Alexander Pope The great chain of being.

Alexander Pope: 1688 – 1744.

*An Essay on Man*, 1734

Pope was an English poet of the 18th century. The Great Chain of Being was a vital part of his philosophical writing called *The Essay On Man*. This piece deals with the acceptance of man’s position in the Great Chain, and a review of man’s position in a finite and divinely organized universe.

*“Is the great chain, that draws all to agree,  
And drawn supports, upheld by God, or Thee?”  
(From “An Essay on Man”)  
“Then say not Man’s imperfect, Heav’n in fault;  
Say rather, Man’s as perfect as he ought.”  
(From “An Essay on Man”)*

*“All are but parts of one stupendous whole,  
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.”  
(From “An Essay on Man”)*

It states that God has a plan for each rung and it is the role of man to submit and accept this fact. It is made clear that man has to recognize that he is but a small part of a complex and ordered universe. He cannot and does not know God’s purposes therefore he cannot complain of his position in the divine ladder, and must understand his ‘imperfection’ that places him there.

Pope also addresses the fact that science and its unquenchable thirst brings about misery to man as he cannot seem to find all the answers. In order to attain happiness, man must submit to the natural order or God’s Will for him in the Great Chain, rather than make the assumption that science gives complete understanding of everything. The universe may be imperfect to man, yet all these imperfections make it a perfect whole, as perfect universe must include within it all the imperfect aspects in harmony and symmetry as well.

Pope’s essay is a reminder that while science was advancing and giving man the power of imitating God, he still has not, cannot move from his set place in the Great Chain and should not question God’s plan.

*“And, Spite of pride in erring reason’s spite, / One truth is clear, Whatever IS, is RIGHT.” (Pope 293-294)*

*An Essay on Man*:

Link: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44899/an-essay-on-man-epistle-i