

Joint Examiners' Report on the PhD thesis submitted by Fran O'Rourke

James Joyce, Aristotle and Aquinas

This excellent dissertation represents an important and signal contribution to Joyce studies in general and, in particular, to the study of the lasting and manifold influence of Aristotle and Aquinas on Joyce's thought and art. Engaging with the original writings of the two philosophers, the thesis closely addresses how Joyce adheres to, diverges from and adapts their ideas, attending to the particularities of Joyce's assimilation and deployment of these philosophers' ideas. It authoritatively offers the conclusion that the ideas of Aristotle and Aquinas are foundational within Joyce's own work.

A pleasure to read, this dissertation is worthy of being published, either as a whole (in monograph form) or as a series of articles. Some academic papers have already been published arising from this research.

The thesis shows an outstanding grasp of the philosophical texts it treats, and reveals a deep engagement with Joyce's works and with the large secondary literature about them. The thesis also makes the ideas of these two philosophers available in a clear and comprehensive way to readers who do not have a formal background in philosophy. Written in fluent, well-judged critical prose which displays commendable clarity and style, the thesis is of appropriate length to the discipline of English and Philosophy studies and is presented in a professional manner with minimal presentation errors.

The first two chapters offer a careful and comprehensive historical contextualization of Joyce's knowledge of Aristotle and Aquinas, respectively. Here O'Rourke explores Joyce's education, both formal and informal, concentrating on his opportunities for gaining acquaintance with Aristotelian and Thomist ideas. O'Rourke uses many original sources: through his thorough-going detective work on Joyce's sources in Ireland, France and the library of Pola, this thesis offers a rich engagement with little-known aspects of Joyce's material legacy. A particularly impressive case is made here for the importance of the *Manuals of Catholic Philosophy* used in UCD during Joyce's time as an undergraduate. These two chapters together make an illuminating argument for the Catholic religious underpinning of Joyce's education as one imbued with Aristotelian principles.

Chapters 3-5 trace the presence of three key Aristotelian and Thomist philosophical concerns in Joyce's output. These chapters are devoted, respectively, to perception and reality (attending to the realism-idealism debate); identity over time and personhood; and the idea of the cosmos as an interconnected whole. In each instance, the discussions shed considerable light on the philosophical resonances of parts of Joyce's works. These chapters allow readers with more limited knowledge of the history of philosophy to recognize clearly the ways in which various sentences, paragraphs, and sections of *A Portrait*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake* connect to specific theses of specific thinkers. Chapter 4, for example, starts from the problem of personal identity over time and provides a clear exposition of Aristotle's metaphysical account of the person; it contains excellent discussions of how Aristotelian and Thomistic accounts of the soul and of substance intertwine with Catholic theological doctrines, and how they underlie discussions in all three of Joyce's novels. Chapter 5 (a highlight of the thesis) makes an original and compelling case for Joyce's debt to Aristotle in emphasizing the synthetic, systematic character of both writers' thinking. Like Aristotle,

Joyce emerges as an extraordinary taxonomist (or, to use the biological term, 'systematist'), in this illuminating argument which posits that the vast organization at which Aristotle's works collectively aimed, is mirrored in Joyce's subtly detailed and unified organization of the phenomena of human life - particularly in his last two works which construct an immense web of connections and relationships. This chapter alone would make an immediate important contribution to scholarly work on Joyce.

Chapter 6 examines Joyce's use of Aquinas in constructing an aesthetic theory, offering an excellent account of the relation between Stephen's pronouncements and Thomistic texts (and authoritatively scotching the proposal of Hegel as the source of Joyce's aesthetics). Chapter 7 offers a very useful list of the citations found in Joyce's Pola notebook, together with helpful remarks on the textual sources in each case, and even more valuable comments on connections to Joycean texts.

Fran O'Rourke demonstrates comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the background to this research topic. In its adept handling of other critics, his thesis corrects many enduring misapprehensions within Joyce studies about Joyce's use of Aristotle and Aquinas. More importantly, it provides a new, stable ground for further analyses. The readings throughout are meticulous and deftly move from fine-grained close reading to perspicacious, large scale analysis. O'Rourke is thoroughly well-versed in the history of philosophy and grounds his readings cleanly, precisely and systematically. His skills as a translator of Latin (and his juxtaposition of Greek originals alongside these where relevant), further consolidate the thesis's solid underpinning.

