

# Knowledge and Identity in Joyce

*Fran O'Rourke*

Questions of knowledge and identity were of constant concern to James Joyce. He was an elementally philosophical author with a keen sense for primordial questions. It is significant that the philosophical themes recurring throughout his work are those which first emerged in early Greek philosophy: diversity and unity, identity, permanence and change, the nature and reliability of knowledge. Joyce was challenged by such questions as they arose in modern philosophy regarding the identity both of that which we know, and of ourselves as knowers. In so far as he may be said to have found a satisfactory answer, he did so, I suggest, in his reading of Aristotle. To be fully appreciated, however, Joyce's concerns must be viewed within the context of modern philosophy, which questioned the stable existence both of the world and the knower, and also against the ancient background of these questions in their inchoate articulation.

A number of fundamental assumptions distinguish modern philosophy from the classical tradition. The central concern for modern philosophy was not the nature of reality, but whether we can know anything with certainty. The modern question centres primarily, not upon the nature of the world itself, but upon our human powers of cognition; unsurprisingly,

---

F. O'Rourke (✉)  
University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland

this preoccupation leads in turn to expressions of self-doubt. A. N. Whitehead remarked: "The ancient world takes its stand upon the drama of the Universe, the modern world upon the inward drama of the Soul" (Whitehead 174). Seeking the unshaken foundation of truth, the *fundamentum inconcussum* of his entire system, in the subjective experience of the *cogito*, Descartes not only placed knowledge of the independent world in doubt, but sowed the seeds for the demise of the self as autonomous substance. For Descartes consciousness is a closed world, limited to internal ideas or representations: we can know only what is *in* the mind. This assumption was adopted unquestioningly by the British empiricists and Kant. What I know directly are not things themselves, but impressions or ideas of things. The direct realism of traditional philosophy gave way to an indirect realism, a position shared equally by Continental idealism and British empiricism. In the words of John Locke, "the mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, hath no other immediate object but its own ideas, which it alone does or can contemplate" (Locke 525).<sup>1</sup> If all we know are the contents of our mind, what grounds have we to affirm the reality of an independent world? The logical conclusion, drawn by the Irishman George Berkeley, was that reality itself consists of nothing but perceptions.

Yet another consequence derived from the primacy of the *cogito*: in his obsession with clear and distinct ideas Descartes identified the soul with conscious activity, defining the self as *res cogitans*, a thinking thing. From the Aristotelian standpoint this was to equate substance with one of its accidental or secondary modes, separating activity from its underlying, abiding, and enduring agent. Moreover, by identifying the body as *res extensa*, Descartes introduced an insoluble dualism into human nature. The traditional notion of individual substance was rejected, the substantial metaphysical unity of the person abandoned, the self dissipated and dispersed. The English empiricist John Locke confirmed the demise of the self when he discarded the notion of substance as the supposed but unknown support of qualities that cause our simple ideas.

<sup>1</sup> Common to the idealist and empiricist views of knowledge is the recognition—itself a truism—that what is known must somehow be "in" the mind or consciousness. Descartes, Locke, and Hume failed, however, to recognize the analogical use of the preposition in the context of cognition: whereas a physical object can only be in a single location, the object of knowledge—while enjoying an independent autonomous existence—is also, as known, somehow mysteriously present within the mind. In this sense Joyce could remark to his brother Stanislaus: "What can a man know but what passes inside his own head?" (*JII* 265).

David Hume inherited Descartes' obsession with clarity and distinction. He adopted Locke's criterion that an idea must be "clear and intelligible" (Hume 251). And since there is no clear and intelligible idea of the self, there is no such reality. In a famous passage from his *Treatise of Human Nature* David Hume drew the logical consequence of Descartes' equation of the ego with thought. The personal, individual, substantial self disappears:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. (Hume 252)

According to Hume, the self is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an incomparable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (Hume 252). Hume's theory became known as the "bundle theory" of the self, a theory that has since remained popular. The notion of self is inseparable from that of soul—another idea which likewise went into decline, notably at the start of the twentieth century. In a lecture at Oxford in 1908 William James declared: "[s]ouls are out of fashion" (McDougall xii). James was commenting on the increased popularity of materialist interpretations of man and the decline of religion in the West. Qualifying Virginia Woolf's provocative claim that "on or about December 1910 human character changed" (Woolf 421), Richard Rorty has suggested that "the big change in the outlook of intellectuals—as opposed to a change in human nature—that happened around 1910 was that they began to be confident that human beings had only bodies, and no souls" (Rorty 168). This was the climate against which Joyce was forming his intellectual outlook, often in reaction to the dominant influences around him.

It is most significant that "soul" is one of the words most frequently used by Joyce, occurring twenty times in *Dubliners*, thirty-five in *Stephen Hero*, 204 in *Portrait*, 106 in *Ulysses*, fourteen in *Exiles*, and thirty-four in *Finnegans Wake*, a total of over 400. In *Portrait* in particular, when speaking of himself, Stephen repeatedly does so by referring to his soul. For Stephen the soul is what essentially constitutes the self. Notwithstanding Aquinas' important statement: "*Anima mea non est ego*" ("My soul is not I"), this is consonant with the declaration in Aristotle's *De Anima*: "It is

the soul by which we primarily live, perceive, and think" (Aristotle 414a12–14).<sup>2</sup>

