

The Four Books and An Essay on Man, Again: A Study in Some Rhetorical Devices

Yen-sheng H. Perng

Mainly concerned with philosophical precepts as they are, *The Four Books* and *An Essay on Man* are nonetheless great literary works. And this, it seems to me, is chiefly due to an admirably deft employment of such rhetorical devices as antithesis, parallelism, and parables. The result in both works is a perfect fusing of form and content. Instead of burdening the works with an excess of theoretical speculation, the philosophical ideas are conveyed with clarity and force. In an earlier article I have examined the thematic contents of *The Four Books* and *An Essay on Man*;¹ the present paper intends to show how artistry in each transforms both works from dry treatises into enjoyable literature.

I. *The Four Books*

As a whole, *The Four Books*, no less than *An Essay on Man*, stress a harmonious hierarchy.² Take the following passage for example. When asked about the making of an ideal government,

孔子對曰：「君君、臣臣、父父、子子。」
公曰：「善哉！信如君不君、臣不臣、父不父、子不子，
雖有粟，吾得而食諸？」（論語，顏淵十一）

Confucius replied, "Let the ruler be ruler,
the minister minister,
the father father,
the son son."

The Duke said, "Good! if, indeed, the ruler be not ruler,
the minister not minister,
the father not father,
the son not son,

although I have my revenue, can I enjoy it?" (*Analects*, 12: 11)³

One cannot but notice how social hierarchy is made prominent, and how the extensive use of parallelism serves to unify and emphasize the themes. But the best example of a "hierarchical" arrangement of argument is found in *The Great Learning*:

物格而后知至
知至而后意誠
意誠而后心正
心正而后身修
身修而後家齊
家齊而後國治
國治而後天下平。(大學經一章)

When things are investigated,
then true knowledge is achieved;
when the true knowledge is achieved,
then the will becomes sincere;
when the will is sincere,
then the heart is set right;
when the heart is set right,
then the personal life is cultivated;
when the personal life is cultivated,
then the family life is regulated;
when the family life is regulated,
then the national life is orderly;
when the national life is orderly,
then there is peace in this world. (*The Great Learning*, Ch. I)

The rhetorical structure speaks for the theme; form and content become one.

Another passage from *The Great Learning* illustrates the effective use of parallelism:

上老老而民興孝
上長長而民興弟
上恤孤而民不倍(大學十釋治國平天下)

When rulers treat the aged with respect,
then the common people will be aroused toward filial piety.
When rulers treat the elders with respect,

then the common people will be aroused toward brotherly respect.
When rulers treat compassionately the young and the helpless,
then the common people will not follow the opposite course.
(*The Great Learning* 10)

But to work out this program effectively, one has to follow the proper order as shown in *The Works of Mencius*:

親親而仁民
仁民而愛物（孟子，盡心上四十五）

He is affectionate to his parents and *jen* to all people,
He is *jen* to all people and benevolent to all.

(*Mencius*, 7A: 45)

This passage, again, is characterized by a combination of chain argument and parallelism, which support the theme of the formation of a harmonious, well-ordered state.

Antithesis, another form of parallelism, which puts opposing ideas in glaring contrast, is also a favorite device in *The Four Books*. For instance, Confucius says:

君子喻於義，
小人喻於利。（論語，里仁十六）

The virtuous man is conversant with *yi*;
the vulgar man is conversant with gain.

(*Analects*, 4:16)

Here, through antithesis, the virtuous man and the vulgar man, *yi* and gain, are the two pairs of typically opposed ideas which stand out in sharp contrast. The superb handling of antithetical parallelism also helps Confucius make clear his humanism:

季路問事鬼神，子曰：「未能事人，
焉能事鬼？」
曰：「敢問死？」曰：未「未知生，
焉知死？」（論語，先進十一）

Chi-lu asked about serving the spiritual beings.

Confucius said, "If we are not yet able to serve man how can we serve spiritual beings?"

"I venture to ask about death."

"If we do not yet know about life, how can we know about death?"

(*Analects*, 11:11)

Precisely because Confucius thinks very much of man, he thinks even more of *jen*. To preserve or achieve *jen*, man should be willing to sacrifice even his life:

志士仁人，無求生以害仁，

有殺身以成仁。（論語，衛靈公八）

A resolute scholar and a man of *jen* will never seek to live at the expense of injuring *jen*.

He would rather sacrifice his life to realize *jen*. (*Analects*, 15:8)

This is why he says

人能弘道

非道弘人。（論語，衛靈公二十八）

It is man that makes truth great,
not truth that makes man great. (*Analects*, 15:28)

In the former example, antithesis is employed to put into relief the means (求生·殺身) and the ends (害仁·成仁) regarding the important concept of *jen*. In the latter, chiasmus underscores the basic assumption of man in control of *tao*. Each rhetorical device strengthens the point of the message.