The candidate, Fran O'Rourke, performed very well during the viva examination, during which a productive, extended discussion of his thesis was held. In response to questioning, Fran demonstrated thorough command over his topic and argument. He explained and defended his work with precision and intellectual maturity, while remaining open to suggestion as to the development of his work for future dissemination. For example, Fran engaged very well with debate on the manner in which Joyce makes original and often playful use of philosophy as his oeuvre develops and as this author modifies over time his understanding of the role of philosophy in his fiction, especially with reference to the shifting relationship between what Joyce's characters say and what the author himself thinks.

In conclusion, this is an excellent thesis – scholarly, detailed and authoritative in its conclusions, it makes an original and substantial contribution to knowledge. In published form it promises to become a foundational critical text for new developments in Joyce studies, and to become a model of good practice in the broader study of the influence of philosophy within literature. The viva voce examination committee recommends this thesis without hesitation for the award of the degree of PhD without substantial changes, once minor typographical errors have been corrected.

Required corrections:

- p. 64: "mental activity": 2 spaces between the words.
- Other minor typographical errors are marked for correction in the internal examiner's copy of the thesis, which was lent to the candidate after the viva.

REPORT ON "JAMES JOYCE, ARISTOTLE AND AQUINAS"

Ph.D. thesis by Fran O'Rourke

Philip Kitcher

This strikes me as an excellent thesis, acceptable as it stands, and worthy of being published, either as a whole (in monograph form) or as a series of articles. As might be expected, it shows an outstanding grasp of the philosophical texts. It also reveals a deep engagement with Joyce's works, and the large secondary literature about them.

The aim of the thesis is to expose the extent of Joyce's debts to Aristotle and Aquinas. A corollary is to downplay the influence of other philosophers, although (sensibly) OR appreciates the role of Vico and Bruno in *Finnegans Wake*. OR is particularly concerned to undermine the idea of a strong connection between Hegel and Joyce (presumably mediated by the British Hegelians of the late nineteenth century.)

The first two chapters explore Joyce's education, concentrating on his opportunities for gaining acquaintance with Aristotelian and Thomist ideas, respectively. They contain much helpful material about the ways in which the young Joyce might have been able to start engaging with the ideas of these thinkers, even without any formal classes devoted to them. OR does a good job at exploring various contexts for reading and discussion, and I was particularly impressed with his case for the importance of the *Manuals of Catholic Philosophy*. With respect to these chapters, however, I have two small reservations, which I'll develop later in this report. First, I wish OR had emphasized the difficulty of the ideas from Aristotle and Aquinas with which the young Joyce was wrestling. OR's own career as a philosopher, and as a teacher of philosophy must have brought home to him how hard it is – and how long it takes – for students, even when they go on to professional philosophical careers, to grasp even the most elementary features of Aristotelian and Thomistic metaphysics and epistemology. Second, these chapters are pervaded by an identification of what Joyce's characters *say* (particularly with what Stephen Dedalus says) and what the author himself thinks. So OR extrapolates Joyce's philosophical stance on a question from that taken by a character (usually Stephen.)

I am full of admiration for the discussions of Chapters 3-5. They are devoted, respectively, to perception and reality, identity over time and personhood, and the idea of the cosmos as an interconnected whole. In each instance, the discussions shed considerable light on the philosophical resonances of parts of Joyce's works. Readers with a far more limited knowledge of the history of philosophy than that possessed by OR will be enabled to recognize more clearly the ways in which various sentences, paragraphs, and sections of *A Portrait*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake* connect to specific theses of specific thinkers. OR's Chapter 3 is, I think, slightly mistitled – the focus isn't on knowledge in general, but with the perception of the external world, and with the realism-idealism debate. OR correctly views the *Proteus* section of *Ulysses* as Stephen's reflections on the clash between Aristotelian realism and Berkeleyan idealism. In this context, he might have made a little more use of Berkeley's *New Theory of Vision*, and it might have been useful to emphasize a kinship between Aristotle and Berkeley: both have *direct* theories of perception. Both are at odds with the Cartesian-Lockean view of perception as relating us to immediate mental entities ("ideas") from which the existence of external objects must be somehow inferred.