In his library in Trieste Joyce had a copy of *Psychology: Empirical and Rational* by Michael Maher, S.J., published in the series "Catholic Manuals of Philosophy" (Maher was the nephew of Fr Delaney, Jesuit President of University College Dublin during Joyce's student days, referred to in *Stephen Hero* as Fr Dillon). Emphasizing the unity of soul and body as one person, Maher explains the different connotations of the related terms "substance," "person," "nature," and "essence," which he states "points to the reality of which the being is constituted" (Maher 559, n. 9). Joyce drew a line in pencil from the word "reality" to the phrase "acting total-ity" which he wrote in the margin (Brivic 1985, 6). Maher offers an exhaustive account of "the Aristotelico-Scholastic doctrine" of soul and body, stating: "[t]he most satisfactory theory is the old Peripatetic doctrine. This explanation was formulated by Aristotle, and later on adopted by St. Thomas and all the leading Scholastic philosophers. The soul is described by these writers as the *substantial form* of the living being" (Maher 555). This is the concept of soul that is repeatedly articulated by Stephen Dedalus.

The enigma of the soul is its elusive nature; St Augustine likened it to an abyss that cannot be fathomed or comprehended. The early Greek thinker Heraclitus declared: "[y]ou could not in your going find the ends of the soul, though you travelled the whole way, so deep is its *Logos*" (Frg. 45). It was of course Heraclitus who gave classic expression to the unsettling theory that nothing whatsoever is permanent, but that all is flux. This is a common motif pondered throughout Joyce's work. Reality resembles a stream that never remains the same. Precisely the opposite was asserted by Parmenides, who rejected all change as involving the contradiction that, in order to change, being must become other; and since the only alternative to being is non-being, if something were to change, logically it must cease to be. It was to reconcile these opposites that Aristotle developed his metaphysics: particularly his distinction of act and potency, and it is in his formulation of these concepts that we can best understand the context of Joyce's philosophical concerns. Hugh Kenner has suggested that "[t]he sharpest exegetical instrument we can bring to the work of Joyce is Aristotle's great conception of potency and act. His awareness of it helps distinguish Joyce from every other writer who has used the

<sup>2</sup>For a comprehensive account, see *De Anima* II, 4, 415a14–415b28.

conventions of naturalist fiction” (Kenner 107). A brief explanation of Aristotle’s distinction between act and potency will therefore be helpful.

The central philosophical question facing Aristotle was to explain, on the one hand (against Parmenides), how reality could involve change without thereby incurring contradiction; and, on the other hand (against Plato, who took too seriously Heraclitus’s view of physical nature in perpetual flux), how it is possible to attain stable knowledge concerning changing realities. Aristotle’s greatest merit was to discern that “being is said in many ways.” He recognized the distinction between what things are and what they can be and formulated the distinction between actual and potential being. Being in the primary sense is actuality. Potency only makes sense in light of its possible actualization. Aristotle defines change or movement as “the act of the potential as potential”; this can only be effected through the agency of a cause which is itself actual. Joyce copied this definition into his notebook in Paris in 1903: “Movement is the actuality of the possible as possible” (O’Rourke 40).<sup>3</sup> He repeatedly uses this phrase; readers are acquainted with its importance in “Nestor.” Joyce is in fact quoting a mistranslation, a most significant, but a fortunate one. He was using the translation of Jules Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire, described by Jules Tricot (whose translation was published in 1940), as a “traduction très défectueuse” (Tricot x). Aristotle defines motion or change as the actuality, or actualization, not of the “*possible as the possible*”, but of the “*potential as potential*”. The correct word in French would be “*potentialité*” or “*puissance*.” The phrase “actuality of the potential as the potential,” it must be said, does not have the same flowing cadence, and would not have had the same appeal for Joyce: the error is *bien trouvée*.

Aristotle distinguished between two related meanings of actuality. There is firstly the word “*energeia*” (whence our word “energy”), which connotes that something is active, or literally “at work.” He also coined the term “*entelecheia*” to denote the fully actualized perfection of something having attained perfection or completion. (The Greek word “*enteleēs*” is derived from the word “*telos*,” i.e. goal or end, and means “complete” or “full”). In this sense “entelechy” also denotes the actuality of an individual in so far as it is fundamentally determined as a definite kind of substance; another word for this is essence or “form” (Greek *eidos*). Unfortunately our word “form” suggests something external or

<sup>3</sup>The Paris notebook can be read online from the National Library of Ireland website ([catalogue.nli.ie](http://catalogue.nli.ie)): MS 36,639/2/A (“The Joyce Papers 2002”).

superficial, “outline,” or “shape”; but for Aristotle *eidos* is the deepest intrinsic principle which determines the very essence of things. It is the basic perfection or actualization of an individual as itself—its first determination. The most significant instance of form for Aristotle is the soul, which he defines as “the first actuality (*entelechy*) of a natural body with organs” (Aristotle 412b5–6). The body is endowed with a variety of distinct organs, i.e. tools or instruments (hands, legs, kidney, heart, eyes, etc.), but in order to function as an individual, these must first be constituted together as a unity: this precisely is the work of the soul. Aristotle provides the radical explanation for the unity of the body when he defines the soul as the “first actuality of a natural body which potentially possesses life” (Aristotle 412a31–2). The soul gives to the body actual existence, unity, and life. It is fundamental for Aristotle that the soul unifies all vital activities of the human individual: vegetal, sensitive, and intellectual.

