

## Correspondence

To the Editor of the Journal of British Studies:

Underlying the Greene-Stanlis discussion of "Samuel Johnson and 'Natural Law'" (May, 1963) is the question to which Mr. Greene brings the argument, that of the Fall of Man. The question is not the Fall but its extent. For some theologians (*e.g.*, Barth, whom Mr. Greene cites), the Fall was utter, resulting in *natura deleta*, "nature annihilated." For other theologians the Fall was quite as real, but resulted in *natura vulnerata*, "nature wounded," or, as Roman Catholic catechisms say, the intellect darkened, the will weakened. True, some Roman Catholics tending toward Jansenism, like Pascal, whom Mr. Greene cites, regard nature sourly, but the prevalent norm is that expressed by Newman (*Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England*, 1918, p. 171): "Now . . . you know there is a divine law written on the heart by nature, and that the Catholic Church is built on that law, and cannot undo it. No Priest, no Bishop, no Council can make that right which is base and shameful."

Most Roman Catholics and Anglicans accept the apostolic natural law written in the hearts of all men, even in those of the Gentiles, according to St. Paul (Rom. 2: 12-15). In various forms of ultra-Protestant Christian thought, nature is, from the viewpoint of the *philosophia perennis* (Leo Ward, *Philosophy of Education*, 1963, p. 260), "a kind of dubious asset and a 'natural' incubus." For eighteenth-century deists outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition (*e.g.*, Rousseau), human nature is no problem, and for twentieth-century non-Christian existentialists, like Sartre, "*Il n'y a pas de nature humaine.*" For Johnson, who must be pronounced not absolutely consistent on this matter, especially in some of his recorded utterances, we may have an estimate better than any now available when Mr. Maurice Quinlan's study of Johnson's religious thought will have been published by the University of Wisconsin Press, probably before this letter appears in print.

Much of the Greene-Stanlis discussion hinges upon meanings Johnson accorded those two words familiar to every eighteenth-century scholar for their protean usage, and, properly employed, fundamental in any century to the natural law, *nature* and *reason*. Here I confine myself to *reason*, which Mr. Stanlis distinguishes in

two senses, (a) "right reason" (Cicero's *recta ratio*) and (b) "discursive reason." According to Mr. Greene, Johnson's *Dictionary* entries will be searched in vain for any recognition of the distinction that Mr. Stanlis makes all-important."

In the *Dictionary* (mine happens to be the 2nd edition), *sub* REASON, *n.s.*, the first signification ("The power by which man deduces one proposition from another; the rational faculty") may appear to be merely that second reason, but Johnson's four exemplifying quotations are for *recta ratio* (Hooker, Milton, Dryden, and Swift). The citation from Hooker reads: "*Reason* is the director of man's will, discovering in action what is good; for the laws of well-doing are the dictates of right *reason*." What Johnson sought here was a definition embracing both *recta ratio* and another allied kind of reason, the "practical reason," which correctly implements the perception of good by "right reason." *Sub* PRACTICAL, *adj.*, Johnson's signification is "Relating to action; not merely speculative," with two citations from the great Anglican divines, Tillotson and South. South's reads, echoing the Fathers on the prelapsarian state of man, "The image of God was no less resplendent in man's *practical* understanding; namely, that storehouse of the soul, in which are treasured up the rules of action and the seeds of morality." So a modern Anglican literary scholar and writer on the natural law, C. S. Lewis (*The Abolition of Man*, 1947, p. 20), adjures his readers to "extend the word Reason to include what our ancestors called Practical Reason." Johnson's definition attempted to include both *recta ratio*, the intuitive perception of good, and "practical reason," the comprehension of the good means whereby the will implements it. Actually, Johnson's definition is not inconsistent with Heinrich Rommen's (*The Natural Law*, 1947, p. 36) description of patristic natural law: "Nature, somehow wounded indeed but not destroyed, is . . . able fully to recognize the first principles of morality and law. But the conclusions from the first principles, which were also plainly intelligible in the state of unimpaired nature, are now attainable only by means of deductive reasoning, since the practical reason is also weakened." Significantly, Hawkins' biography (1787) observes that Johnson was "competently skilled in the writings of the fathers. . . ."

