by the laws of nature, and this should not come as a surprise to anyone. So for Hume, every effect is the natural outcome of a cause, and not necessitated by the cause.

#### **4.2.3. Relationship Between Cause and Effect**

There is a kind of relationship between every cause and its effect. Man can predict the effect of a cause based on historical, or personal experience which he has gained by observing similar effects of previous causes. So it is incorrect to consider a new effect for every cause, as according to Hume, the effect of any cause is predictable

and that is the reason for the creation of the term necessity in general. We can only say one action has been followed by another, and not one has produced the other. The relation between the cause and its effect is based on the laws of nature, and its reason is unknown to man. Man should not endeavour to rationalize the relationship between cause and effect but should predict the effect for every cause based on his memory and senses.

Our idea, therefore, of necessity and causation arises from the uniformity, observable in the operations of nature; where similar objects are constantly conjoined together, and the mind is determined by custom to infer the one from the appearance of the other. (60)

There is no other understanding of the notion of necessity beyond as Hume terms it except in two categories one the ‘conjunction of similar objects’ meaning the same causes creating the same predictable effects, and the other “inference from one to other’ meaning one effect is the natural consequence of its cause.

For the ‘conjunction of similar objects, and the reason why people show the same reactions to the same stimulus, Hume offers the following reasoning:

It is universally acknowledged, that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains the same, in its principles and operations. The same motives always produce the same actions: The same events follow from the same causes. Ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, public spirit; these passions, mixed in various degrees, and distributed through society, have been, from the beginning of the world, and still are, the source of all the actions and enterprizes, which have been observed among mankind. (60)

He argues about the innate feelings in human nature which in more modern terms can be interpreted as human ‘instincts’. Although Hume does not use the word instinct, we should keep in mind *The Enquiry* was written in the eighteenth century, and perhaps at that time, the notion of human instincts had not been as popularized as it is in modern times.

Richard Francks in *Modern Philosophy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* elaborates further on Hume’s approach to this issue:

Hume’s first move is to deny this perhaps natural-seeming account of the matter, and in so doing to deny the whole basis of accepted moral thinking in his day. Reason, he says, our rational understanding, can only ever tell us how things are in the world-it tells us what is true, and what isn’t. But on their own, these facts about the world can tell you nothing at all about what you should *do*, because what you should do depends on what you



want. (241)

Here Francks reconfirms Hume's idea that one always wishes for what he wants probably determined by his instincts, and not what he needs usually determined through his reasoning.

Hume also adds one more dimension to the idea of passions controlling one's mental processes in *The Enquiry* and that is the unchangeable status of these 'motives' from the first day of humanity until the present time. "Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular". (60)

Hume endeavoured to create a bridge of peace between the concepts of liberty and necessity by borrowing the main tenets of each ideology, and mixing them with the fashionable scientific methods which were becoming more and more popular in those times. Instead of taking sides either with the necessitarians by introducing human passions as the main governor of human will, and the libertarian mind-oriented hypothesis on human conduct, he introduced human instincts as the main ruler of the human will.

Hume's introduced 'Reconciling Project' which based human motives on his instincts can also be traced in Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*, especially when he introduced the 'Ruling Passion'. While Hume maintains a rather abstract approach, Pope on the contrary gives this issue a more artistic, and poetic breath.

### 4.3. Alexander Pope on Passions

Alexander Pope is one of those rather difficult characters to study, and it is not easy to delve into his personal beliefs among all the ironic, and paradoxical religious doctrines he followed throughout his life. Being born to Catholic parents Pope later on in his life turned to Deism and Pantheism. It can be said that Pope stayed loyal to his inherited ancestral Catholic faith, which his father taught him despite all the restrictions placed by the official Church, but did not follow it very seriously as a staunch believer. This can be seen from his tendency toward other faiths from one side, and not attacking his ancestral faith in many of his major works. Maynard Mack, who wrote a comprehensive biography of Pope says "Pope was a man of religious temper even if not particularly devout" and was «far more interested by the ethics of Christianity than by its dogmas» (739).

The decline of Pope's faith in his ancestral religion led to new faiths entering his religious arena, and soon the Catholic-born Alexander Pope found himself swimming in the currents of Deism and Empiricism at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Leigh 1997: 25). Deism can be considered a natural outcome of an empiricist view of religion. It followed two main principles at that time: the use of reason alone to explain the ultimate truths; and the rejection of any revealed or supernatural explanations of religious doctrines. Deism rejected Christian doctrines of Trinity, Incarnation, or grace and reduced it to a religion advocating morality. Pope's belief in deism



led to his idolizing of fatalism in *An Essay on Man*. This view of Pope weighing and analysing everything from an empiricist, and scientific point of view is much similar to Hume's view of everything from the same window. The only difference is, if we can call it a difference, that Hume's views were philosophical, and Pope's poetic.

