

The eighteenth century, according to Coleridge, was full of Enlighteners but empty of real Enlightenment. Dr. Samuel Johnson, who refused to be swept along by the current of the Enlightenment, still has meaning for our age.

Whispers of Fancy; or, The Meaning of Rasselas

NICHOLAS JOOST

*"Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy,
and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope . . .
attend to the history of Rasselas, prince of Abyssinia."*

SAMUEL JOHNSON'S *Rasselas* is fundamentally a moral and religious novel in theme, point of view, and purpose.¹ It is, moreover, a parable written not so much for the sake of its characters and action on a literal level of meaning as for the sake of the more nearly universal levels of meaning that these actors and situations objectify. On the literal or historical level, *Rasselas* is merely the not very interesting story of Rasselas, a prince of the royal house of Abyssinia, his sister the Princess Nekayah, her lady-in-waiting Pekuah, and Imlac, mentor and guide to these three: their escape to the world from the happy valley in which they have been reared, their disillusioning adventures there, and their final resolve to return to Abyssinia.

On the symbolic or allegorical level, *Rasselas* seems to have no precise parallels in the Dantean sense. It has, however, approximate meaning as an allegory of our First Parents, their seduction from innocence and the results thereof. This analogue seems implied by Johnson's choice of "the

happy valley" to describe his initial situation in an earthly paradise. The allegory of *Rasselas* in this respect is if not strictly historical, quasi-historical to the extent that Johnson accepted the historical provenance of the Old Testament.

On the oneiric level of the preconscious dream, *Rasselas* is revealing in another fashion, surely never intended by Johnson—and important not so much for literature as for the autobiographical revelation thereby given us of the author. In Freudian terms, *Rasselas* embodies the following experience: man leaves the womb; he struggles to attain maturity as an individual; defeated by these struggles, he desires to return to the simplicity and the irresponsibility of foetal existence, i.e., to the happy valley. The episode, Chapters XIII-XV, in which Rasselas and his party leave the happy valley for the greater world, by tunneling through the mountainside enclosing the happy valley, is a plain if unintended allegory of the birth experience.

"They clambered through the cavity, and

began to go down on the other side. The princess and her maid turned their eyes towards every part, and seeing nothing to bound their prospect, considered themselves as in danger of being lost in a dreary vacuity. They stopped and trembled. 'I'm almost afraid,' said the princess, 'to begin a journey of which I cannot perceive an end, and to venture into this immense plain, where I may be approached on every side by men whom I never saw.' The prince felt nearly the same emotions, though he thought it more manly to conceal them."

A certain fear of the strange is not aberrational, for "if we speak with rigorous exactness, no human mind is in its right state"; but the pronounced regressive tendencies that Johnson deals with here are neurotic, as are the fantasies which he ridicules.

On the moral level of meaning, the interpretation is more obvious: *Rasselas* is the story of man's loss of moral innocence, his discovery of the vanity of all things of the natural life, and his desire to regain that innocence. But Johnson, I believe, shows us that we cannot regain "Abyssinia" as we once knew that kingdom, for we ourselves are changed by living in the world. Which course, then, is preferable in the moral order: to remain in the happy valley of innocence; or to go through the world seeking truth and thereby to risk losing innocence without finding truth? Imlac says that "Long journeys in search of truth are not commanded. Truth, such as is always necessary to the regulation of life, is always found where it is honestly sought." According to the principles upon which it is performed, pilgrimage is reasonable or superstitious. Thus the answer is not so simple as the question posed. Without wandering, we may find truth in the happy valley. The pilgrimage is undertaken on our own responsibility. On this journey we may seek truth and happiness, but we must not confuse the two. Truth, finite and comparative, we may find; however, we must

not expect to find perfect happiness on earth. "Human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed." The prince will not believe Imlac; even at the end of the novel *Rasselas* forms plans, ever-changing, for an ideal kingdom, although he knows that of the wishes he had formed none could be obtained. He has confused truth and happiness by acknowledging but not believing in the validity of Imlac's distinction.