With no ambiguity, the sixth signification in the *Dictionary* is Mr. Stanlis's second *reason*: "Ratiocination; discursive power." *Sub* DISCURSIVE, *adj.*, the second signification reads, "Proceeding by regular gradation from premises to consequences; argumentative."

Now as it was Johnson's intention, though he confesses it not fully realized in the *Dictionary*, to make his citations instructive, those for *discursive* may be worth quoting. The first is from More's *Divine Dialogues*: "There is sanctity of soul and body, of more efficacy for the receiving of divine truths, than the greatest preferences to *discursive* demonstration"; the second from Hale's *Origin of Mankind*: "There hath been much dispute touching the knowledge of brutes, whether they have a kind of *discursive* faculty, which some call reason." In conversation (Boswell's *Life*, Hill-Powell ed., IV, p. 335), Johnson figuratively distinguished the two kinds of reason: "He entered upon a curious discussion of the difference between intuition and sagacity; one being immediate in its effect, the other requiring a circuitous process; one he observed was the *eye* of the mind, the other the *nose* of the mind." Perhaps Johnson was here recalling Hooker (*Eccl. Pol.*, I, 6): "Goodness is seen with the eye of the understanding. And the light of that eye is reason." That reason is *recta ratio*.

In his moral writings, Johnson consistently accords to such reason all but the very highest respect, which (unlike such rationalists as Hume and Gibbon) he reserves for revelation. In the *Rambler* (No. 162) reason is that "great distinction of human nature, the faculty by which we approach to some degree of association with celestial intelligences," which statement echoes Cicero (*e.g.*, *De Legibus*, I, vii, 23-26); but, adds Johnson, heavily emphasizing "practical reason," "as the excellence of every power appears only in its operations, not to have reason, and to have it useless and unemployed, is nearly the same." While Occam and some later Reformation theologians regarded God as Will only, with ultimate consequences on the destruction of the natural law in political thought ("The absolute power of God in Occam's doctrine became in the hands of Thomas Hobbes the absolute sovereignty of the king," Rommen, *The Natural Law*, p. 61), to Johnson (*Rambler*, No. 83) God was the "supreme reason." To Hobbes, as Louis Bredvold (*The Brave New World of the Enlightenment*, 1961, p. 20) observes, the old maxim that the king can do no wrong was given a "new twist," but to Johnson, in the Vinerian Lectures (E. L. McAdam, Jr., *Dr. Johnson and the English Law*, 1951, p. 96), "That this maxim may be morally and physically false it is not difficult to discover."

However, because man's reason had been affected by the Fall, Johnson, like other orthodox eighteenth-century Anglican thinkers, was mistrustful of the private, individual reason. He did not be-

lieve that one should (to use a phrase from Burke's *Reflections*) "put men to live and trade each upon his own private stock of reason." Johnson agreed with Swift, whom he quotes under the fourth citation for the first signification of REASON, *n.s.*: "[R]eason itself is true and just, but the *reason* of every particular man is weak and wavering, perpetually swayed and turn'd by his interests, his passions and his vices." Hence, with a perceptive discrimination which saves him from degenerating into a mere canting traditionalist, Johnson relies on corporate reason, the *sens gentium*, as in the *Idler* (No. 52): "When an opinion to which there is no temptation of interest spreads wide and continuous long, it may be reasonably presumed to have been infused by nature or dictated by reason." Not carried to the extreme lengths of the "common consent" of the Scottish "common sense" school of philosophy (Reid, Dugald Stewart), the Johnsonian *consensus gentium*, anticipating Burke's political doctrine of prescription (the Burkean "wisdom of the species"), may be traced to Hooker (even to Cicero) and linked to the Hookerian natural law (*Eccl. Pol.*, I, 8): "The general and perpetual voice of men is as the sentence of God Himself. For that which all men have at all times learned, Nature herself must needs have taught; and God being the author of Nature, her voice is but his instrument."

