

**JOYCE, ARISTOTLE, AND AQUINAS** by Fran O'Rourke, *University Press of Florida*, Gainesville, 2022, pp. xvi + 314, \$35.00, pbk

This brilliant and authoritative work is a precious commemoration of the centenary of *Ulysses*, piquantly dedicated to the great-great-granddaughters and the great-great-great-granddaughter of its heroine, for Molly Bloom was modeled on Amelia Capacete, ancestress of the author's nieces and grand-niece. Fran O'Rourke reinforces Joyce's own Dublin connections as well, for having lectured in ancient and medieval philosophy in Joyce's university for thirty-six years and published monographs on Aquinas and Aristotle, he is well placed to issue a report on the wayward alumnus. It turns out that Joyce does great credit to University College, Dublin, not so much by the relative accuracy and penetration of the discussions of Aristotle and Aquinas ascribed to Stephen Dedalus, as by his absorption of their realist philosophy, which he pitted against the dreamy idealism of Dublin literati (notably in the library chapter of *Ulysses*), and which exerted a diffuse influence throughout his writing career. Stephen Dedalus emerges as a serious young thinker, not deserving the irony loaded on him by Hugh Kenner and Declan Kiberd but not by Joyce (p. 52). With the lucidity and the light touch that only true expertise makes possible, this book expounds Aristotelean and Thomist thought on the themes of knowledge, soul, analogy, and beauty, showing how thoroughly it infiltrated Joyce's mind and art. Other currents of modern scepticism tugged in a different direction, but they are not allowed to gain the upper hand.

Joyce told Robert McAlmon that his favourite authors were Newman and Aquinas. Like a good Belvedere College alumnus he urged one of his Italian students to drop Schopenhauer and Nietzsche for the sound and sharp reasoning of St Thomas (p. 44). Joyceans want to limit the implications of this, but Irish scholars such as the late Michael Paul Gallagher SJ, Mark Patrick Hederman OSB, Richard Kearney, and myself (*Joysis Crisis*, Chisokudo, 2021) have acknowledged what to T. S. Eliot was obvious: the thoroughly Catholic texture of Joyce's vision. O'Rourke's focus is not particularly religious, though theological lore is bound to surface (sacraments, pp. 50–1; Luther, pp. 11–12; Nicaea and Chalcedon, pp. 115–18; the Communion of Saints, pp. 96–7). This allows him to appreciate the texture of Joyce's mind with delicate and disinterested attention. It also brings Joyce back within the ambit of Catholic intellectual culture in a way that will give the theological interrogation of his work new bearings.

O'Rourke examines closely the quotations from Aristotle, especially *De Anima*, that Joyce penned in the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève. They are short and rather miscellaneous, and include well-known statements of the principles of contradiction and excluded middle, that 'the soul is in a manner all that is', etc. But O'Rourke's thorough account has the value of clarifying in what these studies, which Joyce did not pursue any further, consisted. A little Aristotle seems to have gone a very long way with Joyce, though O'Rourke may read too much Aristotle into Joyce's love of analogies. The 'analogical center' of *Ulysses* is identified as 'the instinct, emotion, and ideal of love in its multifarious, miscellaneous, multiple modes and manifestations' (p. 155). Apart from the unclear status of the truncated quote from the *Summa Contra Gentiles* restored by Hans Walter Gabler in his edition of the novel, this suggestion is not immediately persuasive. Joyce is not Dante. The mythic grandeur he brings out in modern urban life is not most powerfully exemplified in the love themes (Bloom's feelings for Molly, Milly, Rudy, Stephen; Stephen's for his mother).

