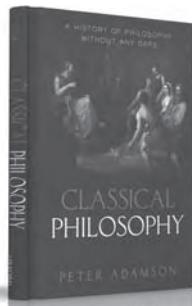


REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Classical Philosophy: A History of Philosophy without Any Gaps, Volume 1

Peter Adamson

Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, UK. www.global.oup.com. 2014. £20. 368 pp. HB. ISBN 9780199674534.

Anthony Kenny (b. 1931) and Thomas Nagel (b. 1937) being sombre do not care for the Internet. Hence, their serious tomes will languish in libraries of philosophy departments most of which have already shut shop. There are few takers for philosophy. Adamson is lucid like Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) and William Durant (1885–1981). What availeth a philosopher if she or he cannot take *sophia* to the masses?

Adamson is not afraid to refer us to the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (317), is smitten with podcasts, and has his own podcast (xi). These show his readiness to be scrutinised by an international audience which determines a scholar's originality. And Adamson is original in his approach to classical philosophy. His *duh* attitude makes philosophy come alive (207). That does not mean that Adamson is not serious about the details of doing philosophy: 'Simplicity, they say, is a virtue. But is it really? ... modern attempts to provide a unified theory of physics [are naïve]' (243).

Who would have thought that in a book about ancient philosophers we will have scientists and their reductive thinking mocked? Aristotle's *Physics* (243–9) is a necessary antidote to these reductionists.

English literature students at Yale are disgusted that they have to read white male writers, at least so was their stance during early June 2016. (See <<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/jun/2/yale-students-white-male-writers-hostile-culture/>> accessed 01 September 2017). Chapter 42 (300–8) of this book thankfully deals with ancient women philosophers and finally points to Luce Irigaray (307–8). If only someone could find Chaucer's female peers!

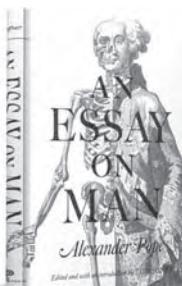
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Professor Adamson's genius lies in connecting the ancient world with our zeitgeist. Writers like Adamson are needed if bright students are to see the value of being philosophers in a world which pays McDonald's employees more than philosophy adjuncts.

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An Essay on Man

Alexander Pope

Edited by Tom Jones

Princeton University Press: 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540-5237, USA. www.press.princeton.edu. 2016. \$24.95. 248 pp. HB. ISBN 9780691159812.

The Psalmist in the *Old Testament* asks God: 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?' (Psalms 8:4). Jesus in the *New Testament* answers the Psalmist that man is the proper concern of God (Matthew 6:26, 6:28–30). Later Thomas of Aquinas (1225–74) will write *The Treatise on Man* (*Summa Theologiae*, 1265–74, Prima Pars, Questions 75–89/102). This is the beginning of European modernity and not as erroneously thought, the start of Scholastic quiddities.

Neither did Shakespeare (1564–1616) nor earlier, Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343/45–1400) inaugurate Early Modernism. Chaucer, contrary to established criticism, in *The Canterbury Tales*

(1387–1400) gives in to despair regarding the human condition and frankly, gives up on man (See ‘Physician’s Tale’, ‘Pardoner’s Introduction’, ‘Pardoner’s Prologue’, and ‘Pardoner’s Tale’). Shakespeare’s Hamlet’s exclamation: ‘What a piece of work is man’ ends in nihilism and despair: ‘And yet to me [Hamlet], what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me; no, nor Woman neither’ (*Hamlet*, Act 2, Scene 2).

The true heir to Aquinas is Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) since in *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), Mirandola till the end of his tract defends man and never gives up on humanity. Much later, Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) will extol humanity in his *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) and Alexander Pope will pick up the traces not only of the Psalmist but of the entire *Old Testament*, including *Qoheleth*, the *New Testament*, Aquinas, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and of course, Pico della Mirandola to write his magnum opus *An Essay on Man* (1733–4). It is this work which will later exert its power on the likes of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and neo-Kantians like Susan Neiman (b. 1955). Neiman’s *Moral Clarity* (2009) shows how Kant was influenced by Pope and depicts Neiman’s love for *An Essay on Man*.

Princeton University Press got Tom Jones to introduce and annotate Pope’s work and it is a wake-up call to those eighteenth century literary scholars who have fixated on Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (1712) to the exclusion of all his other works. Jones’s ‘Introduction’ is itself the best essay today in print about Pope’s poem and a manifesto for the primacy of Enlightenment literature in an academia deadened with catchphrases. Jones writes: ‘The poem [An Essay on Man] has been used as a tool for thinking by philosophers and politicians from the middle of the eighteenth century to the present. It has been a practical resource for understanding where humans are placed in the world, what kind of beings they are, and what they should do ... Consequently it is surprising that the poem has not figured more prominently in the productive confrontation of literary and cultural studies with social theory and postwar European philosophy that has left such a strong mark on the university study of literature’ (xvii).