July, 1963

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To the Editor of the Journal of British Studies:

Mr. Greene's denial of the Stanlis "dogma" that Johnson, in his moral philosophy, understood and took into account the distinction between "human nature" and external physical "nature" amounts to an assumption (humbly unasserted) that Johnson *did not* understand or take into account this elementary distinction. Mr. Greene's denial implies that prescriptive ethics and descriptive physics, the laws of qualitative morality and the laws of quantitative mathematics, the differences between man as spirit and thing as matter, were indistinguishable in Johnson's ethics. There is not a shred of evidence in his writings of this happy pantheistic fusion of all "natures" into One. What would Johnson have done had he read the late Professor A. O. Lovejoy's "Nature as Aesthetic Norm," (*Modern Language Notes* (1927), pp. 444-50), which describes a "multiplicity of . . . meanings" for "Nature," with consequent "common confusions" among modern scholars dealing with the eighteenth century? Perhaps Johnson would have had compassion

for scholars who need to have their empirical evidence writ large and made starkly explicit, so that they might interpret his moral philosophy without the errors of a historical fundamentalist.

Johnson's works afford ample evidence of the distinction between man and external "nature," and the respective modes of "reason" appropriate to each. One passage will have to suffice:

But the truth is, that the knowledge of external nature, and the sciences which that knowledge requires or includes, are not the great or the frequent business of the human mind . . . . The first requisite is the religious and moral knowledge of right and wrong; the next is an acquaintance with the history of mankind . . . . We are perpetually moralists, but we are geometers only by chance. Our intercourse with intellectual nature is necessary; our speculations upon matter are voluntary, and at leisure. Physiological learning is of such rare emergence, that one may know another half his life, without being able to estimate his skill in hydrostatics or astronomy; but his moral and prudential character immediately appears. . . . The innovators whom I oppose are turning off attention from life to nature. They seem to think that we are placed here to watch the growth of plants, or the motions of the stars. Socrates was rather of opinion, that what we had to learn was, how to do good, and avoid evil. (Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets*, in *The Works of Samuel Johnson* [Bohn Library] (London, 1850), I, 28-29.)

This passage reveals that Johnson's hierarchy of moral values depends upon a clear-cut distinction between man as an ethical being and external nature. In this passage Johnson dissociates himself from the "moral calculus" of Hobbes's materialism and Locke's empiricism. Man's moral nature is above physical nature, distinct in kind, not in degree; it is primarily ethical and intellectual, not physiological. Also, the passage reveals that man's moral character is self-evident to intuition and "immediately appears," without prior discursive reasoning upon empirical data.

But Mr. Greene will have nothing to do with any such distinction, because he believes that Johnson "took his epistemology largely from Locke." (p. 84.) Like everyone who has ever lived, before and after Locke, Johnson necessarily apprehended the *physical* universe, including man as a physical being, primarily through his senses and analytical reason. This, in itself, does not make Johnson's empirical observations Lockian. But like Locke, Mr. Greene does not seem to understand that the one thing the mind cannot perceive is mind itself. In the apprehension of ethics,

did Johnson take his *moral* epistemology from Locke's empiricism? Mr. Greene clearly thinks so: "Johnson makes it clear in *his* system . . . you observe the consequences of concrete human behavior; if it seems to conduce to the general happiness, to the 'utility' (Johnson's word) of mankind as a whole, you then infer that it is in accordance with 'natural law,' and so, the will of God." (p. 69.)