Like Hume's views on passions in *The Treatise*, Pope also believed that reason was a slave of passions. John Laird in *Pope's Essay on Man* expresses his views on Pope as:

It was a common doctrine of schools that our passions were the originators of all human actions, and that their object was immediate pleasure or apparent good. Pope accepted this, with ungrateful complaint, from the 'subtle schoolmen' and described the passions as 'modes of self-love' that is to say as the ways in which the springs of self work at unreflective level. For Pope, as for most of his contemporaries, it was all one whether such 'modes' were to be called instincts or pleasure-impulsions. (292)

Laird's views on Pope confirm Pope's belief that reason is a slave of passions and that an alternative to passions could be called instincts.

Pope's prioritizing of passions over reason can be traced in one of his Epistles addressed to Sir Richard Temple, Lord Cobham entitled *Epistle to Cobham* (1734). This epistle will be studied as an example of Pope expressing the same idea as expressed in the *Essay on Man* before analysing *The Essay* itself. In his addressed Epistle to Sir Richard Temple, Lord Cobham, Pope writes:

Oft in the passions' wild rotation tossed,  
Our spring of action to ourselves is lost:  
Tired, not determined, to the last we yield,  
And what comes then is master of the field. (41-44)

The 'spring of action' Pope refers to can be interpreted as one's will or the engine that makes the mind move towards a predetermined direction. The reason for this drowning of 'spring of action' is the storm of one's passions, and when the passions overpower reason in controlling the psyche they become the 'master of the field' pushing this crippled ship of will to any desired destination.

Next in this Epistle Pope returns to his favourite subject of the ruling passion and says:

Search then the ruling passion: There alone,  
The wild are constant, and the cunning known;  
The food consistent, and the false sincere;  
Priest, princes, women, no dissemblers here.  
This clue once found unravels all the rest. (174-178)

Here Pope finds the secret of all comfort, and serenity of life in understanding, and accepting the ruling passion as it is established in everyone. The ruling passion which Pope strongly promoted in his works is a deterministic view of human life and des-

tiny. One is born with a dominant innate character, and this dominant mood in life accompanies him to his grave determining all his actions, and decisions in life. This view is similar to Hume's view of instincts controlling behaviour in *The Enquiry*.

At the end of the Epistle Pope addresses Cobham:

And you brave COBHAM! To the latest breath  
 Shall feel your Ruling Passion strong in death  
 Such those moments as in all the past,  
 'O save my country, Heaven!' Shall be your last. (262-265)

Here Pope concretizes his cherished principle of the ruling passion in Cobham. He argues that Cobham's patriotism stems from his ruling passion and will keep it to his grave. If Hume had ever wished to exemplify the rule of instincts on any individual, then Cobham's example would have sufficed for it.

#### 4.3.1. *Essay on Man*

Pope wrote *An Essay on Man* in 1733. Like Milton who attempted to 'justify the ways of God to men' in *Paradise Lost*, Pope tried to 'vindicate the ways of God to men', but in fact, Pope mostly tried to justify the role and position of man in this world. David Leigh in *Alexander Pope and Eighteenth-Century Conflicts about Ultimacy* describes the *Essay* as:

As a defense of an ordered universe under the direction of a wise and loving creator and as an explanation of the paradoxes of a mixed human nature in need of creating order within the self and society in pursuit of a virtuous life leading to immortality with God, the *Essay on Man* embodies central classical and implicitly Christian teachings in its analogical method and its poetic metaphors. (35)

The 'implicit Christian teachings' refer to Pope's idea of the Creator who created this world, but not the explicit Christian attributions of the beyond, and reward and punishment in the afterlife.

Fredrick S. Troy in his essay entitled *Pope's Image of Man* discusses how Pope overturned the Miltonic image of man as a creature blessed with the gift of reason, and how overturned this hierarchy of the supremacy of Reason over Passions cherished by poets like Milton and Shakespeare:

In the *Essay on Man* this idea of natural law as involving an interpretation of human nature is overturned. In place of Shakespeare's and Milton's hierarchical view with its horizontal cleavage between the higher and lower elements of the soul, Pope introduces a vertical dualism with self-love and reason and the Ruling Passion now contending and now cooperating for the rule of the soul. (365)

*The Essay* was written in four Epistles, and numerous topics were raised in them, but to stay loyal to the main concern of the present article, only the issues

concerning the ideas of Liberty and Necessity will be analysed in the form of a close study.