Recently Professor C. R. Tracy has contended that the resolve of *Rasselas* and his group to return to Abyssinia foreshadows their later life back in the happy valley, a life of continued and futile delusion: "It is the comic end of those who, through their addiction to pure reason, refuse to live the life of common sense²." Of course they have not lived the life of common sense, but neither have they lived the life of pure reason. In the final chapter, Johnson concluded that the pilgrimage of this brilliant party has been not "reasonable" but "superstitious"; consequently, although Pekuah, Nekayah, and *Rasselas* are disgusted in varying degrees with sublunary things, they still misapprehend the human condition. Their pilgrimage after truth and happiness was not commanded. They made it on their own responsibilities. And now that they have lived the life of the world and have pierced the facade of its vanity, they believe that they have apprehended final truth and can return unscathed to their primal state. But Johnson indicates their belief to be the last and greatest illusion. In reality they are no longer innocent. The pilgrimage has affected them. They are, in the image of Marianne Moore, like blind men who think they can see. True, Imlac has correctly interpreted for *Rasselas*, Nekayah, and Pekuah the significance of the sights they have viewed; but, even as they comment on his discourses, they build castles in the air. As the novel closes, they continue to build their fanciful castles despite knowledge that "Of these wishes

that they had formed . . . none could be obtained"! Their failure lies in their not having lived the life of reason: "All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity," says Imlac.

By investigating Imlac's use of the two key terms "fancy" and "reason," we learn more fully what Johnson conceived the error of Rasselas and his entourage to be and what the moral meaning of this cautionary tale intends. The psychological machinery of *Rasselas* is set in motion to produce a suitable moral lesson. "Common sense" and "reason" are Johnsonian synonyms. Like his contemporaries, Johnson opposed fancy and imagination to reason, man's normative faculty. Indeed, Johnson was not greatly interested in the imagination for its own sake. In Chapter XLIV, entitled, perhaps ironically, "The Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination," Imlac does not distinguish between the imagination and the fancy. Unlike Coleridge, Johnson did not equate imagination with pure or speculative reason, an intuitive faculty of the soul; nor did he equate fancy with the practical reason or understanding, the spiritual faculty which arrives at its conclusion by inductive or deductive means. When Imlac states that the despotic reign of fancy is unhealthy and may lead to insanity, he does not seem to be categorizing either fancy or imagination as an intuitive faculty. Rather, he seems to be warning against the enthusiasm that not only is based upon false premises but also proceeds illogically by means of lame syllogisms and false analogies. Such enthusiasm is a disorder of the intellect—irrational because illogical and, therefore, in kind, if not in degree, akin to actual insanity. The difference between the idle visionary and the insane man resides simply in the former's voluntary, temporary relinquishment of his control of the rational faculty. The insane man, however, *cannot* formulate a correct syllogism or meaningful analogy. Johnson we cannot say mistrusted the imagination,

but like all Aristotelian thinkers he believed the imagination to be beneficial and constructive only when it was firmly controlled by the reason. Johnson's psychological theories if not actually scholastic are to a striking degree influenced in terms and relationships by scholastic psychology.

Pekuah, the princess, and Rasselas all illustrate, in their confessions of idle hours spent in visionary schemes, their acceptance of Imlac's definition of "disorders of intellect." From this evidence, we gather, of course, that Johnson would not have equated intuition with fancy; also we learn the nature of the error that Rasselas, Nekayah, and Pekuah fell into. Their reason did not sufficiently control their imagination.

Given such a situation, the moral lesson is obvious. Because the young Abyssinians fancifully envisioned, rather than reasoned about, the ideal life, they chose occupations that would for them be neither wise nor edifying. Retirement and contemplation would be as empty as the bustle and variety of the active life. As we read in *Rasselas*, Johnson advocated the contemplative life for those people who were "unable to stem the temptations of public life." He neither undervalued nor misunderstood the contemplative life, which might be both useful and edifying, and certainly altogether rationally chosen as a mode of living. Johnson deliberately contrasted "pious abstraction" to the despotic "reign of fancy." He set off the monks at the monastery of St. Anthony against the fanciful and therefore ridiculous astronomer, who like them lives apart from the world. Not the religious contemplatives but the scientists, the so-called rationalists, were satirized by Johnson. The astronomer has retired from the world not to contemplate final things but the more easily to give his fancy rein, the more easily to concern himself with the sensible, material universe. The monks we may rationally admire, though not so much as the man "that lives well in the world;" but the astronomer who is the object of

Imlac's tirade against fancy, being a visionary, an enthusiast, we ought not to admire, for he has misused his reason and in consequence has also abused his higher, intuitive powers. This point, as we shall see, has some bearing on the anagogical element in *Rasselas*.