It is very doubtful that this is Johnson's system; there is no doubt that it is Mr. Greene's. The way to arrive at moral principles, apparently, is to extend initial empirical observations of human behavior by analyses based upon inferred utilitarian consequences, until a normative judgment is reached. In short, Mr. Greene believes that by applying empiricism and the scientific method to Man he can convert indicative facts into imperative ethical norms. This is the basic assumption common to almost every modern psychological and sociological behavioral scientist. Christian Revelation, and Natural Law, or "the will of God," is for Mr. Greene not the *source* of Johnson's ethics, but a kind of afterthought, a test tacked on to the tail end of an empirical-analytical process. As Mr. Greene puts it, each "particular individual" should "humbly . . . make whatever small contribution he can to the cumulative knowledge of the sources of human happiness by working empirically, by reasoning *a posteriori*." (p. 71.) The word "humble" is surely not fortuitous. Yet Johnson did not think the empirical method was inherently humble: "Every cold empirick, when his heart is expanded by a successful experiment, swells into a theorist, and the laborious collator at some unlucky moment frolicks in conjecture." (Johnson, *Preface to Shakespeare*, in *Works*, II, 340.) It is one thing for Mr. Greene to *interpret* Johnson in the light of Lockian empiricism, Utilitarianism, and modern methods of behavioral science; it is quite another thing for him to *attribute* their philosophical premises and methods to Johnson. As a Christian and a humanist, Johnson (humbly) took his *moral* epistemology from Divine Revelation and human Right Reason, and not from the (proud?) speculative philosophers of the Enlightenment.

Mr. Greene thinks that because Johnson used the word "utility" in connection with human happiness that his ethical philosophy is Utilitarian. Of course Johnson believed that living according to sound morality made men happy, spiritually if not temporally, and that therefore moral principles were useful. To Johnson ethics was a part of *practical reason*, not of *speculative reason*; it aimed at the good, not the true. But the truth of moral law did not derive from its being useful. Quite the reverse. To Johnson, an ethical prin-

ciple is not true *because* it is useful, but useful because it is true. Johnson's moral principles rest ultimately upon Christian Revelation, not upon eighteenth-century Utilitarianism. As Professor Louis I. Bredvold recently remarked on this point, "No one reads Johnson for Utilitarianism."

The contention that "St. Augustine read Christian Scripture in the light of his Platonism . . . so that a rational element was always mixed with his austere doctrine of grace," (p. 80), rested upon such passages as the following, from Gilson's *God and Philosophy*:

The first epoch-making contact between Greek philosophical speculation and Christian belief took place when . . . the young Augustine began to read the works of some Neo-Platonists, particularly the *Enneads* of Plotinos . . . (p. 44.) The problem which Augustine boldly undertook to solve [was] how to express the God of Christianity in terms borrowed from the philosophy of Plotinos. (p. 47.) As soon as Augustine read the *Enneads*, he found there the three essentially Christian notions of God the Father, of God the Word, and of the Creation. (pp. 48-49.) From the time of Saint Augustine up to our own days, human reason has been up against the tremendous difficult task of reaching a transcendent God whose pure act of existing is radically distinct from our own borrowed existence. (p. 54.) Augustine had nothing to help him but the philosophical technique of Plato in the revised edition of Plotinos . . . . In inheriting the philosophical world of Plato, Augustine had fallen heir to Plato's man . . . . Man was bound to appear to Augustine as a creature endowed with something that was divine in its own right. (pp. 54, 55 and 58.)

Despite the wealth of evidence in the above passages, Mr. Greene writes: "Mr. Stanlis seems not to have read, or understood, the passage in Gilson's book that he cites," and he warns that "his account of Gilson" is not "to be trusted." Evidently, Mr. Greene hoped that readers would not consult Gilson, so that they would not discover his method. In order *to deny* that pagan philosophy existed in St. Augustine's thought, Mr. Greene quotes a passage on the *contradictions* between pagan philosophy and Christian theology, and pretends that both are not to be found in Augustine. To Mr. Greene the presence of Christian theology is necessarily the absence of pagan philosophy.