“The soul is the first entelechy of a naturally organic body” (O’Rourke 7). This was the first quotation noted by Joyce in his notebook in February 1903, as he read Aristotle in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris. The definition was to become crucial for his formulation of personal identity in *Ulysses*. Aristotle made use of other related concepts in his psychology to explain knowledge and Joyce adopted many of these into his vocabulary. Among the phrases that he copied from Aristotle’s *De Anima* the following are relevant to our topic:

- “A sense receives the form without the matter.”
- “The sensation of particular things is always true.”
- “The intellect conceives the forms of the images presented to it.”
- “The intellectual soul is the form of forms.”
- “The soul is in a manner all that is.” (O’Rourke 15, 16, 23, 24)

In his treatise on the soul Aristotle states that while a sense faculty assimilates the sensible form of a material body, it is confined to one object. Intellect is not so restricted, since it can receive immaterially the forms of all things. That is what is meant by the phrase cited by Joyce: “The intellectual soul is the form of forms” (Aristotle 432a2). It has unrestricted cognitive openness towards the entirety of reality, with the capacity to grasp intellectually the essence or form of every substance which it encounters. This is stated in another phrase of *De Anima* that Joyce entered in his *cahier*: “Summing up what we have said about the soul, let us assert once

more that the soul is in a manner all that is" (Aristotle 431b20–21). It is impossible to exaggerate the importance for Joyce of the Aristotelian concepts of form, actuality and potency/possibility, and their application to the soul. In the metaphysical context the soul is defined as the "entelechy," first form or actualization of the body, which constitutes the human individual as a real single entity; epistemologically it is the "form of forms," allowing the individual to know all reality. I will return to these concepts as they relate to the identity of what is known, and of the person who knows.

First, however, I wish to draw attention to the pervasive importance of questions of knowledge in Joyce's writings. The nature and modalities of cognition are thematized in the opening pages of both *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, as well as the final pages of *Finnegans Wake*. It is worth referring to these passages to appreciate the scope and importance of the theme of knowledge for Joyce.

In *A Portrait*, the child's awakening to the world is specified according to the different senses through which it first perceives its surroundings. One of the questions raised by Aristotle in his treatise *On the Soul* was that of the unity among the diverse senses; he solved it by affirming the existence of an internal common sense. Other internal senses—also relevant for Joyce—are memory and imagination. We may observe in passing that Stephen, in his practice of spiritual self-mortification, systematically disciplines each of the five senses (*P* 150–1). It is also worth noting that in the famous sermon in *A Portrait* the preacher states that the internal faculties are more perfect than the external, and therefore more susceptible to greater torment (*P* 130).

Dilemmas of knowledge and identity are centre stage in the opening paragraphs of *Ulysses*. The contrast between Stephen and Buck Mulligan is evident from the outset: Mulligan is the crass empiricist for whom life is a beastly affair, Stephen Dedalus the reflective, realist, introspective and sensitive Aristotelian. Mulligan intones: "For this, O dearly beloved, is the genuine christine: body and soul and blood and ouns. Slow music, please. Shut your eyes, gents. One moment. A little trouble about those white corpuscles. Silence, all" (*U* 1.21–3). In this parody of the Mass Mulligan mocks the transubstantiation of bread into the body of Christ (*corpus Christi*). The mockery also alludes to the theory of corpuscles which was central to the empiricist theory of John Locke. According to Locke, natural bodies are composed of particles which give to bodies the primary qualities of solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number, which

are retained even after repeated division. These primary qualities also cause our simple ideas (Locke 9–10).

The theory of corpuscles had been proposed by Robert Boyle, Irish scientist and friend of John Locke.<sup>4</sup> In his address, “Of the Origins of Forms and Qualities,” to the Royal Society in 1665, he declared: “There are in the world great store of particles of matter, each of which is too small to be, whilst single, sensible, and being entire or undivided, must needs both have its determinate shape and be very solid” (Boyle 41). With this theory, Boyle was praised by the German theologian Henry Oldenburg for having “driven out yt Divell of Substantiall Forms ... that has stopt ye progres of true Philosophy, and made the best of Schollars not more knowing as to ye nature of particular bodies than the meanest ploughman” (Oldenburg 61, 67). This was another major challenge to the dominant role of Aristotelian *eidos* or form which had occupied a central place in the worldview of the medieval period and beyond.

Locke’s theory of enclosed consciousness and indirect realism is played out when Mulligan plays down his insult to Stephen: “What? Where? I can’t remember anything. I remember only ideas and sensations. Why? What happened in the name of God?” (*U* 1.192–3). Stephen’s direct memory of the actuality of the experience by contrast is still raw: “I am not thinking of the offence to my mother./—Of what then? Buck Mulligan asked./—Of the offence to me, Stephen answered” (*U* 1.218–20). The response is cruel: “—O, an impossible person!” (*U* 1.222). Mulligan typifies the vivisectionist mentality which typifies the modern age.<sup>5</sup> “To me it’s all a mockery and beastly. Her cerebral lobes are not functioning” (*U* 1.210–1). The death of his mother affects Stephen profoundly and personally. For Mulligan it is a physiological event that happens to everyone, a “beastly” event devoid of personal import. The question of identity, personal life and personal death, is close to the surface: “—And what is death, he asked, your mother’s or yours or my own? You saw only your mother die. I see them pop off every day in the Mater and Richmond and cut up into tripes in the dissectingroom. It’s a beastly thing and nothing else. It simply doesn’t matter” (*U* 1.204–7). The contrast between Stephen and Mulligan could not be greater.

<sup>4</sup> Locke and Boyle studied together at Oxford in the late 1650s and early 1660s, and corresponded on scientific matters.

<sup>5</sup> See *SH* 186: “The modern spirit is vivisectionist. Vivisection itself is the most modern process one can conceive.”