#### 4.3.1.1. First Epistle

One of the first arguments Pope raises which would convince any reader that he sided more with the necessitarians rather than the libertarians is in the First Epistle where he says:

Of systems possible, if't is confest  
That Wisdom infinite must form the best (I, 43-44)

Here Pope advises mankind not to inquire into how and why the world was created, why the world is as it is today, and just to accept everything as it is. Next, he extends it to the creation, and status of man in this world:

Then say not man's imperfect, Heav'n in fault;  
Say rather man's perfect as he ought; (I, 69-70)

He advises man to accept himself and his physical features as they are. This notion can be extended to the mental features as well as the physical ones which would encompass his instincts and other mental characteristics like the Ruling Passion.

Next Pope discusses 'the creator' planting ideas in the minds of his creations:

Who knows but he, whose hand the lightning forms,  
Who heaves old ocean, and who wings the storms;  
Pours fierce ambition in Caesar's mind,  
Or turns young Ammon loose to scourge mankind? (I, 157-160)

God or The Creator, according to Pope's Deist views, has planted unalterable tempers in humans, and these unalterable tempers control human actions. Therefore, one should not be blamed for his wrong deeds as they stem from his inner unalterable self (Atkins 2013:34). Pope is echoing Hume here as Hume also ascribed all human actions to their instincts rather than acquired habits.

Pope like Hume does not deny the fact that man owns a faculty called reason:  
The powers of all subdued by thee alone  
Is not thy Reason all these powers in one? (I, 231-2)

But, again like Hume in *The Treatise* he finds reason as being erroneous, and unable to comprehend everything. As an example, he brings forth reason's failure to grasp how the universe works:

All Nature is but Art Unknown to thee;  
All Chance direction, which thou canst not see;  
All discord, harmony not understood;  
All partial evil, universal good:  
And spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,  
One truth is clear, *Whatever is, is right.* (I, 289-294)

He considers reason neither eligible nor capable of understanding all the secrets of the creation, nor discovering the relationship between the different components of

the universe which make this world go around. With these considerations in mind, Pope embarks on writing the second epistle where he deals more with the role and relationship of reason and passions in every individual.

#### 4.3.1.2. Second Epistle

As previously mentioned the second Epistle deals more with the individual temper, and condition of man, rather than the relationship of man with creation which was the main concern of Epistle One. Pope opens the second Epistle with these lines:

KNOW then thyself, presume not God to scan,  
The proper study of mankind is Man. (II, 1-2)

These lines both establish Pope as a Deist and emphasise his interest in studying mankind himself, rather than God's effect and influence on man and his views.

Pope calls humans 'a chaos of thought and passion, all confused' (II, 13), incapable of making sound decisions, as he is constantly being pulled to different sides by his passions while trying to make a decision.

He encourages people to follow science to compensate for this vacuum in their souls:

Go, wondrous creature! Mount where science guides:  
Go measure earth, weigh air, and state the tides; (II, 19-20)

But no matter how deep man delves into science, he fails to understand himself:

Go, teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule  
Then drop into thyself, and be a fool! (II, 29-30)

The reason for this failure lies in the uncontrollable forces flowing from within the human psyche, and no matter how hard man tries to bring these forces under control, it will just turn into a futile gesture.

Two principles in human Nature reign  
Self-love to urge, and Reason to restrain; (II, 53-4)

Modern terminology for Pope's 'self-love' can be 'id', and reason 'ego'. Pope finds self-love 'stronger' and associates it with 'immediate good' to be fulfilled. The function of reason is to harness self-love, but as we shall see in the coming lines Pope finds it completely incapable of performing this duty. At this point again he sides with Hume's views in *The Treatise* when he finds the 'self-love' as a subdivision of one's passions 'Modes of self-love the passions we may call' (II, 93), and argues about the dominance of passions over reason in the human psyche:

On life's vast ocean diversely we sail,  
Reason the card<sup>1</sup>, but passion is the gale; (II, 107-8)

Pope's argumentation, in this case, corresponds to Hume's in *The Treatise*. Hume assumed humans as slaves to their passions and found the motivations behind any action as the fulfilment of pleasant passions, or avoiding the unpleasant ones. Everyone wishes to make the best choices in life based on his active reason, and these reasonable choices are like a compass that would take the ship of life to the ultimate

bliss. But passion acts as ‘the gale’ the strong wind that takes control of the steering of this ship and pushes it in its desired direction overpowering reason.