Sometimes parallelism is used in conjunction with other devices, of which the allusion to ancient sage kings is a familiar one:

子曰：「禹，吾無間然矣！非飲食，而致孝乎鬼神；
惡衣服，而致美乎黻冕；
卑宮室，而盡力乎溝洫。

禹，吾無間然矣！」（論語，泰伯二十一）

The Master said, "In Yü I can find no semblance of a flaw. Abstemious in his own food and drink, he displayed the utmost devotion in his offerings to spirits and divinities. Content with the plainest clothes for common

wear, he saw to it that his sacrificial apron and ceremonial headdress were of the utmost magnificence. His place of habitation was of the humblest, and all his energy went into draining and ditching. In Yü I can find no semblance of a flaw." (*Analects*, 8:21)

The allusion to the ancient sage King Yü serves as an oblique criticism of contemporary rulers. The description of food, clothing, and habitation, all heightened in parallelism, skillfully sketches out Yü the man and his self-effacing nobility. Furthermore, the passage begins and ends with one and the same sentence, thus creating a sense of unity.

The same structure is used on a different occasion. Juxtaposed to Confucius' praise of the blameless Yü is his disgust at the unworthiness of his old acquaintance Yuan Jang 原壤:

原壤夷俟。子曰：「幼而不孫弟，
長而無述焉，
老而不死，是爲賊。」以杖叩其脛。

(論語，憲問四十六)

Yuan Jang was squatting on his heels and waiting for the approach of Confucius.

The Master said, "In youth, not humble as befits a junior; in manhood, doing nothing worthy of being handed down; in old age, refusing to die:—this is to be a pest."

With this he hit him on the shank with his staff. (*Analects*, 14:46)

The basic triplet 而-form in the example above is preserved, but he accentuates his contrary indictment of Yuan Jang through the repeated negation (不，無，不). The climactic parallelism carries home an apparently harsh criticism of Yuan Jang. (On the other hand, though, it is not improbable that Confucius had his tongue in cheek when he made this remark.)

Jen, always the goal of Confucius and his disciples, is the hidden theme in the following scene:

顏淵季路侍。子曰：「盍各言爾志？」
子路曰：「願車馬、衣輕裘，與朋友共，敝之而無憾。」
顏淵曰：「願無伐善，無施勞。」
子路曰：「願聞子之志。」
子曰：「老者安之，
朋友信之，
少者懷之。」(論語，公冶長二十六)

Yen Yuan and Chi-lu [Tzu-lu] were in attendance.

Confucius said, "Why don't you each tell your ambition in life?"

Tzu-lu said, "I wish to have horses, carriages, and light coats, and share them with friends, and shall not regret if they are all worn out."

Yen Yuan said, "I wish not to boast of my good qualities nor to brag about meritorious deeds."

Tzu-lu said, "I wish to hear your ambition."

Confucius said, "The old people should be able to live in peace, all friends should be loyal and all young people should feel gratitude to their elders."
(*Analects*, 5:26)

The concept of *jen* is not mentioned in so many words, but, as Ch'eng I pointed out, Confucius and his two disciples are harping on *jen*.⁴ Tzu-lu, who positively tries to share what little he has with others, is rather shallow. Yen Yuan, who negatively shuns a boasting spirit, moves from the ostensible to an inner realization of *jen*. In comparison, Confucius' ambition transcends those of his disciples' and is in fact one with *jen*. This little piece of conversation thus presents the three stages in the attainment of *jen*: the outward, which is rudimentary; the inner, which is more advanced; and the harmonious, which is the highest ideal.⁵ The difference in these stages is also indicated by the choice of words. The Master, significantly, does not simply "wish" (願) for *jen*, as his disciples do;⁶ he proclaims its existence. Parallelism is thus developed with facility and naturalness, signifying the progression of three steps leading to *jen*.

Turning from the *Analects* to *Mencius*, one immediately recognizes the change in style. Generally speaking, the literary devices found in the *Analects*—antithesis, parallelism, allusions, and chain arguments—are still made use of in *Mencius*, but there are also striking differences.⁷ For one thing, while the chapters in the *Analects* usually consist of short, pithy statements, the arguments in *Mencius* are generally lengthy and fully developed. For another, while most of the images in the *Analects* remain undeveloped, in *Mencius* many are elaborated into parables. In these regards, *Mencius* is representative of its contemporary writings. In Mencius' time, with the social order broken, rulers became more and more interested in soliciting advice from scholars and politicians, who in turn relied heavily on rhetorical devices to sell their ideas.⁸ In the case of *Mencius*, the combination of stylistic achievement and noble ideas results in something approaching the

sublime. We shall observe some of the ways in which these images and parables bring about Mencius' themes and arguments.