Berkeley (officially) views himself as restoring common sense realism, but identifying the object as a “congeries” of ideas.

Chapter 4 starts from the problem of personal identity over time. OR provides an exposition of Aristotle’s metaphysical account of the person, showing clearly how Aristotle’s framework is supposed to solve the problem. The chapter also contains excellent discussions of how Aristotelian and Thomistic accounts of the soul and of substance intertwine with Catholic theological doctrines, and how they underlie discussions in all three of Joyce’s novels. My one suggestion for this chapter would be to recognize how there are two separate questions about identity (or perhaps two different aspects of a single problem). The one explicitly posed concerns what it is that makes a person the same person across time. But several of the passages OR cites seem more concerned with the issue of identity in figuring out who one is – the question reflective people pose to themselves when they wonder what is at the center of their lives. It would have been good to explore the connections between these two investigations.

In many ways, Chapter 5 is the most original, and most illuminating, discussion in the entire thesis. It makes a compelling case for Joyce’s debt to Aristotle in emphasizing the synthetic, systematic, character of both writers’ thinking. The characterization of Aristotle in the “Night Lessons” chapter of the *Wake* – “A Place for Everything and Everything in its Place” – provides OR with his key. As he recognizes, the enormous achievements of Joyce’s last two novels include a remarkable ability to construct a web of connections and relationships. Like Aristotle, Joyce emerges as an extraordinary taxonomist (or, to use the biological term, ‘systematist’). The vast organization at which Aristotle’s works collectively aimed is mirrored in Joyce’s subtly detailed and unified organization of the phenomena of human life. If nothing else from this thesis is published, this is a chapter that would make an important contribution to scholarly work on Joyce.

Chapter 6 pursues a question that has occupied many commentators. The starting point is the identification of Joyce’s aesthetic theory with the views expressed by Stephen Dedalus (both in *A Portrait* and in *Stephen Hero*.) The task is then to articulate these views and to trace their sources. OR succeeds in two respects. First, he scotches the proposal of Hegel as the source of Joyce’s aesthetics. Second, he offers the best account I’ve seen of the relation between Stephen’s pronouncements and Thomistic texts. But, as I’ll suggest below, the question seems fundamentally misguided. For just one cause for doubt, it might be worth noting that, given the account of Joyce’s Aristotelianism so powerfully developed in Chapter 5, Joyce’s aesthetics, *as manifested in his major works*, would appear very different from the views expressed by Stephen.

Chapter 7, sometimes referred to as an “Appendix,” offers a list of the citations found in Joyce’s Pola notebook, together with helpful remarks on the textual sources, and even more valuable comments on connections to Joycean texts. Given its merits, ‘Chapter’ is a better title than ‘Appendix.’

Chapter 8 provides a pithy conclusion. In summing up what he has done in the preceding chapters, OR offers three further comments that made me want to cheer. He notes Joyce’s interest in “basic problems” (*philosophical* problems.) He points out that Joyce’s “philosophical disposition remained largely undeveloped.” And he suggests that development of “the philosophical habits of reasoning and analysis” would have enabled Joyce to probe more deeply the problems that interested him. In working further on Joyce and philosophy, I think OR ought to take these – correct – judgments more seriously than he has done so far.

Here's an alternative picture of Joyce and philosophy from the one OR presents in many of his discussions. Joyce was a brilliant student, attracted to philosophical works, and particularly fascinated by Aristotle and Aquinas. He became a *philosophotaster*. Never acquiring the skills for patiently working through philosophical texts, he was often inspired by scraps of philosophical writing. Early in his career, he might have wanted to articulate an answer to a philosophical question. The evenings in the library in Paris might have been devoted to that; the Pola notebook might have been written with that in mind. Perhaps that project continued into *Stephen Hero*; it may even be a large part of the reason why the surviving manuscript pages are so dull, and why Joyce tried to destroy it. But, by the time of *A Portrait*, he had modified his understanding of the role of philosophy in his fiction.

