

O'Rourke, Fran, *Joyce, Aristotle, and Aquinas*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, 2022; pp. xvi + 314. US\$35.00. ISBN 978-0813068633.

Fran O'Rourke, emeritus professor of philosophy at University College Dublin, has now published a work of profound scholarship that will be of great use to all readers of James Joyce but especially to scholars who desire to understand the philosophical background of Joyce's often perplexing writings. O'Rourke sets out in great detail the way in which Joyce was influenced by the Aristotelian and Thomistic ideas he picked up—often, in an unsystematic manner—while a student at two Jesuit institutions: Belvedere College and University College Dublin. (The latter was under the control of the Society of Jesus from 1883 until 1908; Joyce graduated from the University in 1902.) O'Rourke speaks quite straightforwardly about Joyce's philosophical shortcomings, remarking that “he did not fully appreciate the richness and relevance of Aristotle's metaphysics” and “he remained perplexed by the fundamental questions of knowledge and identity” [8]. As becomes apparent as the book progresses, this failure fully to understand Aristotle is especially evident in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce's final work.

The book contains an introduction, seven chapters, an afterward, and an appendix. Chapters one and two are entitled (respectively) “Aristotelian Joyce” and “Thomist Joyce” and serve as philosophical introductions for what follows; also useful in this regard is chapter seven, entitled, “Joyce's quotations from Aristotle,” in which O'Rourke has placed thirty-one quotations that Joyce copied into a notebook, the “Early Commonplace Book,” he used in the years 1903 and 1904. The quotations are mostly from Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire's French translations of Aristotle's *De anima*, *Parva naturalia*, and *Metaphysica*. O'Rourke translates the texts, gives the Greek, and also points to a number of inadequacies in the French translations that had a negative effect upon Joyce's understanding of Aristotle. The three texts in the appendix (entitled, “Texts on aesthetics from James Joyce's ‘Early Commonplace Book’”) are brief commentaries by Joyce on remarks drawn—not entirely accurately—from Thomas Aquinas. O'Rourke discusses these texts especially in chapter six.

The ideas presented in the book are multifarious and sometimes complex; in the present context it will only be possible to present a selection from these ideas in order to give the reader some indication of the book's general drift and philosophical richness. So, for instance, in chapter one O'Rourke tells us that, in the earlier works, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and in *Ulysses*, Joyce appears to prize Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction but that his attitude changes by the time he writes *Finnegans Wake*. “Aristotle's strict logic of

noncontradiction, based on the absolute opposition of ‘either-or,’ gives way to the *coincidentia oppositorum* of Nicholas of Cusa, ‘a collideorscope’ in which dichotomies ‘by the coincidence of their contraries reamalgamerge’” [24]. (The neologisms ‘collideorscope’ and ‘reamalgamerge’ are from *Finnegans Wake*.) O’Rourke also in effect argues that Joyce need not have abandoned Aristotle in order to achieve a less “either-or” writing style. Aristotle, he notes, “also recognized the power of association—indispensable for metaphor. It is a gift of nature, free and spontaneous, the true sign of genius. For Aristotle, there is no conflict, only the difference between two levels of human activity: the primary order of natural reality and the derivative order of creative imitation” [25–26]. O’Rourke clearly has in mind Aristotle’s remark at *Poetica* 22.1459a4–8 (see O’Rourke’s chapter five [133]). Joyce was apparently familiar with the latter work (see [25], and note 60). One supposes confidently that he was familiar with Aristotle’s remark at *Poetica* 21.1457b1–3 that words used in poetry might be “either the primary word for the thing, or an obsolete word, or a metaphor, or an ornamental word, or an invented word, or a word lengthened, curtailed, or changed utterly.”

A major point—even theme—in chapter two is that William T. Noon, S.J., author of *Joyce and Aquinas*, was wrong to underestimate Joyce’s exposure to “Aristotelian Thomism” while at University College Dublin. O’Rourke agrees with Noon that Joyce “never formally studied philosophy” at the University, but he identifies a number of Thomistically inclined Jesuits teaching in the University who would have influenced him: William Delany, for instance, Thomas A. Finlay, Jacques Mallac, William Magennis, and Joseph Darlington. O’Rourke connects Joyce with the foundation of the Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas at the University, the leading spirit of which was the “Thomist zealot” William Magennis [36]. He also mentions Joseph Darlington’s “approach to Hamlet through Aristotle and Aquinas” [32]. Relying on Jacques Mercanton, O’Rourke reports that Joyce at one point said of his Jesuit professors that they were “a distinguished order, efficacious, remarkable educators, far more likeable than the Dominicans, whom he considered narrow, obtuse, tangled up in their own theology, truly the barking dogs of the Lord” [38]. Later, while living in Paris, Joyce also apparently expressed dislike for the burgeoning Thomist revival there, led by Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson. According to Mary Colum, the author of *Our Friend James Joyce* (and wife of the poet and author Padraic Colum): “In some ways Joyce could be very difficult and even intolerable. He was angry with me because I made friends with some French people who were Thomists in a different way from himself, who was ‘steemed in the school of old Aquinas’” [47], the latter being a quotation from Joyce’s poem, “The Holy Office.”