Mencius is no ordinary pander of isms. A man of moral integrity, he uses parables and elaborate images to demonstrate the wickedness and cruelty of war and a bad government, and the sweetness and fruitfulness of a benevolent government. Since the *Mencius* was written in wartime, military images come in bushels, of which the following dialogue is an example. Having done something for the starving people, King Hui of Liang 梁惠王 wonders why the people of neighboring kingdoms do not swarm into his kingdom. Mencius has an explanation in military terms—because King Hui is “fond of war”:

孟子對曰：「王好戰，請以戰喻：填然鼓之，兵刃既接，棄甲曳兵而走，或百步而後止，或五十步而後止，以五十步笑百步，則何如？」
王曰：「不可，直不百步耳！是亦走也。」
曰：「王如知此，則無望民之多於鄰國也。」

(孟子，梁惠王上三)

Mencius replied, “Your Majesty is fond of war;—let me take an illustration from war. The soldiers move forward to the sound of the drums; and after their weapons have been crossed, on one side they throw away their coats of mail, trail their arms behind them and run. Some run a hundred paces and stop; some run fifty paces and stop. What would you think if those who run fifty paces were to laugh at those who run a hundred paces?”

The King said, “They should not do so. Though they did not run a hundred paces, yet they also ran away.”

“Since your Majesty knows this,” replied Mencius, “you need not hope that your people will become more numerous than those of the neighboring kingdoms.” (*Mencius*, 1A:3)

Parables compel our attention and appeal to our love for a good story. In this particular instance, Mencius' choice of a “battlefield” is especially apt, for no other parable could carry the point to a warlord better. That Mencius is able to defeat King Hui in the latter's own game is the source of great irony here.

As might be expected, sometimes military images are used in conjunction with their natural companions—images of death and animals. The effect is often a strong sense of disgust with the bad government. Take, for

example, the following dialogue (again, King Hui of Liang has asked for Mencius' advice):

孟子對曰：「殺人以梃與刃，有以異乎？」

曰：「無以異也。」

曰：「殺人以刃與政，有以異乎？」

曰：「無以異也。」

曰：「庖有肥肉，

廄有肥馬，

民有飢色，

野有餓殍；此率獸而食人民也！獸食相食且人惡之；

爲民父母行政，不免於率獸而食人，惡在

其爲民父母也。」（孟子·梁惠王上四）

Mencius replied, "Is there any difference between killing a man with a stick and with a sword?"

The King said, "There is no difference."

"Is there any difference between doing it with a sword and with the style of government?"

"There is no difference," was the reply.

Mencius then said, "In your kitchen there is fat meat; in your stables there are fat horses. But your people have the look of hunger, and on the wilds there are those who have died of famine. This is leading on beasts to devour men. Beasts devour one another, and men hate them for doing so. When a prince, being the patriarch of his people, administers his government so as to be chargeable with leading on beasts to devour men, where is his parental relation to the people?"

(Mencius, 1A:4)

In this parable, the world of animal nature is so closely related to man's world that it is shattering to reflect on what a bad government is capable of destroying.

In sharp contrast with the bad rulers and their fondness of fighting, nothing seems more inviting and attractive than a benevolent government. The following dialogue between Mencius and King Hsiang of Liang 梁襄王 presents a completely different picture from what we just saw:

「孰能一之？」

對曰：「不嗜殺人者能一之。」

「孰能與之？」

對曰：「天下莫不與也。王知夫苗乎？七、八月之間旱，
則苗槁矣。天油然作雲，
沛然下雨，
則苗浡然興之矣。其如是，孰能禦之？」
(孟子，梁惠王上六)

“Who can so unite [the world]?”

I replied, “He who has no pleasure in killing men can so unite it.”

“Who can give it to him?”

I replied. “All the people of the nation will unanimously give it to him.

Does your Majesty understand the way of the growing grain? During the seventh and eighth months, when drought prevails, the plants become dry. Then the clouds collect densely in the heavens, they send down torrents of rain, and the grain erects itself, as if by a shoot. When it does so, who can keep it back?”

In opposition to the destructive beast imagery in the example cited earlier, the vegetable forces referred to here are life-giving. The benevolent government is compared to the much-desired rain in a droughty summer. As rain washes away the disease of a plant and gives life to it, so a benevolent government brings hope and happiness to all people. With the help of climactic parallelism of 油然作雲，沛然下雨，浡然興之， the parable effectively brings out the idea of how people may fare under a benevolent government. Parables such as this are bold and forceful; their message is clear.