Joyce as a writer is pursuing philosophy by other means, as Hermann Broch recognized, but it is not exclusively that of Aristotle and Aquinas. Their spokesman is Stephen Dedalus, but Bloom claims Spinoza as his guide, lecturing Molly on him. How the Jewish philosopher plays off against Catholic scholasticism in the novel would be a juicy research topic, as difficult as the following exam question posed by Professor William Magennis, well known to Joyce, in 1920: “Substance, with Locke, is the unknown and unknowable *substrate of attributes*’. Is this permanence underlying accidents the central note in the Scholastic concept?” (quoted, p. 249).

The *Summa Contra Gentiles* was the one work of Aquinas that Joyce knew (p. 175), and he declared it his favourite book, supplementing the Latin with a smart folio edition of its translation by Joseph Rickaby SJ (p.151). The ‘transcendentals’ of truth, the good, and beauty figure in Stephen Dedalus’s discourse, but O’Rourke, in a searching account (pp. 179–87), shows that Joyce had not mastered Thomist thought on them. O’Rourke sometimes sounds like the scholastic textbooks of Joyce’s student days (by Rickaby, Michael Maher SJ, Richard F. Clarke SJ), serenely laying down the way things are, and pitying improperly trained thinkers who fall short of seeing it. In Thomas, it is reality (being) that is desired as good, known as true, enjoyed as beautiful, but Joyce jumbles these when he talks of truth and beauty as being desired as ‘good.’ ‘It is true that beauty and truth may be labeled good, but only in a secondary or supervenient sense; ontologically, they do not subsist in themselves but abide in the relationship between concrete entities and the capacities of intellect and will’ (pp. 177–8). Insofar as Joyce claims to write *ad mentem divi Thomae* such strictures have merit, but a more apposite critique of his amateur scholasticism might urge that he retreat to a more concrete phenomenology inspired by modern literary masters.

*Finnegans Wake* poses a particular difficulty, in that as a dream book it leaves no space for the element in which Aristotle and Aquinas moved, namely rational argument. If *A Portrait* leaves its protagonist not ‘a stable sense of himself’ but ‘a series of selves’ (p. 130), Aristotelean stability cannot be expected in the scissiparous flux of the *Wake*. But O’Rourke finds apt quotes from it to illustrate many of Joyce’s philosophical thoughts. He even begins to persuade me to take seriously Joyce’s aspiration ‘to have the entire universe, culture, history, thought, and tradition refracted through the genius of a single mind’ (p.162) in ‘a sustained attempt to engage with the great questions of human nature and reality’ (p. 163).

‘Joyce had a natural philosophical penchant; he was interested in basic problems’ (p. 232). But the parts of his thought that visibly connect with philosophy are but the tip of an iceberg. The big philosophical questions he touches on are not necessarily what most loom in his thought, any more, say, than the philosophy of Schopenhauer is what lies deepest in Wagner’s music-dramas. As a student, the correspondent of Ibsen and translator of Hauptmann was a fount of avant-garde ideas. He did not follow a course in metaphysics, and his literary cast of mind may have induced the distortions O’Rourke finds in his restatements of St Thomas. ‘Joyce had doubtless the Wordsworthian gifts of “clearest insight,” and “amplitude of mind” but exercised these in the service of the literary imagination.... Had he developed the philosophical habits of reasoning and analysis, he would have explored more deeply the topics that continued to interest him’ (p. 233). But great imaginative writers with an amateurish and uncertain relation to philosophy (Shakespeare, Goethe, Proust, Rilke, T. S. Eliot) can offer philosophy an irreducible challenge. Regret would be misplaced here, but one might regret that modern Ireland has no philosopher of equal stature with Joyce and Yeats. That might have something to do with the over-

investment in Thomism as an orthodoxy. Joyce ultimately disinvests in all orthodoxies; only so could he have given Derrida's deconstruction its Bible in the *Wake*. He could genuinely admire Aristotle and Aquinas, champion them and use them, yet refuse to be bound fast by them. Be that as it may, Fran O'Rourke has provided Joyceans with an essential frame of his mental universe, which will allow more extravagant accounts of his alleged philosophy to be checked and counterbalanced.

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