#### **4.3.1.2.1. The Ruling Passion**

At this point in the Essay Pope, after introducing passions and their role in human destiny, gives a new turn to his argument taking one step further in his discussions on passions, and perhaps close to Hume’s argument in *The Enquiry*. He added a new dimension to the role of passions in one’s life, and that was the concept of the ‘Ruling Passion’.

Pope asserts that everyone, besides being ruled by his various passions, is born carrying a dominant innate passion all through his life, and that particular passion determines one’s destiny.

And hence one Master-passion in the breast,  
Like Aaron’s serpent, swallows the rest.  
As man, perhaps, the moment of his breath,  
Receives the lurking principle of death,  
The young disease, that must subdue at length,  
Grows with his growth, and strengthens with his strength: (II, 131-36)

This dominant passion is likened to a disease. It is born with the person and grows stronger as the individual owning that particular passion grows bigger and stronger. It turns into an inseparable part of one’s psyche and dominates the soul from cradle to grave.

So, cast and mingled with his very frame,  
The mind’s disease, its Ruling Passion, came;  
Soon flows to this in body and in soul;  
Whatever warms the heart or fills the head  
As the mind opens and its functions spread,  
Imagination plies her dangerous part,  
And pours it all upon the peccant part. (II, 138-144)

Ruling passion as the commander of the soul soon orders ‘imagination’ to begin pouring poison into the mind, and take control of the ‘peccant’ part of the soul which is a reference to one’s more basic instincts, and passions. Here one can see traces of Hume’s assumptions concerning instincts in *The Enquiry*.

So what is the function of reason in an instinct-dominated world? Pope explains:

Yes, Nature’s road must ever be preferr’d,  
Reason is here no guide, but still a guard;  
‘T is hers to rectify, not overthrow,  
And treat this passion more as friend than foe: (II, 161- 64)

People should accept themselves as they are and not take arms against their passions and instincts. They should not blame themselves, or grow a guilt complex for whatever

er they do which goes in line with their feelings and instincts. This again corresponds to Hume's understanding of determinism. Humans are doomed to act in a certain way not because of any previous causes, or external factors, nor what their minds dictate, but because of the dictate of their instincts. Therefore, they should refrain from blaming themselves for their actions.

Then he continues:

Thro' life 't is follow'd, ev'n at life's expense;  
 The merchant's toil, the sage's indolence,  
 The monk's humility, the hero's pride,  
 All, all alike, find Reason on their side.  
 Th' Eternal Art educating good from ill,  
 Grafts on this passion our best principle: (II, 171-76)

The assumption that one follows his reason in his decision-making process is just a delusion, and one's passions, especially the ruling passion, decide one's will. That is the reason why Pope calls passions 'our best principle'. People finally choose to do what pleases them most, and not what is the most reasonable thing to do, and this corresponds to what is known today as the 'pleasure principle' which is an instinct shared by all humanity.

The ruling passion drives life to its desired destination:

See some strange comfort ev'ry state attend,  
 And Pride bestow'd on all, a common friend:  
 Some see fit passion every age supply;  
 Hope travels thro, nor quits us when we die (II, 271-4)

One is destined for the life arranged for him by his passions and instincts. One may have feelings like pride, but these feelings would eventually succumb to his passions.

Life continues like an unfulfilled dream, stuffed with passions originating from his instincts until he faces the final curtain:

Pleas'd with this bauble still, as that before  
 Till tired he sleeps, and life's poor play is o'er. (II, 281-2)

Pope continues the discussion in the Third Epistle by looking at the matter from a different angle.

#### 4.3.1.3. Third Epistle

While in the Second Epistle, Pope concentrated more on the role of passions in one's life which could be interpreted as instincts, in the Third Epistle, however, he concentrates on the role of instincts in one's life directly by introducing the word 'instinct' itself. Like the Second Epistle where Pope finds reason unable to harness passions, he also inscribes some role to reason when it comes to harnessing the instincts:

Reason, however able, cool at best,  
 Cares not for service, or but serves when prest,  
 Stays till we call, and then not often near;

But honest Instinct comes a volunteer,  
Sure never to o'ershoot, but just to hit,  
While still too wide or short is human wit;  
Sure by quick Nature happiness to gain,  
Which heavier Reason labours in vain. (III, 85-92)

Pope accuses reason of being too slow and heavy in the decision-making process and finds instincts more active, vivid in nature, and able to make spontaneous decisions overruling the choices made by reason.