In some cases Mencius' argument relies less on extended images than on paralleled comparisons:

孟子謂齊宣王曰：「王之臣，有託其妻子於其友，而之楚遊者，比
其反也，則凍餒其妻子，則如之何？」

王曰：「棄之。」

曰：「士師不能治士，則如之何？」

王曰：「己之。」

曰：「四境之內不治，則如之何？」

王顧左右而言他。(孟子梁惠王下六)

Mencius said to King Hsuan of Ch'i, "Suppose that one of your Majesty's ministers were to entrust his wife and children to the care of his friend, while he himself went into Ch'u to travel, and that, on his return, he should find that the friend had let his wife and children suffer from cold and hunger; how ought he to deal with him?"

The king said, "He should cast him off."

Mencius proceeded, "Suppose that the chief criminal judge could not regulate the officers under him, how would you deal with him?"

The king said, "Dismiss him."

Mencius again said, "If within the four borders of your kingdom there is not good government, what is to be done?"

The king looked to the right and left, and spoke of other matters.

(*Mencius*, 1B:6)

In this dramatic scene, the unexpected attack culminates the climactic parallelism, driving home Mencius' harsh criticism of rulers' neglect of duty in general and of King Hsuan of Ch'i 齊宣王 in particular. The king's embarrassment amid confusion at the end is a subtle finishing touch that hits off the forceful effect of parables.

Mencius does not merely stress the desirability of a benevolent government: he also shows its workability. Here is how his syllogism goes:

人皆有不忍人之心。
先王有不忍人之心，
斯有不忍人之政矣。（孟子公孫丑上六）

All men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others. The ancient kings had this commiserating mind, and they, as a matter of course, had likewise a commiserating government. (*Mencius*, 2A:6)

The reference to ancient kings lends weight to Mencius' argument. The repetition of the phrase 不忍人 or "commiserating" underscores the vital importance of *jen*.

Elaborating upon what commiseration is, Mencius further brings out his celebrated theory of man being good by nature. Again, he uses parable to make his point clearer.

今人乍見孺子將入於井，皆有怵惕惻隱之心；
非所以內交於孺子之父母也，
非所以要譽於鄉黨朋友也，
非惡其聲而然也。（孟子，公孫丑上六）

Even nowadays, if men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress. They

will feel so, *not* as a ground on which they may gain the favor of the child's parents, *nor* as a ground on which they may seek the praise of their neighbours and friends, *nor* from a dislike of the reputation of having been unmoved by such a thing. (Mencius, 2A:6)⁹

Here it is worth pointing out that the negative parallel structure 非...也 is used three times as if to underscore the fact that man is *not* by nature bad.

And if one acts for other reasons than the urgent need of helping a baby in danger, he is not man. To state this idea with force, Mencius puts it in crisp and paralleled sentences:

由是觀之，無惻隱之心，非人也；
無羞惡之心，非人也；
無辭讓之心，非人也；
無是非之心，非人也。

惻隱之心，仁之端也；
羞惡之心，義之端也；
辭讓之心，禮之端也；
是非之心，智之端也。

人之有是四端也，
猶有四體也。

From this case we may perceive that the feeling of commiseration is essential to man, that the feeling of shame and dislike is essential to man, that the feeling of modesty and complaisance is essential to man, and that the feeling of approving and disapproving is essential to man. The feeling of commiseration is the incipient tendency of *jen*. The feeling of shame and dislike is the incipient tendency of *yi*. The feeling of modesty and complaisance is the incipient tendency of *li*. The feeling of approving and disapproving is the incipient tendency of *chih*. Men have these four incipient tendencies just as they have their four limbs. (Mencius, 2A:6)

The passage is ostensibly divided into two groups of four sentences each, the first being negative, and the second positive. The character 心 or "heart," however, runs through the whole block as the center-word, for it is the central idea of the writer. The first group employs double negatives (無...非), with a compelling positive force, in the condemnation of the negative qualities. Antithetically, the second group expresses positive qualities in perfect parallel. Having made clear what *is* and what *is not* right, Mencius goes on to compare the four incipient tendencies to man's four limbs to stress their

organic importance in the full development of manhood. The idea is also made prominent rhetorically by a double fourfold pattern of parallel lines as illustrated in the arrangement of the Chinese characters. Obviously, in the formation of true manhood, *jen*, *yi*, *li*, and *chih* are Mencius' extensions of what *jen* means to Confucius.

Among these four, Mencius seems to give *yi* special significance by attaching to it almost the same importance as *jen*. This is shown in the following parallel statement.

仁，人之安宅也。

義，人之正路也。

Jen is the tranquil habitation of man; *yi*, his straight path.

(*Mencius*, 4A:10)

The metaphors of "habitation" and "path" appropriately point to the importance of these two cardinal virtues, the latter perhaps intended as the way which best leads to the tranquility of the former. The importance of *yi* is revealed by a homely comparison in the following parable, justly famous not only because of its teaching but, no doubt, because of its rhetorical triumph as well.