Four other of Mr. Greene's responses warrant brief comments: (1) Of course Boyle was both a devout Christian and a fine chemist, without contradiction (p. 84), because in each role he employed the distinct principles and methods appropriate to moral

man on one side and physical nature on the other. But did Boyle carry his "Cartesian rationalism" over into his Christianity, or vice versa? Did he seek to apply the mathematical calculus in ethics? Was he a christian-Chemist, or a chemist-Christian? (2) Mr. Greene writes that "Johnson was certainly not a pyrrhonist." (p. 86.) A statement by Professor James Clifford is equally certain on the other side: "The Pyrrhonistic spirit, which carried doubt over into the realm of Man's reason, produced a basic disbelief in the possibility of any major sudden improvement in human institutions . . . Johnson was essentially of this Pyrrhonistic tradition (as recent writers have pointed out). . . ." (James L. Clifford, "A Survey of Johnsonian Studies," in *Johnsonian Studies* (Minneapolis, 1951), p. 12.) (3) Concerning Calvinism (historical, not pejorative), the point is not that Calvin denied "that God's will is inherently inaccessible to man's understanding," (p. 86), but that the Calvinist doctrine of grace contains the most extreme Augustinian conception of man's fall, close to total depravity (except for the "elect"), which minimizes or denies man's reason as a *source* of revelation. Mr. Greene doesn't *label* Johnson a Calvinist, but he attributes the Calvinist doctrine of grace to him. (4) Mr. Greene thinks that Johnson's general warning against "yielding to the suggestions of pride," (p. 87) was *attributed* to him, whereas it was merely *applied* to him. He fails to perceive this, because he is so certain that Johnson's warning applies only to proud believers in Natural Law, never to humble empiricists. In this he is a victim of his own slanting.

To Mr. Greene the "plain meaning" of Johnson's *Taxation No Tyranny* lies wholly in the title. Mr. Greene admits to believing (p. 87) that "on occasion" government has the moral right to "strip subjects of their property." In short, he rejects the Natural Law and argues that *political might makes moral right*, that political power alone is sufficient to make law, without reference to any prior and greater moral or constitutional law, which sanctions power.

But what does Johnson say about the Natural Law principles which protect life, liberty, and property, to which some Americans were appealing:

The Americans are telling one another . . . what yet is a very important truth, 'that they are entitled to life, liberty, and property, and that they have never ceded to any sovereign power whatever a right to dispose of either without

their consent.' While this resolution stands alone, the Americans are free from singularity of opinion; their wit has not yet betrayed them to heresy . . . . They claim but what is claimed by other men, and have withheld nothing but what all withhold. They are here upon firm ground, behind intrenchments which never can be forced. (Johnson, *Taxation No Tyranny*, in *Works*, II, 619.)

Clearly, Johnson affirms with the Americans a common belief in Natural Law principles. But Johnson also held that "the supreme power of every community has the right of requiring from all its subjects, such contributions as are necessary to the public safety or public prosperity." (*Ibid.*, p. 613.) Political sovereignty is the legally constituted power for the collection of taxes, and there is nothing in this contrary to Natural Law. The amount of taxes levied varied according to the needs of government, but so long as they were equitable, and not arbitrary, they were not contrary to Natural Law, and therefore not a tyranny. This applied to Britain's taxation of the Americans. The American appeal to "life, liberty, and property," though sound in itself as a common principle, was not valid in the application to Britain, and did not IN ITSELF justify their political rebellion against British sovereignty in refusing to pay just taxes. Johnson's position is a world removed from Mr. Greene's "plain meaning," which proudly makes Johnson an arbitrary tyrant.