Joyce was intelligent and insightful enough to know his limits. When Stephen announces his aesthetic theory in *A Portrait* V, he's pursuing a project, Joyce had once assigned himself. But the author of *A Portrait* understands very well that that's not something he's qualified to do or even particularly wants to do. Stephen boasts that he, unlike Aristotle, can define 'pity' and 'terror.' Should we take the boast seriously? I think not. Joyce was astute enough to see that Stephen's proposed definitions don't take anyone very far – they are (at best) only the beginning of philosophical reflection. The entire performance is intended to show us Stephen, to display his tremendous talent and simultaneously his shortcomings. We're not given an aesthetic theory. Rather we're offered the portrait of a young man with intellectual gifts and intellectual pretensions, simultaneously appreciative and critical. Anyone who thinks the aesthetic theory is serious philosophy (or intended as such) should take a similar view of Stephen's villanelle. And we don't need a critical literature devoted to the brilliance and subtlety of "Joyce's poem."

The mix of precocious brilliance and callow misunderstanding is apparent in one of Stephen's Aristotelian formulations that OR cites (83): "Horseness is the whatness of allhorse." OR correctly sees this as an expression of an Aristotelian approach to the problem of universals (though the parent discipline is ontology not epistemology), and that it's "peculiar" (83). I'd say that it shows quirky talent – how a creative artist might play with a dry bit of metaphysics. Now bring in OR's observation of Joyce's undeveloped skills in reason and analysis. A philosopher is going to worry about the apparent definition. There's nothing special about horses here – the concern is with terms for universals: substances of the form "...-ness". But notice: one of those terms figures in the *definiens*. What are we to make of "whatness"? Should Stephen go on to say "Whatness is the whatness of allwhat"? Unhelpful. Or should he amend the original formulation: "Horseness if the what of allhorse"?

In *Scylla and Charybdis*, Stephen is performing (again). In *Proteus*, he is playing. Bits and scraps of philosophy are props for the exercises. *No serious philosophy gets done here*. Rather, in the spirit of Joyce's search for system (as OR so convincingly explains it in Chapter 5), philosophy as a human enterprise gets connected with parts of human life.

As it stands, OR's thesis is dominated by the idea that, when philosophical references occur in Joyce's works, philosophy is being presented and (maybe) philosophy is being done. I disagree. Joyce can find lots of uses for all kinds of human activities, including philosophy. Sometimes they are matters of pure amusement, good jokes; witness the philosophers' names in the "Ondt and Gracehoper." Sometimes they are ways of sharpening a characterization. Stephen on Sandymount strand is the same hyper-intelligent, bookish, figure we left at the end of *A Portrait*, now beset with a consciousness of failure and gnawing at himself about the circumstances of his mother's death. In *Proteus*, he pretentiously theorizes perception, half-astutely, half-naively. And

his own perceptions are cloudy at best. It makes a lovely contrast with the unlearned Bloom of the next chapter, bereft of theory but exquisitely sensitive to the sensory qualities of his environment. (The scent of the kidneys, the gelid air, the humpy tray – and, successively, ever more detail in the cat’s mewling.)

OR’s conclusion recognizes a question that should be on his mind as he rewrites for publication. Joyce wasn’t in the business of arguing a philosophical case or unsheathing “dagger definitions.” His works have philosophical significance through their ability to draw facets of life together, to emulate Aristotelian systematicity. In the process, he uses philosophical texts and philosophical figures in lots of different ways. It’s always worth asking: What exactly is he *doing* with (or to?) philosophy here?

But I end as I began. This is an excellent thesis. It should be accepted without asking for substantial changes. (Perhaps OR should be given comments, and simply asked to amend as he sees fit.)

External examiner report: Fran O'Rourke, *James Joyce, Aristotle and Aquinas***Examiner: Sam Slote**

This is an impressive dissertation and a pleasure to read. It represents an important and signal contribution to Joyce studies in general and, in particular, to the study of the lasting and manifold influence of Aristotle and Aquinas to Joyce's thought and art. This work corrects many enduring misapprehensions within Joyce studies about Joyce's use of Aristotle and Aquinas, but, more importantly, it provides a new, stable ground for further analyses. The readings throughout are meticulous and deftly move from fine-grained close reading to perspicacious, large scale analysis. As would be expected O'Rourke is thoroughly well-versed in the history of philosophy and grounds his readings cleanly, precisely and systematically. I have no hesitations in recommending that this pass without revisions (although there are a handful of small, but not insignificant infelicities I would like to see cleaned up; I will note these at the end of this report); and, furthermore, I hope that this will soon be converted into a monograph (although I note that portions of this dissertation have been published, in an earlier form, in *Allwisest Stagyrte*). For publication as a monograph, I would suggest expanding the introduction.