魚，我所欲也。

熊掌，亦我所欲也。二者不可得兼，舍魚而取熊掌者也。

生，亦我所欲也。

義，亦我所欲也。二者不可得兼，舍生而取義者也。

(孟子，告子上十)

I like fish, and I also like bear's paws.

If I cannot have them both, I will let the fish go, and take the bear's paws.

So, I like life, and I also like *yi*.

If I cannot keep them both, I will let life go, and choose *yi*.

(*Mencius*, 6A:10)

The above examples should suffice to show that, while Mencius' themes are as lofty as Confucius', through his frequent use of down-to-earth images and parables, he is always able to relate them to the immediate concern of the people. This, together with other rhetorical features—such as antithesis and climactic parallelism—gives his arguments a high degree of vividness and effec-

tiveness.

II. *An Essay on Man*

From the Confucian classics we now turn to Pope's *An Essay on Man*. A long but well-constructed philosophical poem, it is written in the closely-knit heroic couplet rather than the loosely-strung Socratic dialogues of *The Four Books*. Against this obvious disparity, a close examination of the literary devices reveals some interesting similarities between the two. Both works make extensive use of parallelism and antithesis to illustrate the hierarchical order. Both use allusions to enrich their significance.¹⁰ Both convey messages of philosophical import through images or parables. And both employ epigrammatic sentences to attract the reader's attention. The following discussion will concentrate mainly on how parallelism, antithesis, and visual imagery help to present the themes.

Parallelism has many functions in *An Essay on Man*. The most important one is that of illustrating the hierarchical order. The first epistle introduces the concept of the chain of being:

Vast chain of being, which from God began,
Natures aethereal, human, angel, man,
Beast, bird, fish, insect! what no eye can see,
No glass can reach! from Infinite to thee,
From thee to Nothing! (I, 237-41)

In lines 240-41, the same sentence structure and the repetition of "thee" suggest that man is a meeting point between the two extremes of Infinitude and Nothingness. Furthermore, Pope is able to strengthen his argument by the use of a concealed chiasmus. Isolating the "Infinite-Nothing" phrases and arranging them according to their chiastic word structure, we get

from Infinite to thee,
From thee to Nothing!

The invisible point where the two lines intersect illustrates the tension of man's ambivalent state of existence.

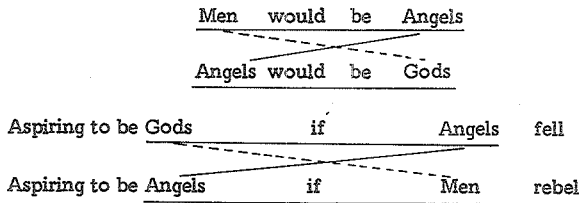
Man's middle nature is further described in terms of two other extremes—spirits and brutes. This finds its concise expression in the chiasmic parallelism stated in the last line of the following quotation:

Heav'n from all creatures hides the book of Fate,
 All but the page prescrib'd, their present state;
 From brutes what men, from men what spirits know. (I, 77-79)

The most illustrative example of such a hierarchical order is evidenced in the following parallelism:

Men would be Angels, Angels would be Gods.
 Aspiring to be Gods, if Angels fell,
 Aspiring to be Angels, Men rebel; (I, 126-28)

If we arrange these three lines to illustrate their chiasmic structure, we can visualize some of the links in the great chain of being. Note that the angels (the middle state between God and man) constitute the zigzag line throughout maintaining the continuity of the whole concept as diagrammed.



A common use of parallelism is to put equal importance on the things paralleled. Take, for instance, the following passage:

Whate'er the passion, knowledge, fame, or pelf,
 Not one will change his neighbor with himself.
 The learn'd is happy nature to explore,
 The fool is happy that he knows no more;
 The rich is happy in the plenty giv'n,
 The poor contents him with the care of Heav'n. (II, 261-66)

In the ideal society, every man, regardless of his state and condition, is contented with what he is and what he has. The same sentence structure indicates the equal importance of each creature in the same scale. This equality is not restricted to man but is applicable to all creatures, who are equal in the presence of God. Such a "parallelism in God"¹¹ is evident in the following passage:

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;
That, chang'd thro' all, and yet in all the same,
.....
As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart;
As full, as perfect, in vile Man that mourns,
As the rapt Seraph that adores and burns;
To him no high, no low, no great, no small;
He fills, he bounds, connects, and equal all. (I, 267-69; 276-80)

Through parallelism, matter and man and spirit, whether "useful" or "useless," are shown equal in God.