Throughout, Mr. Greene's method shows little real respect for empirical thoroughness, inductive processes, and scientific accuracy. He objects, quite rightly, to identities made between Johnson's Christianity and the Natural Law doctrines of other Christians. But then he commits the same error in reverse, concerning the supposed skepticism toward Natural Law of Christians such as Pascal and Vico. It is fallacious to discuss a *specific* element, such as Natural Law, in an author's thought by reference to his *general* similarity or dissimilarity with other authors. Johnson's *general* fondness for Pascal proves nothing *specific* about Natural Law in Johnson's thought. By making broad leaping analogies between Johnson and these and other writers, Mr. Greene can pick and choose his data, to emphasize or ignore similarities and differences as they fit his thesis. It is not true that two writers, similar to a third, are identical to each other in thought.

Professor Herbert Butterfield has commented most appropriately upon yet another aspect of the method in Mr. Greene's type of scholarship:

A man who wished to write the history of my College, and tried to confine himself to the documents in the College Treasury, might too easily imagine that we were a body concerned only with the administration of money, buildings and other property. If he would go outside and consult some forms of evidence that he might regard as inferior – discussions in the *University Reporter* and the *Cambridge Review*, for example, . . . – he would discover that men in Cambridge have a real interest in education too. (Herbert Butterfield, *George III and the Historians* (London, 1957) p. 212.)

As Jonathan Swift liked to say on such occasions, here is “a seasonable innuendo,” which Mr. Greene would do well to ponder when next he ventures into the moral philosophy of Samuel Johnson.

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To the Editor of the Journal of British Studies:

I can make very little of Mr. Stanlis’s commentary, which seems to be a mixture of *ignoratio elenchi* and *argumentum ad hominem*. The point of my article was that it appears difficult to attribute to Johnson a belief in the particular conception of “natural law” held by Mr. Stanlis and some others. Possibly I misunderstand that conception (for it has certainly been very vaguely defined so far); I hoped my article might elicit a more precise formulation of it, and citation of the passages from Johnson’s writings which substantiate the claim that he “believed in” it in a way that Locke, say, did not. In place of such definition, we get much discussion and abuse of something called “Mr. Greene’s system.” I am flattered by the attention, but my “system” (if I have one) is not, after all, the point at issue, nor are the readers of this *Journal* likely to be as much interested in it as Mr. Stanlis thinks.

As for the “ample evidence” that Johnson held the “Stanlis dogma” of a sharp dichotomy between two uses of the word “nature,” Mr. Stanlis, in his earlier commentary, produced one passage, from Johnson’s review of Soame Jenyns’s *Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*. I showed that Mr. Stanlis had hopelessly misunderstood what Johnson was talking about there. Mr. Stanlis does not defend himself against this charge, abandons the passage, and now produces another, from Johnson’s *Life of Milton*. In this Johnson is complaining, apropos of Milton’s educational theories, that education in the physical sciences is not as useful in

the average man's daily activities as moral education. It is unlikely that anyone before Mr. Stanlis has ever taken the famous remark "We are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance" to mean "Johnson dissociates himself from the 'moral calculus' of Hobbes's materialism and Locke's empiricism. Man's moral nature is above physical nature," etc., and it is unlikely that anyone after Mr. Stanlis will do so. All Johnson is saying is that we don't use what we learn in school about physics as often as what we learn about behavior, a proposition with which any good Hobbesian or Lockean might readily agree. Johnson goes on to remark, "Physiological learning is of such rare emergence that one may know another half his life, without being able to estimate his skill in hydrostatics and astronomy; but his moral and prudential character immediately appears." The meaning could hardly be clearer: even when you have known a person for some time, you may never have had a chance to learn how good his grasp of physics is, but it doesn't take long to get a pretty good idea of whether he is an honest man or a crook. But to Mr. Stanlis the remark "reveals that man's moral character is self-evident to intuition and 'immediately appears,' without prior discursive reasoning upon empirical data." Really! In the first place, Johnson is not talking about "*man's*" moral character but about "*a man's*"; in the second, Johnson would not be foolish enough to try to assess "*another's*" moral character by "intuition," but would certainly use "empirical data" in making the judgment. If Mr. Stanlis has to resort to such preposterous distortion of Johnson's plain English, his case must indeed be a desperate one.

