

Fran O'Rourke, *Joyce, Aristotle, and Aquinas* (Florida University Press, 2022)

Reviewed for *Classics Ireland* by Brian Arkins

The use made of philosophy by creative writers is complex. As a rule, these writers do not completely espouse the doctrines of a particular philosopher. Instead, they manipulate the concepts of philosophy in order to help them express their own preoccupations. Exceptions confirm the rule: in about 55BC, the Roman poet Lucretius expounds, without any deviation, the teachings of his Greek mentor Epicurus.

But much more typical of Rome – and of later eras – is the philosophical eclecticism of Horace. Who asserted 'I am not bound to swear by the words of any master'.

Joyce makes constant use of Aristotle and Aquinas. As Stanford wrote, 'Aristotle and Aquinas moulded his adolescent mind. Plato he distrusted'.

Michael Patrick Gillespie (author of *James Joyce and Exilic Imagination*) stated that O'Rourke 'has written a marvellous scholarly study that offers, in lucid prose, profound insights of the intellectual, imaginative and creative contexts that informs the writings of James Joyce'. The book has some 50 pages of notes.

O'Rourke points out that his book 'is concerned exclusively with philosophical themes that are of material significance for Joyce's writing or that provide inspiration for their artistic construction; it is not concerned with the literary merit of their application by Joyce'. Hence we are dealing with an essential prolegomenon to Joyce.

O'Rourke's book covers three significant issues in three chapters:

1. The issue of permanence and identity as it relates to knowledge.
2. The issue of self-identity.
3. The issue of an overall unifying totality.

Aristotle founded two sciences, logic and biology. His system of logic remained dominant for centuries, and O'Rourke notes that Joyce took logic as a subject in UCD. Aristotle also wrote extensively on politics, metaphysics, ethics, psychology, art. Joyce held that he was 'the greatest thinker of all time.' In Paris, Joyce read every day Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. No wonder then that his brother Stanislaus stated that Joyce 'upholds Aristotle to his friends and boasts himself an Aristotelian'.

Aristotle is an authority for Joyce in his satirical poem 'The Holy Office' (1904): 'Bringing to tavern and to brothel/ The mind of witty Aristotle' (O'Rourke notes that the unexpected epithet 'witty' means 'knowing').

Joyce rejected the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, but remained loyal to that church's prime philosopher Aquinas. He sees himself as 'steeped in the school of old Aquinas'. There was a renaissance of Thomist thought in the Catholic Church after Pope Leo XIII's encyclical in 1878, and O'Rourke notes that in UCD, run by the Jesuits, the influence of Aristotle was all pervasive.

Joyce deals with what we can know for certain. While Mulligan is a crass empiricist, Stephen Dedalus is a reflective Aristotelian. He believes that what is seen or heard cannot be escaped. As in his famous formulation 'ineluctable modality of the visible' and 'ineluctable modality of the audible'. This is pure Aristotle, who believed in facts.

But Stephen is also struck by the phenomenon of change. O'Rourke notes that Aristotle believes that matter receives the determination of multiple successive forms in a ceaseless flow of substantial change.

As far as *Finnegans Wake* is concerned, O'Rourke points out that neither Aristotle or Aquinas 'occupies any significant place in Joyce's book of the night'.

Joyce's mind works by analogy, a similarity of relationships, which was crucial for the synthesising mind of Aristotle. So O'Rourke asserts that Joyce's skill was the ability to order the great diversity of human detail into an orderly scheme.

O'Rourke notes that the word soul occurs more than 400 times in Joyce's works, which reflects his Catholic education. In *Portrait*, Soul is used to depict Stephen's development and struggle for self-identity. In *Ulysses*, Stephen employs the term *entelechy*, a basic perfection that is already complete, to describe himself: 'But I, entelechy, form of forms. As Aquinas says, soul is the form of body.'

O'Rourke deals with complex issues of philosophy in a very clear, lucid style. His book will be the standard work on Joyce's use of Aristotle and of Aquinas for a very long time. It is important for students of Joyce, for students of Aristotle and Aquinas, for the later reception of Greek philosophy.

One item missing from O'Rourke's bibliography is Brian Arkins, *Greek Roman Themes in Joyce* (1999), which includes a chapter entitled 'Philosophy: The Impact of Solider Aristotle'. O'Rourke has graciously apologised for this omission.