Antithesis in *An Essay on Man* is also employed thematically. Against the parallelism in God is man's antithetic relations with other creatures on the Scale. Regarding man's relations with God, man has to "trace" Him from his own, but God can "tell" why Heaven has made man as he is. This sharp contrast of capacity is revealed through a vision from which man may reason and then understand himself better.¹²

Say first, of God above, or Man below,
What can we reason, but from what we know?
Of Man what *see* we, but his station here,
From which to reason, or to which refer?
(I, 17-20; italics mine)

Juxtaposed to man's limited vision is God's piercing omniscience:

He, who thro' vast immensity can *pierce*,
See worlds on worlds compose one universe,
Observe how system into system runs,
What other planets circle other suns,
What vary'd being peoples ev'ry star,

May tell why Heav'n has made us as we are.

(I, 23-28; italics mine)

Owing to his limited vision, man cannot see God's overall plan. As a result, he often gets caught in his middle state, "In doubt to deem himself a God or Beast" (II, 8). Thus,

*Now upward will he soar,
And little less than Angel, would be more;
Now looking downwards, just as griev'd appears
To want the strength of bulls, the fur of bears.*

(I, 173-176; italics mine)

Through antithesis the opposing relations between God and man, between man and beast, are put in bold relief.

Like Mencius, Pope likes to resort to the parable to bring home his argument:

Know, Nature's children all divide her care;
The fur that warms a monarch, warm'd a bear.
While Man exclaims, "See all things for my use!"
"See man for mine!" replies a pamper'd goose;
And just as short of Reason he must fall,
Who thinks all made for one, not one for all.

(III, 43-48)

Limited in visions, hence short of reasoning power and comprehension,¹³ the animal as well as man is inclined to think that "all [are] made for one, not one for all," when in fact man and animal are all made for one another: "All serv'd, all serving" (III, 25). In this parable, parallelism and repetition make plain the fact that both monarch and bear share the same fur, that both arrogant man and pampered goose share one well-organized nature which brings harmony into their mutual relations.

It is Pope's intent to make people "see" that all are but parts of one "well-mix't. State" (III, 294):

Such is the World's great harmony, that springs
From Order, Union, full Consent of things!

Where small and great, where weak and mighty, made
To serve, not suffer, strengthen, not invade,
More pow'rful each as needful to the rest,
And, in proportion as it blesses, blest,
Draw to one point, and to one centre bring
Beast, Man, or Angel, Servant, Lord, or King. (III, 295–302)

How to bring oppositions into reconciliation, how to reduce oppositions in the great Scale—these become the proper study of man. According to Pope, there are two opposing principles that reign in human nature: “Self-love, to urge, and Reason, to restrain” (II, 54). Though opposed in nature, they need each other to work out proper and fruitful operations:

Self-love, the spring of motion, acts the soul;
Reason's comparing balance rules the whole.
Man, but for that, no action could attend,
And, but for this, were active to no end; (II, 59–62)

The absence of either will result in inaction or even destruction; but positively, self-love and reason work for the same goal, since for both of them “Pain [is] their aversion, Pleasure their desire” (II, 88). Again, through a typical use of antithesis, their common goal is forcefully brought out. Another significant and emphatic use of antithesis is in distinguishing erring reason from instinct:

One must go right, the other may go wrong.
See then the acting and comparing pow'rs
One in their nature, which are two in ours,
And Reason raise o'er Instinct as you can,
In this 'tis God directs, in that 'tis Man. (III, 94–98)

For Pope there was a time when man gave up his prerogative to rule, and

Men walk'd with beast, joint tenent of the shade;
The same his table, and the same his bed;
No murder cloath'd him, and no murder fed. (III, 152–154)

But as time went by, the opposite came to prevail, and, as Rebecca

Parkin has pointed out, "Men slew animals for food and clothing. In turning *Against* animals, man turned *toward* them. Eventually, identifying himself, by his behavior, with the brutes, he also turned against his own species":¹⁴

The fury-passions from that blood began,
And turn'd on Man a fiercer savage, Man. (III, 167-168)

Rebecca Parkin further interprets this in terms of antithesis and the great chain of being:

The existence of a sharp, though relative, antithesis between man and beasts on the Great Scale is assumed, since "Whatever is, is right," to be just and fair. Any blurring or reduction of this antithesis, it is implied, is a sin against the divine ordering of the universe, and hence morally wrong.¹⁵

As may be expected, Pope uses antithesis to comment on man's ups and downs in general:

Fortune her gifts may variously dispose,
And these be happy call'd, unhappy those;
But Heav'n's just balance equal will appear,
While those are plac'd in Hope, and these in Fear:
Not present good or ill, the joy or curse,
But future views of better, or of worse. (IV, 67-72)

Two groups of words are put in striking juxtaposition, one pertaining to felicity ("happy," "hope," "good," "joy"), the other to woe ("unhappy," "fear," "ill," "curse"). Consequently, one results in "better," the other in "worse."