One of the most significant passages at the close of *Finnegans Wake* is the conflict between the idealism of George Berkeley and the common-sense realism of St Patrick.<sup>6</sup> There is patent reference to Berkeley's theory of vision, prompted by the bishop's multicoloured vestments, with their "heptachromatic sevenhued septicoloured roranyellgreenlindigan mantle finish" (FW 611.6–7). Scepticism is voiced over the "all too many much illusiones through photprismic velamina of hueful panepiphanal world spectacurum" (FW 611.12–14), as the search continues for the "wisdom of Entis-Onton he savvy inside true inwardness of reality, the Ding hvad in idself id est" (FW 611.20–1). References to the "mantle finish" and the "velamina of hueful panepiphanal world" echo the call to "roll away the reel world, the reel world, the reel world!" (FW 64.25–6).

The potent references to the "wisdom of Entis-Onton" (a combination of Latin and Greek genitives, singular and plural, of "being"), the "true inwardness of reality" (an echo perhaps of Hopkins), and "the Ding hvad in idself id est," referring to Kant's distinction between the "thing in itself" (*Ding an sich*) and its appearance (Noumenon and Phenomenon), and Aquinas' *quidditas*: these all combine to emphasize Joyce's concern with the real in itself. They also recall Aristotle's statement in his *Metaphysics*: "[t]he question which, both now and of old, has always been raised, and always been the subject of doubt, namely, what being is, is just the question, what is substance?" (Aristotle 1028b). Regarding Joyce's basic outlook Harry Levin has pertinently remarked: "There are times, even in his maturest writing, when he still seems to be a realist in the most medieval sense" (Levin 35).

Having referred to these passages spanning Joyce's entire oeuvre which illustrate Joyce's preoccupation with complex questions of knowledge, I wish now to focus on the contrasting attitude of Joyce's protagonists to questions of identity and cognition. It is striking that both Stephen and Bloom are exercised by the enigma of self-identity as well as the challenge

<sup>6</sup> Joyce remarked to Frank Budgen: "Much more is intended in the colloquy between Berkeley the archdruid and his pidgin speech and Patrick in answer and his Nippon English. It is also the defence and indictment of the book itself, B's theory of colour and Patrick's practical solution of the problem. Hence the phrase in the preceding Mutt and Jeff banter 'Dies is Dorminus master,' = Deus et Dominus noster plus the day is lord over sleep, i.e. when it days" (Budgen 66). Anthony Burgess refers to "St. Patrick refuting the philosophical gibberish of the archdruid Berkeley-Bulkily-Buckley" (Burgess 973, 259). See Burgess: "'Bilkilly-Belkelly' spouts sesquipedalian idealism which makes as much sense as blackfellow's gibberish" (Burgess 1965, 260).

of a changing world. Each speculates whether he persists as the same individual in a stable world. In the case of Stephen this already occurs in *Portrait*, when he confirms his own sense of selfhood and self-creation when asked about his attitude to his abandoned religion, and if he was now happier:

- Often happy, Stephen said, and often unhappy. I was someone else then.
- How someone else? What do you mean by that statement?
- I mean, said Stephen, that I was not myself as I am now, as I had to become.
- Not as you are now, not as you had to become, Cranly repeated.  
(P 240)

This awareness is repeated in the opening scene of *Ulysses* in which Mulligan enacts his mock liturgy. Stephen recalls how years earlier he participated in a religious ceremony: “So I carried the boat of incense then at Clongowes. I am another now and yet the same. A servant too. A server of a servant” (U 1.310–12). He frequently refers to past events in order to interpret current experiences. He sympathizes with the struggling pupil, Cyril Sargent, through a certain self-interpretation: “Like him was I, these sloping shoulders, this gracelessness. My childhood bends beside me” (U 2.168–9). The subsequent conversation with Mr. Deasy likewise triggers memories of the self, and attendant problems: “The same room and hour, the same wisdom: and I the same. Three times now. Three nooses round me here. Well? I can break them in this instant if I will” (U 2.233–5). This is an interesting indication of Joyce’s persisting struggle for personal identity in self-liberation from the nets of nationality, language, and religion, famously challenged at the end of *A Portrait*.

The question of identity arises for Stephen at two levels: that of the individual self as an abiding entity, and the development of the individual artistic persona. I am concerned here with the first, but the following passage presents his twofold challenge:

As we, or mother Dana, weave and unweave our bodies, Stephen said, from day to day, their molecules shuttled to and fro, so does the artist weave and unweave his image.<sup>7</sup> And as the mole on my right breast is where it was

<sup>7</sup> Joyce almost certainly borrowed this phrase from the conclusion to Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance* (which has as its slogan Heraclitus’ declaration of universal flux): “It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis

when I was born, though all my body has been woven of new stuff time after time, so through the ghost of the unquiet father the image of the unliving son looks forth. In the intense instant of imagination, when the mind, Shelley says, is a fading coal, that which I was is that which I am and that which in possibility I may come to be. So in the future, the sister of the past, I may see myself as I sit here now but by reflection from that which then I shall be. (*U* 9.376–85)