On the moral level of meaning, however, Johnson was concerned not with intuitive perception but with the rational perception of the difference between worth and vanity, good and evil. Because *Rasselas*, Nekayah, and Pekuah have lost their moral innocence, they will at best have great difficulty in perceiving this difference. Even when they perceive it, even when they desire the good, concupiscence may—and usually does—distract them from the good. Doubly deluded by their individual “schemes of happiness” and by their common belief that, having lived in the world, they will now be satisfied with life in the happy valley, the three young people have forgotten Imlac's reply to an earlier question of *Rasselas*. Asking Imlac about his residence in the happy valley, *Rasselas* had wanted to know, “Hast thou found happiness here at last?” And Imlac had replied, “I know not one of all your attendants who does not lament the hour when he entered this retreat. I am less unhappy than the rest, because I have a mind replete with images which I can vary and combine at pleasure.” The philosopher, we note, knows the true value of the imagination: while being exercised, it lessens the pain of life, but it does not help men achieve either truth or happiness. Imlac's “knowledge” was, if not peculiar to the age of Johnson, characteristic of Johnson's mind, in which psychology was indissolubly allied, not to laboratory experiment, but to metaphysics. Thus, by this psychological machinery, through Imlac *Rasselas* makes its point on the moral level, that all is vanity. Man's desire to return to the happy valley may be natural, but it is vain.

On the anagogical level, *Rasselas* possesses meaning, although what this may be

is disputed. Professor Tracy believes the novel to be lacking “the Christian teaching” of the *Vanity of Human Wishes*. Surely we must reject his reasoning that *Rasselas* was set deliberately in a non-Christian part of the world “so that Johnson could deal with man on a purely naturalistic level and feel free to discuss the issues he had in mind unimpeded by other considerations³.” First of all, through his reading of Fr. Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia* Johnson must have learned that Abyssinia was a Christian land and that Egypt contained Christians. For example, Johnson—it is fair to assume by design, in order to prepare his readers for the discussion of immortality in Chapter XLVIII—had Pekuah ransomed from the Arabs at the “monastery of St. Anthony, which is situated in the deserts of Upper Egypt.” The milieu of *Rasselas* is not non-Christian. Rather, for the religious purposes of the story, this physical milieu is almost though not quite neutral; but negatively Christian on the level of ideas it assuredly is not.

Secondly, Johnson did not deal with man on a purely naturalistic level, unimpeded by other considerations. He nowhere stated in *Rasselas* that his morality was a Christian morality or that his “higher authority” was the Christian Bible, but that a specifically Christian body of doctrine is the context of this work was tacitly assumed by both the author and his contemporary readers. This assertion is based on two arguments: Johnson as a sincere and pious Christian would not have written an irreligious parable of so serious an intention; and *Rasselas* contains, despite its superficial air of noncommittal, positively Christian elements. It may be objected that Johnson's anagogical meaning in *Rasselas*, while not anti-Christian, is not specifically Christian; for Christianity shares many beliefs in common with Hebraism, Mohammedanism, Stoicism, and even such vanished religions as Mithraism. It is true that this community of analogy does exist. But

it certainly is not arguing in a circle to say that *Rasselas*, as the work of a Christian writer, contains, at least by intention, a Christian meaning. It was, as Joseph Wood Krutch points out in his life of Johnson, a "pietistic solution⁴." It was consciously intended as such by the author. No fault is here, however, but rather a shining virtue that this meaning can be recognized by believers in cults other than Christianity. As a parable, *Rasselas* would no more be directly concerned with dogmatic theology than would the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins; yet from a reading of both we may educe certain moral and religious principles in consonance with a certain religion. *Rasselas* does, moreover, contain a specifically Christian expression of faith. As I shall show in some detail, its religious, as distinct from its moral, conclusions are fideistic in tendency. Now other religions besides the Christian may or may not offer, among other answers, an answer analogous to that of fideism to the problem of Prince Rasselas. Fideism is, however, exclusively a Christian answer. As an embodiment of a fideistic bias, *Rasselas* is, therefore, a specifically Christian work.