There is much that is strong in the dissertation, in particular the careful historical contextualisation of Joyce's philosophical background. Chapters 4 and 5 are very strong and rich. Chapter 6 – on Aquinas – is perhaps less original but still very thorough. I will focus for the remainder of this report on some points of contention.

There is a tension throughout the dissertation regarding the character of Joyce's engagement with Aristotle and Aquinas. On the one hand, O'Rourke seriously considers Joyce as a philosophical disciple of Aristotle, engaged with and committed to his thought and remaking and remodelling it in the service of his art. On the other hand, O'Rourke adeptly points out the areas where Joyce's understanding and use of Aristotle is deficient and perhaps even (at least on occasion) superficial; for example, the fact that Joyce's mélange of Aristotle and Berkeley in

‘Proteus’ is done ‘rather unsuccessfully’ (p. 78) is not without relevance to the larger scope of the dissertation. For my part, I would say this latter, critical part of the dissertation is one of its most important strengths and contributions. However, I don’t see that this tension between Joyce the philosopher’s disciple and Joyce the philosophical amateur is ever directly addressed within the dissertation.

The line Stephen uses in ‘Circe’ when confronting the ghost of his mother, might provide a way to approach this tension: the ‘intellectual imagination’ (15.4227); which follows from Matthew Arnold’s phrase ‘imaginative reason’, a post-Romanticist synthesis of reason with imagination and fancy and perhaps even whimsy. Stephen’s mode of argumentation in ‘Scylla’ might be taken as a good example here, not limited to mere mockery in the manner of Mulligan, he yokes together disparate threads, some serious, some (seemingly) trivial in the service of an idiosyncratic argument. O’Rourke touches on this seriously playful style in chapter 5 with the idea of Joyce using both rigorous Aristotelian analogy and free association, but this could be developed further. Indeed, chapter 5 is in many ways the highlight of the dissertation, but perhaps this part of the argument could be extended further: to more argue for the ways in which Joyce is a systematiser in order to all the more precisely show the imaginative uses of such systemisation.

The final section of chapter 5 contains an error with the statement that the ‘love’ passages in ‘Scylla’ is ‘an emendation unanimously accepted as the most important on the critical edition’ (p. 150). While it might be fair to say that it is unanimously accepted that this is the most significant or consequential emendation Gabler makes, the emendation itself is *very far* from unanimously accepted (especially by textual scholars and geneticists). Indeed, the issue discussed here becomes more interesting and more complex when one acknowledges that the textual status of this passage is ambiguous – whether or not one accepts the emendation as such. Furthermore, the discussion of the passage for *Summa Contra Gentiles* in this passage does not refer to Jean Kimball’s article ‘Love in the Kidd Era: An Afterword’ (some of her other articles are cited, but

not this one), which advances a similar argument about Joyce's modification of this passage from Aquinas.

In chapter three, the reading of the first paragraph in 'Proteus' is very strong, but perhaps Joyce's complex use of Aristotle and other writers could itself be considered as an instance of Joycean 'expressive form'. That is, in that opening paragraph Stephen is contemplating the nature of perception and apprehension; by presenting his reflections in an opaque manner Joyce is leading the reader into contemplating their own act of apprehension.

Small issues for correction

- Constantine Curran's name is inconsistently rendered throughout (Con; Constantine; C. P.)
- p. 41: the statement that there is not a single mention of Hegel in all of Joyce's works is wrong: Hegel is mentioned in *Finnegans Wake*, albeit not in a way that suggests either great familiarity or love: 'hegelstomes' (415.33)
- p. 64: mental activity: 2 spaces between the words
- p. 81 The correct citation reference is *U* 3.414–20, not 2.414–20
- p. 120 contrasmagnificandjewbangtentiality is not Joyce's invented word. It is one of many variants of a popular American tongue-twister that dates from at least the 1830s, 'Transmagnificandubandantiality' (see John Simpson, *James Joyce Online Notes*).
- p. 150: see above