The question of personal continuity and identity arises most visibly, as stated in the preceding passage, due to physical transformation, i.e. renewal by replacement: “Five months. Molecules all change. I am other I now. Other I got pound. Buzz. Buzz. But I, entelechy, form of forms, am I by memory because under everchanging forms. I that sinned and prayed and fasted. A child Connée saved from pandies. I, I and I. I. A.E.I.O.U.” (*U* 9.205–13). Stephen ponders his own self-identity: with the passage of time does he really still exist? Put crassly, have not all his molecules changed? More subtly: is he still the same, despite his discrete memories. Is he the same enduring “I”—indicated punctually: “I, I”—or are there different successive selves: “I. I”? (*U* 9.212). The dilemma is articulated with the help of Aristotle; Stephen persists as identical by virtue of his personal entelechy—enduring under the ever-changing forms as remembered, because the soul is the primordial “form of forms.” Stephen briefly entertains Locke’s theory of self-identity as grounded in memory, but holds fast to his belief in soul, the primary determination (entelechy) that governs the exchange of molecules and gives actuality to memory. In one of his metaphysical insights in Nighttown, Stephen brilliantly describes the first entelechy, the soul, as “the structural rhythm” (*U* 15.107). With this principle, Aristotle could respond to the *panta rhei* of Heraclitus (“all is flux”); one could step twice into the same stream, indeed step out of it, while the stream itself flows on: “human nature was a constant quantity,” we read in *Stephen Hero* (*SH* 175).

That Stephen’s solution to personal identity is the Aristotelian soul or entelechy (“form of forms”) is already announced in “Proteus”: “Take all, keep all. My soul walks with me, form of forms. [...] The flood is following me. I can watch it flow past from here” (*U* 3.279–82). The “I” necessarily stands above the flow, otherwise it could not observe that which

leaves off—that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves” (Pater 236).

flows. Stephen confirms his conviction that the self is rooted in the soul as “form of forms”: “I throw this ended shadow from me, manshape ineluctable, call it back. Endless, would it be mine, form of my form?” (*U* 3.412–14).<sup>8</sup> Aristotle occasionally used the word “shape” (*morphê*) as synonymous with “form” (*eidos*); combined with one of Joyce’s favourite words, “ineluctable,” it conveys that which for Aristotle is essential, necessary, and inalienable within the human individual. The phrase “form of forms” conveys the soul’s powerful cognitive role as receptive of all reality. Shortly afterwards in the same episode we have what is tantamount to Stephen’s ultimate existential self-affirmation: “As I am. As I am. All or not at all” (*U* 3.452).

Even in his inebriated state Stephen manages to come up with a remarkable formula for the development of self: “What went forth to the ends of the world to traverse not itself, God, the sun, Shakespeare, a commercial traveller, having itself traversed in reality itself becomes that self. Wait a moment. Wait a second. Damn that fellow’s noise in the street. Self which it itself was ineluctably preconditioned to become. *Ecco!*” (*U* 15.2117–21). The problem may be summed up: “To me or not to me. Satis thy quest on” (*FW* 269.19–20). The question is asked: “Fas est dass and foe err you”? (*FW* 273.6).

So much for Stephen’s concern with his own permanence and identity. It is highly revealing of Joyce’s preoccupation with permanence and self-identity that Stephen and Bloom are both challenged by the phenomenon of change, which occupies much of the background in “Proteus,” “Lestrygonians,” and “Scylla and Charybdis.” The approaches of Bloom and Stephen, however, are significantly different. While Bloom is equally baffled by the question of self-identity through time, he does not have Stephen’s theoretical apparatus to resolve the question. As well as puzzlement with a Heraclitean vision of the world in constant flux, Bloom is also troubled by the question of his own personal permanence and identity: “I was happier then. Or was that I? Or am I now I? Twentyeight I was. She twentythree. When we left Lombard street west something changed. Could never like it again after Rudy. Can’t bring back time. Like holding

<sup>8</sup> The word “manshape” echoes Hopkins’s poem “That Nature is a Herclitean Fire”:

Man, how fast his firedint, his mark on mind, is gone!  
Both are in an unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark  
Drowned. O pity and indignation! Manshape, that shone.

water in your hand. Would you go back to then? Just beginning then. Would you?" (*U* 8.608–12). Reminiscing about his amorous adventures with Molly on Ben Howth, he muses: "Me. And me now" (*U* 8.917). He also wonders about the identity of his personality: "Am I like that? See ourselves as others see us!" (*U* 8.662). His self-doubt is illustrated in the final scene of "Nausicaa" by his failure to trace his identity in the sand, in the hope of arranging another encounter with Gerty MacDowell: "I./[...] AM. A./No room. Let it go./Mr Bloom effaced the letters with his slow boot. Hopeless thing sand. Nothing grows in it. All fades" (*U* 13.1258, 1264–7). Bloom somehow seems uncertain of his identity, and muses at the graveside in Glasnevin: "If we were all suddenly somebody else" (*U* 6.836). This is, of course, a futile and contradictory exercise. The illusory assumption is that while remaining oneself, one might also become another, which is of course a complete impossibility. Aristotle remarks in his *Nicomachean Ethics*: "No one would choose to possess every good in the world on condition of becoming somebody else [...] but only while remaining himself, whatever he may be" (Aristotle IX, 4, 1166a19–23). The impossible presumption is that one could become someone else, while remaining oneself—a patent contradiction.

By contrast it is interesting to compare Bloom's self-image with the perception others have of him. Molly who presumably knows him better than anyone, on the one hand recognizes his uniqueness: "I suppose there isnt in all creation another man with the habits he has" (*U* 18.1197–8), but also raises a troubling question regarding Bloom's core personality: "hes always imitating everybody" (*U* 18.1204–5). Hoppy Holohan exclaims in "Circe": "Good old Bloom! There's nobody like him after all" (*U* 15.1727).