Aside from parallelism and antithesis, another prominent stylistic feature of *An Essay on Man* is the use of the "see" imagery. This imagery, as Patricia Mayer Spacks has clearly demonstrated,¹⁶ is essential to the central argument of the whole poem; it not only illustrates the meaning of perception, but defines perception's limits as well. Ultimately, through the proper use of perception, man might reason the better and thence be able to identify seeing with understanding. Earlier in our discussion of the antithetic relations between God and man, between man and animals, we have observed how the "see" imagery plays an important role in promoting

one's understanding. The strong intent to call people's attention to open their eyes to see the world and thus to provide an opportunity to "vindicate the ways of God to Man" is clearly and effectively stated in the opening lines of the poem:

Of all who *blindly* creep, or sightless soar;
Eye Nature's walks, shoot Folly as it flies,
And catch the Manners living as they rise;
Laugh where we must, be candid where we can;
But vindicate the ways of God to Man. (I, 12-16; italics mine)

In fact, Pope invokes others to "see" the universe, the great chain of being:

See, thro' this air, this ocean, and this earth,
All matter quick, and bursting into birth.
Above, how high progressive life may go!
Around, how wide! how deep extend below!
Vast chain of being, which from God began,
Natures aethereal, human, angel, man,
Beast, bird, fish, insect! *What no eye can see,*
No glass can reach! from Infinite to thee,
From thee to Nothing! (I, 233-241; italics mine)

The most effective use of the "see" imagery is found in the following long passage where it is used in conjunction with the other senses:

Far as Creation's ample range extends,
The scale of sensual, mental pow'rs ascends:
Mark how it mounts, to Man's imperial race,
From the green myriads in the peopled grass:
What modes of *sight* betwixt each wide extreme,
The mole's dim curtain, and the lynx's beam:
Of *smell*, the headlong lioness between,
And hound sagacious on the tainted green:
Of *hearing*, from the life that fills the flood,
To that which warbles thro' the vernal wood:
The spider's *touch*, how exquisitely fine!
Feels at each thread, and lives along the line:
In the nice bee, what *sense* so subtly true
From pois'nous herbs extracts the healing dew:
How Instinct varies in the grov'ling swine,

Compar'd, half-reas'ning elephant, with thine:
 'Twixt that, and Reason, what a nice barrier;
 For ever sep'rate, yet for ever near!
 Remembrance and Reflection how ally'd;
 What thin partitions *Sense* from Thought divide:
 And Middle natures, how they long to join,
 Yet never pass th' insuperable line!
 Without this just gradation, could they be
 Subjected these to those, or all to thee?
 The pow'rs of all subdu'd by thee alone,
 Is not thy Reason all these pow'rs in one? (I, 207-232; italics mine)

The extensive use of such words as "mark," "sight," "smell," "hearing," "touch," "feel," and "sense" expands the meaning of "see" to embrace all mental "perceptions"; man must be able to *perceive* the great chain of being.

Finally, the verse form matches its content. The heroic couplet used in *An Essay on Man* is functional in three ways. First, Pope uses it to bind his ideas tightly together according to the great unity he envisioned. Second, he uses heroic couplets to match the grand subject matter. Third and most important, he uses it thematically. For as William Bowman Piper has correctly observed,¹⁷ Pope's couplet form is adapted to the philosophical and didactic purpose in as much as it shows the limitations in which man has to work and the power he can enjoy within these limitations; the purpose is to come to a lucid understanding of man's condition, duties, and destiny. Piper further posits that the "process by which it is achieved is one of the poem's central concerns."¹⁸ This argument seems valid in the light of Pope's closing line, "all our knowledge is, ourselves to know" (IV, 398). It is also true since in the process of the poem, to better man's understanding of himself, Pope shows separately the nature and state of man, with respect to the universe, to himself as an individual, to society, and to happiness. But to see and understand one's circumstances and limitations is not enough. Like the poet striving to present his thoughts in the best way, man should do his utmost to glory in his limitations.

III. Conclusion

Our thematic study has shown that both *The Four Books* and *An*

Essay on Man engage in preserving a certain hierarchy, in making people glory in their "proper place." Both find man's perfect state in the union with a higher being—either *t'ien* or God. The driving force behind man's action is *jen* in Confucianism and self-love in Pope; the regulating force is *yi* in Confucianism, and reason in Pope. Although the Confucian notions of *jen* and *yi* are more moral and those of Pope more rational, yet they show a similar conception of man being constituted of both the power to act and the power to control his action. The harmonious relationship between *jen* and *yi* or between self-love and reason will not only bring about effective and fruitful actions, but an ideal man.