Mr. Stanlis's difficulties with elementary semantics again appear when he quotes a sentence where Johnson uses the word "empirick" in derogation of dilettantish Shakespearian critics; this, he thinks, shows that Johnson disapproved of philosophical empiricism. A glance at a dictionary would have told Mr. Stanlis that "an empiric" is a very different thing from "an empiricist." I quoted Gilson precisely in the hope that readers *would* consult Gilson and not be content with Mr. Stanlis's version of him; I hope they will consult Johnson, too — extensively. It would be hard to say what Mr. Stanlis's discussion of *Taxation No Tyranny* tends to prove. If one goes on to read the continuation of the passage that Mr. Stanlis quotes from it, one will see that Johnson is saying that, although one may readily agree with "natural rights" theory in the abstract — in a vacuum, so to speak — neither the Americans nor anyone else lives in such a vacuum. I certainly don't make John-

son "an arbitrary tyrant," as I think my book on Johnson's politics demonstrates; still, it would be interesting to discover how Mr. Stanlis explains the remark from *Taxation No Tyranny* that I quoted in my original paper, "All government is ultimately and essentially absolute." As for the relevance to the present discussion of the passage from Herbert Butterfield quoted at the end of Mr. Stanlis's commentary — like that of the reference to Lovejoy at the beginning of it — anybody's guess is as good as mine.

But it is clear that the present discussion cannot possibly be profitable, and it will be well to abandon it. Mr. Stanlis is not writing as a scholar, but as a polemist. He has been an associate of Russell Kirk and others in the campaign that has been going on for some time to enlist Burke and Johnson in the service of the "radical right" in American politics — to use them, as Donald C. Bryant put it in the November, 1962, issue of this *Journal*, as a "fountain of dicta which may be made to support an intellectual conservatism which lacks the splash of a Barry Goldwater." The attempt to enroll Burke has met with heavy going among those who really know their Burke, and the effort to recruit Johnson, if it necessitates such fantastic misreading of Johnson's plain language as Mr. Stanlis has given us, is likely to be even less successful. Concerning this group of polemist, the eminent Burke scholar Thomas W. Copeland comments, in the May, 1962, issue of this *Journal*, "Several of those who invoke his [Burke's] authority have already shown how simplified an image of his personality will suffice them," and Bryant, "What seems to matter most to these writers, alas, is the ethos which can be bequeathed to a label, not the illumination of Burke in his time, or of his time in Burke." How much illumination Mr. Stanlis's remarks contribute to the study of Johnson, readers may decide.

One small point does emerge in Mr. Stanlis's comment which deserves some serious attention and clarification — the use of the term "Pyrrhonism" in connection with Johnson's thought. It is highly misleading to apply the term "Pyrrhonism" to the classic British tradition of philosophical empiricism, which stems from Bacon (whom Johnson used so extensively in his *Dictionary*) and which dominated the eighteenth century. "Pyrrhonism" has its own perfectly clear and distinct meaning: it denotes (to quote J. H. Tufts in Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*) "the imperturbability or ataraxy of the Wise Man [which] is the result of a suspense of judgment with regard to things . . . this suspense in turn is due to the recognition that nothing can be known."

Pyrrhonism is repugnant to philosophical empiricism, which insists that useful knowledge, in terms of probabilities if not certainties, is indeed possible and should be pursued; the classic discussion is Hume's, in the last chapter of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. It was also repugnant to the author of *Rasselas* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* – “Must dull Suspense corrupt the stagnant mind?/ Must helpless man in ignorance sedate/ Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?” On the epistemological question, as regards history, Johnson provides, in the opening paragraphs of his review of the Duchess of Marlborough's memoirs, an interesting statement of the Pyrrhonist position, and a rejection of it.

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