Next, he names some shared instincts in humans and animals that become the basis for all their actions, and asks the crucial question of where these instincts have originated from.

God in nature of each being founds  
Its proper bliss, and sets its proper bounds;  
But as he framed a whole the whole to bless,  
On mutual wants built mutual happiness:  
So from the first eternal order ran,  
And creature link'd to creature, man to man. (III, 109-114)

God has placed some instincts in all its creations, and these instincts govern human behaviour and control his psyche. Therefore, all human conduct is based on a kind of pre-programmed plan. Humans are not free by their will and all is predestined for them. This again corresponds to Hume's idea of unalterable instincts governing human behaviour. As an end note to this section of the study, it would be worth learning about the role of reason in this world according to Pope.

Pope said in the Second Epistle that reason is a good guide, but not a leader. In the Third Epistle though he elaborates more on this idea of his. Humans turned too savage relying solely on their instincts and passions, so their reason entered with a special mission at hand:

See him from Nature rising slow to Art!  
To copy Instinct was Reason's part:  
Thus then to man the voice of Nature spake-  
'Go, from the creatures thy instructions take:  
Learn from the birds what food the thickets yield,  
Learn from the beasts the physic of the field; (III, 169-174)

Reason embarked on the mission of civilizing man by taking examples from the behaviour of other animals like bees, ants etc. This resulted in:

Great Nature spoke; observant man obey'd  
Cities were built, societies were made (III, 199-200)

Pope ascribes to reason the role of civilising man on the social level, rather than the personal one. On an individual level, like Hume, he remains loyal to his initial assumption that humans are governed by their instincts.

The study shows that traces of Hume's ideology can be traced in the works



and thoughts of Alexander Pope. Hume found the motive for human actions in uncontrollable forces born in every person: human instincts. Pope implemented the same views in his writings. He recognised a dominating force on the psyche named the Ruling Passion, and next, he went on to name instincts as the force and motivation behind decisions made and actions performed by every human.

## 5. Conclusion

David Hume was a philosopher who set his goal on bringing reconciliation between Hobbesian determinism, and Lockean freedom of the will. To implement it, he attributed the source of human conduct not to his reason, or passions, but his instincts.

The study demonstrates that Hume's ideology was echoed in Pope. In the first Epistle, Pope reverberates the views of the empiricist fathers through his deism and his support of the natural religion. The introduction of empiricism followed by the Enlightenment, and the gradual secularization of society also had pivotal roles in spreading the idea that humans are ordinary creations like all the other creations, and both Hume and Pope were influenced by these ideas to some extent. In the second Epistle, he follows Hume's footsteps by attributing human actions to innate uncontrollable passions in general, and the Ruling Passion in particular, which is an innate dominant passion controlling an individual's behaviour. This definition closely resembles the definition of what we now know as instincts. In the Third Epistle, Pope directly discusses how humans are driven by their instincts, and how insignificant the role of reason is in this process.

The observation of Hume's viewpoints and their effects on Pope would enable those interested in Pope to view his *Essay on Man* from a new perspective. It will also help them understand Pope's notion of The Great Chain of Being, man's position in the Universe as just another creation of the Creator, like all other creations who act upon their instincts, compared to for example the Renaissance belief of man being the Paragon of Creation and being different from other beings. The observation will also justify Pope's tendency to turn from his hereditary Catholicism to Deism in his later life.

The theories of Hume on the source of human conduct were quite novel and revolutionary for the Post-Renaissance era. It not only affected other contemporary figures like Pope, but also, by breaking the barriers on the discussion of such topics placed mostly by the Church, opened the way for future scientists to continue the topic, develop it, and conduct further research on the role of instincts in one's life. As a result, these ideas were further studied and were given new dimensions by scientists like the British naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-1882), or Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) through the Nineteen and Twentieth Centuries.

The present article is an extract from a PhD dissertation entitled "Free Will and De-

terminism in British Post-Renaissance Philosophy: A Study of the Selected Works of John Dryden, Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson”.

**End Notes:**

1- Pope finds reason as ‘the card’ which refers to the rotating card in every magnetic compass showing the four main bearings.

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