The present study of rhetorical devices shows similarities in the techniques used in *The Four Books* and *An Essay on Man*. Both works are written in pithy, epigrammatic sentences; both works make extensive use of parallelism, antithesis, repetition and images. Most important, these and other literary devices are employed thematically. The ample use of parallelism, antithesis, and repetition results, as we have seen, in a lucid presentation of the hierarchical order. The Confucian *Four Books* and Pope's *Essay on Man*, it is true, are two works vastly separated in space and time and glaringly different in cultural background. Yet some of their dissimilarities may be more apparent than real. The thematic and rhetorical analogies between the two works reveal that the mind of man and his modes of expression are similar enough to make literary bridge-building between East and West not only possible but a mutually enriching enterprise. In view of their literary merits, indeed, both may well claim a place in the history of world literature.

Notes

1. Perng, Yen-sheng H., "Comparing *The Four Books* and *An Essay on Man*: A Thematic Study," *Tamkang Review*, 12 (1981), 119-42.
2. Perng, "The *Four Books* and *An Essay on Man*," p. 123.
3. Arthur Waley's translation. Unless otherwise noted, the translations of Chinese texts in this paper are my own—with the invaluable help, of course, of the following established classics:

Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (rpt. Taipei: Caves Book

Co., 1969).

James Legge, *The Four Books* (rpt. Taipei: Yi-shih ch'u-pan she, 1971).

Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of Confucius* (New York: Random House, 1938).

Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938).

James R. Ware, *The Sayings of Confucius* (Taipei: Wen-chih ch'u-pan she, 1969).

For references to the *Analects*, numerals (in parentheses following each quotation) on the left of the colon indicate the book number and those on the right indicate the chapter: thus, (15:28) means Book XV, Chapter 28. Similarly, for *Mencius* composed of seven books, each having two parts, a numeral and a capitalized letter on the left of the colon indicate the book number; the number on the right indicates the chapter number: thus, (7B:14) means Book VII, Part II, Chapter 14.

4. Elsewhere in the *Analects*, Confucius also used 吾道一以貫之 "I have one thread upon which I string them all" (4:15) to refer to *jen* which Tseng-tzu explained in terms of *chung* and *shu*.
5. Ch'eng-tzu's 程子 interpretation. See Chiang Po-ch'ien 蔣伯潛, *Kuang-chieh ssu-shu tu-pen* 廣解四書讀本 (Hong Kong: Chi-ming Book Co., 1964), vol. 1, p. 69.
6. Huang Chin-hung 黃錦鎔, "T'an Lun-yü K'ung-tzu yü ti-tzu yen-chih-chang chih hsieh-tso chi-ch'iao" 談論語孔子與弟子言志章之寫作技巧 -- *K'ung-Meng yueh-k'an* 4, No. 5 (January 1966), 8.
7. For further study of the literary and rhetorical devices used in *Mencius* and the book's influence on later literary works, see Yeh Lung 葉龍, "Meng-tzu wen-hsueh kai-lun" 孟子文學概論, *Ta-lu tsa-chih* 大陸雜誌, 42, No. 5 (March 1971), 4-25.
8. For a general discussion of the historical background of Mencius' time and his uses of parables, see Wei Chih-chih, "A Short Introduction to Old Chinese Fables," *Chinese Literature*, No. 12 (1960), 69-74.
9. Chiang Po-ch'ien interprets the word 聲 as "sound"; other critics interpret it as "reputation." The clause 非惡其聲然也, as Chiang sees it, means people help the child not because they dislike the child's cries. See Chiang, *Meng-tzu tu-pen*, vol. 1, p. 79. Since the two interpretations are not mutually contradictory, perhaps both can be accepted in the name of poetic ambiguity.
10. In *The Four Books*, Confucius and Mencius frequently alluded to *The Book of Odes* and *The Book of History* to support their own theories. For further study of the allusions in *The Four Books*, see Mi Wen-k'ai 糜文開, "Lun-yü yü Shih ch'ing" 論語與詩經, *Ta-lu tsa-chih*, 31, No. 9 (November 1965), 1-5; and Mi Wen-k'ai, "Meng-tzu yü Shih-ch'ing" 孟子與詩經, *Ta-lu tsa-chih*, 36, No. 1 (January 1968), 1-5, and 36, No. 2 (January 1968), 23-27. In *An Essay on Man*, the most obvious allusions are to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the Bible and some Latin writers. Maynard Mack's footnotes to *An Essay on Man* (the Twickenham edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope) are especially scholarly and illuminating.

11. Rebecca Price Parkin, *The Poetic Workmanship of Alexander Pope* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1966), p. 77.
12. Patricia Meyer Spacks, *An Argument of Images: The Poetry of Alexander Pope* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 43.
13. Spacks, *An Argument of Images*, p. 69.
14. Parkin, *The Poetic Workmanship*, p. 82.
15. Parkin, *The Poetic Workmanship*, p. 82.
16. See Spacks, *An Argument of Images*, pp. 43-44.
17. William Bowman Piper, *The Heroic Couplet* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969), p. 137.
18. Spacks, *An Argument of Images*, p. 50.
19. Ferng, "The Four Books and An Essay on Man."