This is not ‘surprising’ because the academic

discourse on eighteenth century literature has been tainted by subaltern historiography, minor philosophical concerns, and an inertia expansively commented on by Alexander Pope in *The Dunciad* (1728). Hopefully Professor Jones’s thorough glosses will force inert humanists to re-scrutinise Pope’s entire corpus. The art of glossing literary texts is now a lost art and yet it is precisely this technique of glossing that should be taught to literature students in English major classrooms instead of harrying them to inane quick-fix seminars, which in most cases do not further the cause of deep scholarship. Enlightenment ideals are needed now what with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (b. 1954), Ali Bongo Ondimba (b. 1959), and their ilk clinging to political power throughout the world. Tellingly, Jones notices Pope’s concern with man’s animality and animal’s humanity (*ibid.*). In a certain sense, Alexander Pope is one of the pioneers of ‘animal studies’, much discussed within the humanities today.

In his ‘Introduction’ to this edition, Jones notes that Arthur O Lovejoy in 1936 saw the ‘correspondences between Immanuel Kant’s *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755)’ even before Maynard Mack (1909–2001; see Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* (New York: Norton, 1969)) did while researching the life of Pope (civ). This eye for detailed academic sleuthing makes Jones’s ‘Introduction’ by far the most advanced and original work by any researcher working today on Enlightenment literature. In 2017 it does little good to keep on going round and round about the question of Swift and Pope being satirists and making a hue and cry about whether they were Horatian, Juvenalian, or Varronian satirists. That work has been done masterfully by the late Ian Jack (1923–2008) in his *Augustan Satire: Intention and Idiom in English Poetry, 1660–1750* (1952) and later by Northrop Frye (1912–1991) in his *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957).

Tom Jones is in the line of literary scholars worldwide who understand that literature is not philosophy; neither is philosophy, literature. Jones is in the line of Edward Mendelson who is editing W H Auden’s (1907–73) corpus and Princeton University Press’s publishing both Jones and Mendelson shows the clarity of thought of the publisher since few try today to reclaim the domain

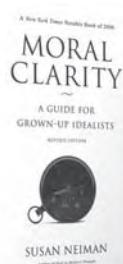
of the literary for literature students and scholars. Jones's edition under review reminds this reviewer of Auden's lines: 'The gaunt and great, the famed for conversation / Blushed in the stare of evening as they spoke / And felt their centre of volition shifted' (W H Auden, 'The Garden' in *The Quest*).

The 'gaunt and great[s]' among self-appointed literary gatekeepers may be forced to shift 'their centre of volition' to literature since Jones's work performs the *act* of literature so urgently needed. That is, only if the gaunt academic greats take the trouble to deeply read Jones's edition of *An Essay on Man* within their busy seminar-schedules. For Pope's *An Essay on Man* sees into the heart of dystopias:

But still this world (so fitted for the knave)
Contents us not. A better shall we have?
A kingdom of the just then let it be:
But first consider how those just agree.
The good must merit God's peculiar care:
But who, but God, can tell us who they are?
One thinks on Calvin Heaven's own spirit fell;
Another deems him instrument of hell;
If Calvin feel Heaven's blessing, or its rod.
This cries there is, and that, there is no God.
What shocks one part will edify the rest,
Nor with one system can they all be blest.
The very best will variously incline,
And what rewards your virtue, punish mine.
Whatever is, is right. This world, 'tis true,
Was made for Cæsar—but for Titus too:
And which more blest? who chained his
country, say,
Or he whose virtue sighed to lose a day? (84–5)

Pope, as is seen from the quotation, indeed rereads the Bible, the Reformation, vide Calvin above, and closes Early Modernism. What began in pre-Talmudic times ends with the Enlightenment within the Western history of ideas. This world 'so fitted for the knave' will march into a 'retreating world' prophesied by Wilfred Owen (1893–1918) in his poem *Strange Meeting* (1918) if one ignores Jones's scholarship, Pope's satires, and especially, his *An Essay on Man*.

Subhashis Chattopadhyay



Moral Clarity: A Guide For Grown-Up Idealists

Susan Neiman

Princeton University Press: 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540-5237, USA. www.press.princeton.edu. 2009. \$37.50. 480 pp. PB. ISBN 9780691143897.

Kant argued that happiness isn't a matter of wishful thinking, but a matter of reason's rights. Many Enlightenment thinkers held Christianity responsible for systematically decreasing our expectations of happiness, but Socrates wasn't much better. Kant saw that the problem was older than Christian asceticism; it goes as deep as metaphysics ever does. Because we long to believe that, appearances to the contrary, the world is the way that it should be, we use one or another trick to fool ourselves that it is. A disconnect between happiness and virtue? Just an illusion, said many Greek and Roman philosophers. When you look closer, they turn out not only in harmony, but identical. Epicureans thought virtue was happiness. Kant thought both views were attempts to escape the double pain of disconnection: We are neither as good nor as happy as we ought to be (174).

In the face of insurmountable evil in the form of the Shoah (For an understanding of Shoah, see Shmuel Trigano, *The Democratic Ideal and the Shoah: The Unthought in Political Modernity* (New York: State University of New York, 2009)), Susan Neiman asserts the need for clear thinking about what Aristotle termed 'eudaimonia'. (For an understanding of 'eudaimonia', see Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986), 334–5). Neiman is not the first philosopher trying to search for meaning qua happiness in life; this search for happiness has been the concern of thinkers in the last century as well as in this century.

It is strange that Neiman has been seen mostly in relationship with Hannah Arendt (1906–75).