Stephen and Bloom are alike concerned with the question of personal identity. Let us consider also their attitude to change. Stephen's reflections on change which dominate "Proteus" are well known and need not be rehearsed here. Suffice it to say that his response is from the start that of the intellectual who theorizes about what he observes: "God becomes man becomes fish becomes barnacle goose becomes featherbed mountain" (*U* 3.477–9). Stephen goes beneath the perceptible to seek an underlying and enduring undercurrent. In his analysis of change he was, perhaps unawares, searching for a common element analogous to Aristotle's "prime matter." Prime matter, *prote hule*, a principle of pure potency, allows Aristotle to make sense of radical, substantial, change: since change is a succession within an identity there must be an underlying

element that persists throughout the process and which is receptive to all possible transformation.

Bloom is likewise struck by the phenomenon of change. In "Lotus Eaters" he reflects: "Won't last. Always passing, the stream of life, which in the stream of life we trace is dearer thaaan them all" (*U* 5.563–4). In "Lestrygonians" he muses: "How can you own water really? It's always flowing in a stream, never the same, which in the stream of life we trace. Because life is a stream" (*U* 8.93–5). The phrase is repeated shortly afterwards: "The stream of life" (*U* 8.176). Later in the same episode we find him reflecting upon the fluidity of the world, in a passage strongly reminiscent of Heraclitus. Bloom ponders the flux of his metropolitan world:

Trams passed one another, ingoing, outgoing, clanging. Useless words. Things go on same, day after day: squads of police marching out, back: trams in, out. Those two loonies mooching about. Dignam carted off. Mina Purefoy swollen belly on a bed groaning to have a child tugged out of her. One born every second somewhere. Other dying every second. Since I fed the birds five minutes. Three hundred kicked the bucket. Other three hundred born, washing the blood off, all are washed in the blood of the lamb, bawling maaaaaa.

Cityful passing away, other cityful coming, passing away too: other coming on, passing on. Houses, lines of houses, streets, miles of pavements, piledup bricks, stones. Changing hands. This owner, that. Landlord never dies they say. Other steps into his shoes when he gets his notice to quit. They buy the place up with gold and still they have all the gold. Swindle in it somewhere. Piled up in cities, worn away age after age. Pyramids in sand. Built on bread and onions. Slaves Chinese wall. Babylon. Big stones left. Round towers. Rest rubble, sprawling suburbs, jerrybuilt. Kerwan's mushroom houses built of breeze. Shelter, for the night.

No-one is anything. (*U* 8.476–93)

This last phrase is strikingly similar to the conclusion drawn in Plato's *Theaetetus*, where Socrates refers to the secret doctrine, inspired by Heraclitus' theory of flux, that underlies the extreme sensism of the doctrine that "[m]an is the measure of all things": "All things are always in every kind of motion. [...] One must not use even the word 'thus,' nor yet 'not thus'" (Plato 182a, 183b). According to this theory, it is impossible either to think or speak about anything, since nothing remains constant, neither the knower nor the known. The Greek word for knowledge, *episteme*, derives from the same root as the verb "to stand" and implies fixity.

Because Plato believed there could be no stable knowledge of changing things, he posited a separate world of unchanging Ideas. With his theory of form (*eidos*) as the abiding defining principle of natural beings, Aristotle explained how there can be stable knowledge of changing things: form guarantees the underlying identity of the individual even as it changes accidentally. With his theory of soul, which is metaphysically the entelechy of the body and cognitively the “form of forms,” he provided an explanation of the continuity and identity of the knowing subject.

Bloom is as concerned as Stephen with the question of permanence and identity. But while Stephen is compelled to theorize about everything, Bloom is more practical. We might apply the words from *Finnegans Wake*: “Let us leave theories there and return to here’s here” (*FW* 76.10). In Glasnevin cemetery Bloom reflects upon the decay of the body. Just as Stephen finds permanence in Aristotle’s principles of form and prime matter, Bloom (whose mentality is more scientific than philosophical)<sup>9</sup> finds ultimate stability in the cells that go on living:

I daresay the soil would be quite fat with corpse-manure, bones, flesh, nails. Charnelhouses. Dreadful. Turning green and pink decomposing. Rot quick in damp earth. The lean old ones tougher. Then a kind of a tallowy kind of a cheesy. Then begin to get black, black treacle oozing out of them. Then dried up. Deathmoths. Of course the cells or whatever they are go on living. Changing about. Live for ever practically. Nothing to feed on feed on themselves. (*U* 6.775–82)

Bloom views all happenings in the world as natural phenomena; indeed the world is composed entirely of natural phenomena that can be explained in terms of natural causes and events. Stephen is the Aristotelian philosopher. He finds the guarantee of self-identity in Aristotle’s theory of the soul as the entelechy, or first actualization, which is the substantial form of the human individual. He grounds the reliability of knowledge in Aristotle’s theory of sensation and develops it through Aristotle’s theory of the soul as “form of forms.” The intellectual soul apprehends the essential form of the object, its whatness or quiddity, which it expresses in definition: “Unsheathe your dagger definitions. Horseness is the whatness of allhorse” (*U* 9.84–9).

<sup>9</sup> Stephen stands for the Hellenic, intellectual, and artistic, as against Bloom, the Hebraist, sensualist, and scientific. See Wagner 178.