This fiction, indeed, cannot be comprehended unless it be considered as not only a moral but also as, if secondarily, a religious work. *Rasselas* mirrors Johnson's religious temperament, which was of a contemplative cast. Like other contemplatives, Johnson did much work of an immediately practical nature and not religious in a narrowly homiletic or hortatory sense; thus he expressed his belief by performing good works, such as establishing the blind Miss Williams in his household. Yet Johnson did also consistently express his religion in its strict sense. Elton Trueblood in *Doctor Johnson's Prayers* finds Johnson's "faith in God expressed in the *Tour of the Hebrides*, in his *Letters*, his various groups of essays, in the memorabilia of his distinguished friends, and in Boswell's *Life*,

as well as in his specifically religious production, *Prayers and Meditations*⁵." As a man of letters, Johnson did not keep his religion hidden away in some secret corner of his being, but without making a display, gave unostentatious evidence of his convictions.

Even though Christianity is not mentioned by name in the novel, Johnson composed *Rasselas* with the Christian faith always in mind. He was working in a tradition that permitted him to perform this feat as a matter of course. In this respect, perhaps the most distinguished analogue to *Rasselas* in Fénelon's *Télémaque*, that edifying favorite of the Augustans, which remains a Christian work despite its pagan trappings. *Rasselas* is by no means a pagan work even in the nominal sense in which *Télémaque* is pre-Christian; set in some vaguely contemporary or immediately antecedent year of the Christian era, *Rasselas* overtly purports to be an exercise in theodicy. Were this exercise intended to prove the adequacy of theodicy, the novel would resolve itself as Christian at best in a negative sense. Such is not the case. Johnson deliberately set out to prove the inadequacy of natural religion and, therefore, by reason's default, the sole adequacy of tradition, authority, Revelation.

Rasselas undoubtedly has lost its appeal for many readers today because they no longer recognize the author's religious purpose, or if they do, they consider it as lip service paid to eighteenth-century convention. Writing of the "pietistic solution" to the problem set forth by the novel, which Johnson "makes a show of offering," Professor Krutch states that the tribute of formal profession paid by Johnson to orthodoxy constitutes only the "formal rather than the effective moral⁶." But Johnson was however troubled a Christian, a nonetheless sincerely believing Christian. When Nekayah says that to herself the choice of life is become less important and that she has, hereafter, to think only

on the choice of eternity, we may take at face value the author's obvious concurrence with this admission. In *Rasselas* the "formal," which is to say the consciously intended, anagogical meaning — to substitute a less weighted word for "moral" — is also the "effective" meaning; but it is effective only when the reader accepts its basic assumptions as viable. Those assumptions are Christian; when they cease to compel the reader, then he must reject the effectiveness of the solution based on them. He must refine, must select certain byproducts of the novel as effective, in order that it continue to exert its appeal for him. Johnson was writing in an assured religious and literary tradition, the substance of which, despite some differences, his public not only knew but approved. Two centuries later and in a far different milieu, a reader may reject the formal meaning of *Rasselas* as effective, but this subjective attitude surely does not affect that expressed in the work of art, unchanging, independent of revolutions in thought and taste.

The point of view that would deny the effectiveness but that cannot deny the formal reality of Johnson's pietistic solution to the problem posed by *Rasselas* — in short, the humanist attitude — Boswell anticipated in the *Life*. Writing of *Rasselas*, he stated, "To those who look no further than the present life, or who maintain that human nature has not fallen from the state in which it was created, the instruction of this sublime story will be of no avail. But they who think justly, and feel with strong sensibility, will listen with eagerness and admiration to its truth and wisdom." In Boswell's opinion, Johnson's meaning, by showing the unsatisfactory nature of things temporal, was to direct the hopes of man to things eternal. To support this interpretation, which from the declarative manner of his statement Boswell intended his readers to accept as the received opinion regarding *Rasselas*, he related an observation made to him by "a

very accomplished lady." *Rasselas*, she remarked, was a more enlarged and more deeply philosophical discourse in prose upon the "interesting truth" which in his *Vanity of Human Wishes* Johnson had so successfully enforced in verse⁷.