Chapter three, “Knowledge and permanence,” maintains that in *Ulysses* Joyce espoused (in the person of Stephen Dedalus) Aristotle’s position that of primary importance in the acquisition of knowledge are the senses. “‘Ineluctable modality of the visible’ (*Ulysses* 3.01) and ‘ineluctable modality of the audible’ (*Ulysses* 3.13) are unmistakable allusions to Aristotle’s doctrine of sense knowledge, outlined in *De Anima* ...” (which Joyce studied while in Paris) [53]. O’Rourke contrasts this approach with that of John Locke. What Aristotle called the ‘proper sensibles’ and regarded as primary, Locke regarded as secondary; what Aristotle called the ‘common sensibles’ and regarded as secondary, Locke regarded as primary [77]. The result of Joyce’s emphasis upon the senses is that, in *Ulysses*, everything seems knowable. The same, however, cannot be said of *Finnegans Wake*. “Whereas *Ulysses* unfolds in the light of day, *Finnegans Wake* is the ‘book of the dark.’ The *lumen naturale* of intellect, exemplified in the luminous guidelines of identity, noncontradiction, and excluded middle, is sacrificed for the *coincidentia oppositorum*, where dichotomies merge in coinciding contraries” [86]. In concluding the chapter, O’Rourke remarks that “neither Aristotle nor Aquinas occupies any significant place in Joyce’s book of the night” [90].

The major theme of chapter four, “Identity, soul, and substance,” is Joyce’s obsession throughout his literary career with the question how a human being, although consisting of a collection of distinct experiences, thoughts, etc., can be one. “The question of identity remained central throughout Joyce’s writing, from *Stephen Hero* to *Finnegans Wake*, where Shaun tires in his effort ‘to isolate i from my multiple Mes’ (*Finnegans Wake* 410.12)” [103]. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Cranly says to Stephen Dedalus, “It’s a curious thing ..., how your mind is supersaturated with the religion in which you say you disbelieve.” Stephen acknowledges that, as a young man, he did believe: “I was someone else then.” O’Rourke speaks extensively about both Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s understandings of the unity of the human substance, a theory (or theories) with which Joyce would have been familiar through his Jesuit education; but he argues that Joyce’s lack of familiarity with Aristotle’s *Categoriae* prevented him from solving the problem of identity that so obsessed him. O’Rourke speaks of a certain centripetal-centrifugal tension in *Ulysses*:

That tension arises, I suggest, from a failure to recognize the difference between accidental and substantial change. If the author of *Ulysses* had grasped this distinction, many of the questions that enliven its pages would have ceased to perplex him. As already suggested, however, for that we may be grateful, since otherwise we would be deprived

of the recurring dramatization of the enigma of self-identity that never ceases to preoccupy him [123].

O'Rourke [113] makes a similar point with respect to *Finnegans Wake*.

Chapter five, "Totality, diversity, and order: the unity of analogy," considers a philosophical issue similar to that considered in chapter four: how diversity is related to order. As noted above, O'Rourke [133] here calls attention to Aristotle's *Poetica*, where unlike his approach especially in the *Analytica posteriora*, he is more than willing to acknowledge that the use of metaphor—the use of words in a non-standard ways—can provide insight into reality. Aristotle speaks, for example, of the cup of Dionysus (the god of wine) and of the shield of Ares (the god of war) but switches their characteristic implements: "I mean, for instance, that a cup stands similarly in relation to Dionysus and a shield toward Ares; so the cup will be said to be the shield of Dionysus and the shield the cup of Ares" [*Poetica* 21.1457b20–22]. Dionysus *wields* a cup, we might say, and Ares *gives comfort* with his shield. Following Aristotle, O'Rourke speaks of metaphor as "analogy of proportion" [133]; he also notes that there is another type of analogy, analogy of attribution, which is "performed by the mind when in thought and language we group a variety of apparently disparate concepts or realities around a common primary focus" [134]. O'Rourke contends that Aristotle "perceived countless proportionalities but did not rise above a universal pluralism" and so never united the whole of reality analogically. Aquinas, on the other hand, "combined analogy of proportionality with the analogy of attribution and forged a synoptic, synthetic, and panoramic vision of universal reality that was both horizontally unified and vertically grounded" [155–56]. O'Rourke says that this latter was Joyce's understanding of the universe "until he relinquished the Catholic faith" [156]. Analogy, says O'Rourke, helps us to describe reality without denying the principle of non-contradiction [161]. In *Finnegans Wake*, where contradiction is presumed unproblematic, analogy is no longer needed—nor, in fact, was unity desired.

In chapter six, "Joyce's Thomist aesthetics," O'Rourke considers closely the three texts contained in the appendix. These texts, taken from James Joyce's "Early Commonplace Book," are Joyce's reflections on aesthetics, supposedly from a Thomist perspective. The first two begin with epithets attributed to Thomas (*Bonum est in quod tendit appetitus* and *Pulcra sunt quae visa placent*); the third text is a continuation—or perhaps refinement—of what is said in the second text. O'Rourke argues that in these texts Joyce incorrectly separates the activity of intellect from aesthetic appetite. Joyce, he maintains, focused too exclusively on the first epithet's linking of the good to appetite, ignoring Thomas's Aristotelian definition of the good

as “that which all things desire” (*bonum est quod omnia appetunt*), which speaks not so much of an exclusive relationship between appetite and the good but rather of the good as the end for creatures in their entirety, which in man includes also the intellect. O’Rourke also notes that an accurate transcription of the second epithet would be the more tentative, *Pulchra [enim] dicuntur quae visa placent*. “By contrasting the intellectual and aesthetic appetites,” writes O’Rourke, “by reference to the most satisfying relationships respectively of the intelligible and the sensible, Joyce introduces a false dualism between truth as the grasp of pleasing suprasensible relationships, and beauty as the apprehension of pleasing sensible relations” [181].