In a delightful and cleverly-worded exchange in "Eumaeus" we are given a clear insight into the contrasting outlooks of Bloom and Stephen concerning human nature and the foundation of human thought. Bloom is forthright in his challenge:

—You, as a good catholic, he observed, talking of body and soul, believe in the soul. Or do you mean the intelligence, the brainpower as such, as distinct from any outside object, the table, let us say, that cup? I believe in that myself because it has been explained by competent men as the convolutions of the grey matter. (*U* 16.748–52)

Stephen is obliged to recall what he has learned about the ultimate metaphysical ground of the soul and its enduring identity:

—Thus cornered, Stephen had to make a superhuman effort of memory to try and concentrate and remember before he could say:

They tell me on the best authority it is a simple substance and therefore incorruptible. It would be immortal, I understand, but for the possibility of its annihilation by its First Cause Who, from all I can hear, is quite capable of adding that to the number of His other practical jokes, *corruptio per se* and *corruptio per accidens* both being excluded by court etiquette. (*U* 16.754–60)

Bloom's reaction is one of the cleverest and most amusing characterizations in the entire book: "Mr Bloom thoroughly acquiesced in the general gist of this though the mystical finesse involved was a bit out of his sublunary depth" (*U* 16.761–2). He entirely misunderstands Stephen's use of the word "simple": "Simple? I shouldn't think that is the proper word. Of course, I grant you, to concede a point, you do knock across a simple soul once in a blue moon" (*U* 16.764–5). Bloom innocently assumes that "simple" means weak-minded, innocent or naïve, whereas Stephen intends it in its original sense of undivided. He correctly outlines the Thomist argument that since the human soul is not composed of parts, it is of its nature incorruptible. The only conceivable possibility is that God would annihilate it or reduce it to nonbeing. But since God has out of love created souls in his own image and likeness, it would negate his divine goodness if he were to do so. Such a practical joke on God's part would be intrinsically a contradiction, since he would be destroying his own work; his action would be void of purpose.



In connection with the identity of the object as known, it is necessary to refer to the reliability of sense knowledge. One of the phrases noted by Joyce in his notebook was the phrase from Aristotle's *De Anima*: "The sensation of particular things is always true" (Aristotle 428b18–19, 427b11–12). According to Aristotle, each of the senses is infallible with respect to its specific object, within its own particular, very restricted, domain; in the simple apprehension of their respective objects the senses cannot err. This follows by definition from the nature and function of the sense faculty itself: the eye is the organ specifically equipped to grasp colour; the ear is the faculty which necessarily and inevitably grasps sound. To suggest that a particular sense faculty, operating according to its nature, is deceived in its grasp of its proper object is contradictory: it would be to deny the existence of such a faculty. Joyce captures the kernel of Aristotle's theory of sensation in the twin phrases "ineluctable modality of the visible" (*U* 3.1) and "ineluctable modality of the audible" (*U* 3.13). These phrases summarize with accurate clarity Aristotle's fundamental teaching regarding the infallibility of sense knowledge.

Aristotle makes the important distinction between the proper and the common objects of perception. Colour is the proper sensible of the eye, sound the proper sensible of the ear; size, shape, speed and distance, on the other hand, are among what he calls the "common perceptibles." These may be grasped by more than one sense faculty and the perceiver is liable to err if he carelessly judges an object on the evidence of one sense alone. There is a necessity, however, attaching to our knowledge of the proper sensibles; this derives from the very nature of our faculties of sensation, which must grasp their proper objects correctly. John Locke, on the other hand, gave primacy to data such as extension and number, describing them as primary qualities, since they are less dependent upon the observer's subjective condition. Experiences such as colour and taste are less reliable; these he termed "secondary qualities."

The difficulty involved in the perception of the common sensibles is dramatized in "Lestrygonians," as Bloom admires the fieldglasses in the window of Yeates and Son on Nassau Street: "Must get those old glasses of mine set right" (*U* 8.554). Distance appears to distort size; the clock on the top of the bank appears no larger than a watch: "There's a little watch up there on the roof of the bank to test those glasses by" (*U* 8.560–1). Distance, size, shape, perspective: these are all situation-dependent. Bloom improvises the experiment suggested by the Irish astronomer Sir Robert Ball in *The Story of the Heavens* (first published in 1885) to illustrate "the

conception known to astronomers by the name of *parallax*; for it is by parallax that the distance of the sun, or, indeed, the distance of any celestial body, must be determined." It is, notes Ball, "a geometrical problem of no little complexity" (Ball 151–2).<sup>10</sup>

Parallax is the "apparent displacement" of an object in the foreground relative to a distant background when viewed separately by the right and left eye. This optical displacement of the object in relation to the background increases as one approaches, and decreases as one moves away. This is because distance, perspective, size, and shape are not the proper sensible of any one of the senses alone; they are what Aristotle calls "common sensibles," since we can grasp these data not only by sight but also by touch.<sup>11</sup>

It will be of interest to refer our foregoing discussion of personal identity to the characters of Bloom and Stephen. Joyce remarked to Frank Budgen that he no longer found Stephen interesting; he had "a shape that can't be changed" (Budgen 107). This seems paradoxical, since Joyce was not only Stephen's creator, but also his model. Had Joyce grown tired of himself? Had he exhausted all possibilities for self-representation? He famously confessed that he did not have the gift of imagination, only those of memory and organization. Was he unable to find further possibilities of character? It appears from the text that there was a predictability about Stephen. In *Portrait* he states: "I was someone else then. [...] ...I was not myself as I am now, as I had to become" (*P* 240). In *Ulysses* he refers to the "Self which it itself was ineluctably preconditioned to become. *Ecco!*" (*U* 15.2120–1). This is even sensed by Bloom, who "saw in a quick young male familiar form the predestination of a future" (*U* 17.780).