Boswell's accomplished acquaintance was, no doubt, referring to the last verse paragraph of the *Vanity of Human Wishes*. The parallel between these lines and the last chapters of *Rasselas* is a close one. In both novel and poem, at the decisive moment in his manipulation of ideas, Johnson tells us that human life is full of "vanity and vexation of spirit." Is man doomed to futility then? Where, the poet of the *Vanity of Human Wishes* asks rhetorically, "shall Hope and Fear their Objects find?" Must no cries of man "attempt the Mercies of the Skies?" He replies affirmatively: do not "deem Religion vain"; pray; trust God; He answers man's prayers in His own measure and at His own choice. To the faithful, then, death is "kind Nature's signal of Retreat" to a "happier Seat." We see that the poem revolves around the question of belief in a religious and, not so incidentally, an optimistic certitude concerning human destiny. The long catalog of anecdotes illustrating human vanity — the body of the *Vanity of Human Wishes* — is simply an excuse for Johnson's brief but triumphant presentation of his solution to the question. In *Rasselas*, too, the artfully varied scenes and dialogues are simply the excuse for the last three chapters, in which Johnson presents the same solution to the very question posed, in other words to be sure, in his adaptation of Juvenal. Of course, the poem is much less diffuse in expression than is the novel. Johnson's ideas in both are essentially the same, however. The main difference lies in the positiveness with which Johnson advocated his Christian solution in the poem, where he could speak directly to the reader, and his diffidence in proposing that solution in the novel, where he must

speak through his characters and abide by the circumstances of the action. Yet one religious attitude underlies both works.

The religious attitude expressed in *Rasselas*, like that in the *Vanity of Human Wishes*, is Christian. Superficially, that attitude seems "liberal," even deist, because it ignores dogma, even the central Christian tenet of the Incarnation. Actually, it is deeply conservative, appealing to "higher authority" for assurance of personal immortality, and in that general appeal subsuming a particular appeal to Christian doctrine for the assurance needed. Indeed, one may question Johnson's pietistic solution as the result of a too conservative bias, toward fideism rather than toward a broadly rational belief⁸. Fideism as it existed in the eighteenth century was the resort of Christians whose reasoned acceptance of their religion as a rational, coherent system had been made impossible by the work of the philosophers. Bacon had first excepted God from his speculations, and by Johnson's day, Hume had climaxed the trend by asserting the difference of opinion between an atheist and a theist to be only a verbal one. Discarding the arguments of reason, which apparently led inexorably to Hume's extreme scepticism, fideists relied on Revelation, tradition, and the authority of the Church to convince themselves that Christianity was what they wanted it to be, a living *fides*. Of course, not all Christ-

ians were fideists; neither were all fideists anti-rationalists to the total exclusion of reason, of a systematic philosophy. A fideist might conduct his mundane affairs on rigidly logical principles, while reserving religion as an area in which blind faith was the sole operative and efficacious power. The traditional and more orthodox Christian doctrine held, in contradistinction to fideism, that in religion faith and reason gave mutual support, that one never failed the other.

Rasselas is an excellent example of Johnson's fideistic tendency. It is a detailed and comprehensive denial of the ultimate efficacy of rationalism. Reason, or if you prefer, common sense, can lead us to the most pleasing mundane existence; reason can show us the difference between good and evil; reason can even show us the vanity of human wishes; but reason cannot show us how to achieve perfect happiness. Such happiness is to be achieved only by immortality, a state about which philosophy tells us little and of which it cannot assure us. That the soul "will not be annihilated by him that made it, we must humbly learn from higher authority." Thinking of Imlac's statement, the princess remarks that "To me . . . the choice of life is become less important; I have hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity." But, in Johnson's frame of reference, she apparently is still deluded when we leave her; for she dreams of

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becoming the head of a female seminary and of improving the worldly lot of women through disseminating knowledge, to her the best of all sublunary things. Pekuah we leave charmed with the idea of becoming a prioress, but one questions the seriousness of her attraction to religion. Previously, when Imlac had dilated on the congeniality of retreats of prayer and contemplation, Pekuah had said that she had often wanted to close her life in pious abstraction, with a few associates serious as herself, and that she had "heard the princess declare that she should not willingly die in a crowd."

These, surely, are the delusions of vanity, the delusions of people who cannot hold fast to true notions of religious life precisely because they cannot retain true notions of the natural life. Imlac has led his pupils up to the point at which if they are to go further, faith, intuition, must take over where reason fails. Instead, even when one of them enters the contemplative way of life, the seemingly religious way, she does so because she is deluded by excessive, unrestrained imagination. In none of the three young Abyssinians does faith operate. They have knowledge of the vanity of things, but rather than ascend to the level of faith, accepting higher authority and thereby achieving a positive, an optimistic solution to their problem, they content themselves with delusory schemes of happiness.

