

“I refute it thus” leaves no doubt as to the measure of disagreement felt by Dr. Johnson at the dialectic of Bishop Berkeley’s immaterialism given in the Bishop’s sermon. The vivid gesture expressed in Johnson’s “stone kicking” episode does seem somewhat curious manner of expression for a person of his intellectual status.

Dr. Johnson’s kicking of the stone may have a much deeper meaning, symbolically, other than bluff common. The kicking of the stone, to be meaningful, not just bluff common, would need to encapsulate some elements of refutation for whole or part of immaterialism, as such.

My reasoning leads me to view Dr. Johnson’s manner of refutation, not just a bluff common kick, but a metaphysical action. The intellectual depth of Dr. Johnson persuades me to look for a more congruent way of him expressing his disagreement with the sermon.

Dr. Johnson demonstrated his own mind, independently from God’s mind. A court yard in which perceptions were translated into real objects that could be kicked. The object then affirming the qualities of action-reaction by remaining in place. An object, not only perceived, but also experienced as an object corresponding to reality.

The kick, as such, also demonstrated the existence of space in that the stone remained in the space it occupied before and after the kicking episode. It seemed by my reasoning that Dr. Johnson did in that moment of answering Boswell’s question, move from “passive observer” to “active agent of consciousness” in the state of deep frustration.

Dr. Johnson brief association with philosophy in his earlier years certainly does not qualify him as a metaphysician, however, this does not mean he was incapable of thinking at that level. His thoughts at the metaphysical level may well have been subliminal and brought to he surface by Boswell’s question surrounding contents of the sermon.

Perhaps Dr. Johnson, in kicking the stone, was demonstrating a metaphysical action, overcoming the dualism of subject and object, the “it” in his locution may well have been symbolized in the attempt at healing the antimony of immaterialism. It may well also have a metaphysical connection to Kant’s transcendental immaterialism by exposing “the thing in itself” the unknowable object.

For me, Dr. Johnson’s refutation was successful, and if that was not the case his attempt has encouraged me to delve more deeply into other possible thought processes represented by his gesture of disagreement.

I would like to see Dr. Johnson’s “refutation by kicking” as a spontaneous role change from “passive observer” to “active agent” crowned by a “metaphysical kick” rather than a bluff common one.