For the author of *Ulysses* the figure of Bloom was vastly more interesting. Stephen was the intellectual, interpreting the world in terms of fixed categories and an already defined *Weltanschauung*. Bloom was untrained and curious, eager to inquire, an amateur scientist. He had still to discover and understand the world and displays the innocent enthusiasm of one

<sup>10</sup>See *U* 8.110: "Fascinating little book that is of sir Robert Ball's. Parallax." Also *U* 15.1010–12: "I was just chatting this afternoon at the viceregal lodge to my old pals, sir Robert and lady Ball, astronomer royal at the levee. Sir Bob, I said..."

<sup>11</sup>Anatole France expresses a similar phenomenon, perceived by Riquet, M. Bergeret's dog: "Men, animals, and stones grow larger as they approach me, and become enormous when they are quite close. It is not so with me. I remain the same size wherever I am" ("Les hommes, les animaux, les pierres grandissent en s'approchant et deviennent énormes quand ils sont sur moi. Moi non. Je demeure toujours aussi grand partout où je suis" [France 87]).

who names it for the first time; to portray this was for Joyce a greater challenge. Stephen, although he contemplates “possibilities of the possible as possible: things not known” (*U* 9.349–50), is already fixed and formed; Bloom remains open to possibility. Like most of Joyce’s characters he is not inflexible, but is receptive to new development; he does not yield to rigid definition.

The challenge for philosophy is to justify the common-sense belief that there is an abiding unity in each of us, while also accounting for the interaction of that self-unity with the ever-changing flux of experience. The self must be at once constant and dynamic: is this not a contradiction? It is clear that the individual must be inalienable and self-possessed. This insight is articulated in “A Painful Case,” where Mr. Duffy realizes that the self is a solitary and isolated entity: “as he attached the fervent nature of his companion more and more closely to him, he heard the strange impersonal voice which he recognised as his own, insisting on the soul’s incurable loneliness. We cannot give ourselves, it said: we are our own” (*D* 111). In *Finnegans Wake* such isolation becomes exile, conveyed in a very powerful passage: “the whirling dervish, Tumult, son of Thunder, self exiled in upon his ego, a nightlong a shaking betwixtween white or reddr hawrors, noondayterrorised to skin and bone by an ineluctable phantom (may the Shaper have mercery on him!) writing the mystery of himsel in furniture” (*FW* 184.5–10). This isolation is also suggested by Anna Livia, who in her concluding introspective reflections recognizes this fundamental fact of life: “Ourselves, oursouls alone” (*FW* 623.28–9).

The question of identity pervades, even dominates, *Finnegans Wake*, which it may be suggested, deals with “the first riddle of the universe: asking, when is a man not a man?” (*FW* 170.4–5). Given the constantly changing prosopography (“intermutuomergent,” *FW* 55.11–12) inhabiting its dreamworld, the conflict between identity and plurality of personality is repeatedly dramatized but, as we might expect, never resolved. It is no use to appeal to either Aristotle or Aquinas, since the domain of concrete facts gives way to the realm of dream and imagination. And yet the work is in a very real sense a testament to the profound mystery of selfhood and its multiple manifestations: ever most real, it remains elusive and beyond defining. Its most important lesson is, perhaps, that it is impossible “to identifine the individuone” (*FW* 51.6). This coincides indeed with the deepest sentiment of both Aristotle and Aquinas, who joyfully affirm the mystery of concrete reality: *individuum est ineffabile*.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ball, Robert S. *The Story of the Heavens*. London: Cassell, 1900.
- Boyle, Robert. *Selected Philosophical Papers of Robert Boyle*. Ed. M.A. Stewart. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991.
- Brivic, Sheldon. *Joyce the Creator*. Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1985.
- Budgen, Frank. *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses* (1934). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Burgess, Anthony. *Here Comes Everybody*. London: Faber and Faber, 1965.
- . James Joyce. In *A Shorter Finnegans Wake*, ed. Anthony Burgess. London: Faber and Faber, 1973.
- France, Anatole. *Œuvres complètes illustrées*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1928.
- Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford: Clarendon, 1973.
- Kenner, Hugh. The Cubist Portrait. In *Critical Essays on James Joyce*, ed. Bernard Benstock. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985.
- Levin, Harry. *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction*. London: Faber, 1960.
- Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon, 1979.
- Maher, Michael. *Psychology: Empirical and Rational*. London: Longmans, Green, 1900.
- McDougall, William. *Body and Mind: A History and a Defense of Animism*. London: Methuen, 1911.
- O'Rourke, Fran. *Allwisest Staggyrite: Joyce's Quotations from Aristotle*. Dublin: The National Library of Ireland, 2005.
- Oldenburg, Henry. *Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*. Ed. A.R. Hall and M.B. Hall, vol. III. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966.
- Pater, Walter. *The Renaissance*. London: Macmillan, 1935.
- Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and Social Hope*. London: Penguin, 1999.
- Tricot, J. *Aristote. La Métaphysique I*. Paris: Vrin, 1940.
- Wagner, Geoffrey Atheling. *Wyndham Lewis: A Portrait of the Artist as the Enemy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Science and the Modern World*. London: Free Association Books, 1985.
- Woolf, Virginia. *The Essays of Virginia Woolf III*. London: Hogarth Press, 1995.

# Author Query

Chapter No.: 2      0003365442

Queries	Details Required	Author's Response
AU1	In sentence beginning 'They also recall...' (Aristotle 1028b) is not there in Bibliography; is it the Aristotle 1901 or 1931? Or give new 1028b entry in Bibliography? Or delete this text citation?	