

# THE GREAT ADVANTAGE OF LATIN AND GREEK

*As posted on the Sententiae Antiquae blog*

## **From Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*:**

On Saturday, July 30, Dr. Johnson and I took a sculler at the Temple-stairs, and set out for Greenwich. I asked him if he really thought a knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages an essential requisite to a good education.

JOHNSON. 'Most certainly, Sir; for those who know them have a very great advantage over those who do not. Nay, Sir, it is wonderful what a difference learning makes upon people even in the common intercourse of life, which does not appear to be much connected with it.'

'And yet, (said I) people go through the world very well, and carry on the business of life to good advantage, without learning.'

JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, that may be true in cases where learning cannot possibly be of any use; for instance, this boy rows us as well without learning, as if he could sing



the song of Orpheus to the Argonauts, who were the first sailors.' He then called to the boy, 'What would you give, my lad, to know about the Argonauts?' 'Sir, (said the boy,) I would give what I have.' Johnson was much pleased with his answer, and we gave him a double fare.

Dr. Johnson then turning to me, 'Sir, (said he) a desire of knowledge is the natural feeling of mankind; and every human being, whose mind is not debauched, will be willing to give all that he has to get knowledge.'

*Sententiae Antiquae is something of a digital commonplace book, replicating all the delights and horrors of ancient authors like Aulus Gellius, Aelian, Macrobius and Philostratus. Find this post at <https://sententiaeantiquae.com/2016/10/16/the-great-advantage-of-latin-and-greek/>.*