

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.