What of a positive nature, then, does Johnson have to say about religion? First, he shows us that in none of its variety

can the natural life assure earthly, much less unending, happiness. Secondly, he shows us that the approach to a solution must accord with right reason; he did not adopt the extreme argument of those fideists who asserted that religion and moral truths are given to man directly by Revelation. Philosophy, Johnson shows us by the example of Imlac, is efficacious — to a point. Third, he shows us that beyond this point we must accept the answers to our questions on faith; else we must gloomily reject these answers because we lack faith in the revelations of "higher authority." Philosophy cannot answer the question of man's destiny. Only religion, based ultimately not on rational proof but on faith in authority, can give the final answer. We may conclude that on the anagogical level of meaning, the most universal level of all five here discussed, *Rasselas* concerns the soul's search for union with God, or as Johnson calls Him with conscious irony directed at the rationalists, the Supreme Being.

1. See also Gwin J. Kolb, "The Structure of *Rasselas*," *PMLA*, LXVI, 698-717 (September, 1951). This essay treats some aspects of the moral level of meaning of *Rasselas*, but I have not seen fit to poach on Mr. Kolb's preserve.

2. Democritus Arise! A Study of Dr. Johnson's Humor," *Yale Review*, XXXIX, 310 (Winter, 1950).

3. Tracy, p. 308.

4. *Samuel Johnson*, New York, 1944, p. 182.

5. Elten Trueblood, ed., *Dr. Johnson's Prayers*, New York, 1947, p. xiv.

6. Krutch, p. 183.

7. *Life of Johnson*, New York, 1933, I, 227.

8. Portions of the following arguments are drawn from my essay, "Poetry and Belief," *Dublin Review*, CCXXVI, 35-53; pp. (First Quarter, 1952). pp. 44-45 are pertinent here.

Whitehead Read Afresh

W. T. COUCH

"UNDOUBTEDLY," SUZANNE LANGER observes in her *Philosophy in a New Key*, "one reason for the lack of language in apes is their lack of any tendency to babble." As I understand Miss Langer, she is saying, without a flicker, that if apes had the habit of babbling, sooner or later this habit would become linguistic; and in the fulness of time apes would begin writing books—and reviewing them. This proposition of Miss Langer's is not merely amusing in the suggestion it makes about certain human activities: it is a typical example, in a good book, of unintended miracle-mongering which can be found in many other modern writings.

Now I have been deeply interested in Alfred North Whitehead, particularly in his *Process and Reality*, because he alone among modern writers—so far as I have been able to discover—tries to expose the irrational nature of propositions of this kind. I limit my comments here to this aspect of Whitehead's thought, beginning with a few wandering questions directed at predecessors of Whitehead; and if what I say seems to you unintelligible, remember that what I say cannot possibly amount to less than the statement, "I babble, therefore I am."

I never have understood how Descartes was able to satisfy himself with his proposition that "I think, therefore I am." He might as well have said, "For many years, millions of them, I did not think, therefore I was not; now I think, and in

some way I am, but whether I am the same I from moment to moment in my life is a matter of grave doubt; and the time is coming when I may no longer think, therefore my thinking now proves nothing as to my real existence." How can I exist now and not exist at another time? And Descartes might have asked, "How can anything come into existence and then go out?" Descartes, as far as I have been able to discover, threw no light on this question.

Now, if you are an up-to-date semantist or a logician of the positive school, you may say this is a foolish question and only witless people, given to mere babbling, would ever ask it. If by any chance you should be one of those who thinks this way on questions of this kind, then, if we can agree on nothing else, I believe we ought at least to be able to agree that if we do not wish to classify ourselves as witless babblers we must not ignorantly make or accept statements that by implication cancel each other out.

The question whether something can come from nothing is, of course, of ancient lineage and has been answered in general in two ways: one in the formula *ex nihilo, nihil fit*—out of nothing, nothing is made; the other in the formula the world was created out of nothing. The first of these received its classic, if somewhat hazy expression, in Plato and Aristotle; the second, in Christian interpretation of Hebraic cosmology. But the idea