

## Two recent publications by authors associated with the Symposium Thomisticum

*Ciphers of Transcendence. Essays in Philosophy of Religion in Honour of Patrick Masterson:* <https://irishacademicpress.ie/product/ciphers-of-transcendence-essays-in-philosophy-of-religion-in-honour-of-patrick-masterson/>

Includes essays by Alasdair MacIntyre, John Dillon, John Haldane, Philip Pettit, Denys Turner, Dermot Moran, Richard Kearney. Also an unpublished poem by Seamus Heaney.

### Endorsements

Patrick Masterson is the very soul of what Aquinas called *sapientia*, a fetching blend of intelligence, wit and humanity, a master of both the speculative and the practical, which is reflected in the range and depth of this outstanding collection of studies. A well-deserved and ringing tribute to one of the luminaries of Irish philosophy and intellectual life. (**John D. Caputo, Syracuse University**)

*Ciphers of Transcendence* is a superb collection of essays from a group of experts in the areas of philosophy of religion and ethics and of the history of philosophy in the classical, medieval and modern eras. All the essays are concerned in some way with the notion of ‘transcendence’ which is something that ought to mean more to us as we so readily fight among ourselves and trash our earth-bound world. All the authors have had some connection with Professor Patrick Masterson either in Ireland or in other parts of Europe and so the volume stands as a fitting tribute to him who is one of Europe’s more interesting and important modern thinkers. (**William Lyons MRIA, Emeritus Professor, Trinity College Dublin**)

This is an impressive collection of essays honouring Patrick Masterson—philosopher, university president and novelist—who has long played a central role in Irish intellectual life. Along with eminent colleagues from other countries, some of the best-known Irish philosophers have contributed to the volume, which paints a lively picture of important issues in contemporary philosophy of religion, metaphysics, and ethics. Highly recommended. (**Philipp W. Rosemann, National University of Ireland, Maynooth**)

This is a splendid collection of essays, illuminating diverse philosophical themes. by many of the significant voices in the Irish philosophical scene. The writers and essays pay due honour to Patrick Masterson, himself a significant contributor to philosophical and academic matters in Ireland for many decades. (**William Desmond, Villanova University**)

A rich and wide-ranging volume, which explores the perennially fascinating notion of transcendence from a host of different, and often highly illuminating, perspectives. (**John Cottingham, University of Reading**)

Fran O'Rourke, *Aristotelian Interpretations*:

<https://irishacademicpress.ie/product/aristotelian-interpretations/>

### **Endorsements**

'In these splendid essays O'Rourke teaches us how to understand Aristotle's contemporary relevance in often new and always illuminating ways.'

*Alasdair MacIntyre, University of Notre Dame*

'A refreshingly different collection of essays, generous in its range of reference, acute in mature philosophical judgment, and wearing great learning lightly. The volume is bookended by autobiographical reflections (in which Aristotle's surprising presence in Irish folk tradition emerges), and by a study of his impact on James Joyce. In between O'Rourke gives us Aristotle whole: metaphysics, natural philosophy, psychology, ethics, aesthetics. This is an Aristotle who still has much to teach and intrigue us.'

*Malcolm Schofield, University of Cambridge*

'In this beautiful collection of essays, O'Rourke combines impeccable scholarship with passionate philosophical engagement. Aristotle lives in the twentyfirst century through books like this.'

*Lloyd P. Gerson, University of Toronto*

'Fran O'Rourke's interpretations are entirely reliable as presentations of Aristotle's thought. They have the merit of comparing it both with modern science and today's philosophy, highlighting its permanent value. The language is clear and accessible; what strikes the reader is the enthusiasm of the author and the freshness of his exposition.'

*Enrico Berti, University of Padova*

'This is not just another collection of scholarly articles, of which there are many, but a personal encounter with Aristotle. It starts with a wonderfully poetic evocation of the author's childhood as budding Aristotelian; the interpretations, however, are mature and original. O'Rourke does not write for a detached scholarly audience or address dry and abstract themes. His thoughtful and reflective essays, scholarly through and through, display a rare empathy with the ancient philosopher and a sensitivity to themes of personal importance to all readers.'

*Carlos Steel, former President, Higher Institute of Philosophy, Leuven*

'O'Rourke's book exemplifies the remarkable synthetic power and attraction of an Aristotelian framework for grasping unity across diverse areas of reality. It also provides a powerful critical tool for assessing metaphysical claims made by contemporary science. It consciously counteracts an understanding of our world as composed not of realities but of relativities... *Aristotelian Investigations* is a must-read for anyone who wants to discuss contemporary Aristotelianism.'

*International Journal of Philosophical Studies*

Reviews by the following are copied below:

James V. Schall, *The University Bookman*

Arthur Madigan, S.J., *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*

Dousa, Thomas M., *The Catholic Library World*

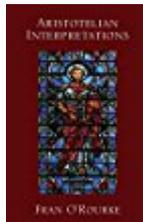
Angela Curran, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*

Mark Hederman, *Studies*

Markus H. Woerner, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*

James V. Schall, S. J., *The University Bookman*, Spring 2018

### **On Aristotle: Impressive Interpretations**



“The power of symbolic signification is possible only because the human mind has an unlimited openness to the entirety of reality, and can thus create a connection between any two entities. Aristotle expresses this openness in the *De Anima* when he states: ‘The soul is, in a sense, all things.’ The mind has the ability to intentionally receive any reality in mental form and intentionally fabricate countless modalities of meaning. The mind, he states, can become everything and make everything.”<sup>[1]</sup>

“To accept that we have a genetic propensity to behave morally does not yet explain why we are obliged to act morally. Applying Aquinas’ comment on the individual nature of knowledge (*hic homo intelligit*), we may affirm: *hic homo deliberat et agit*. Moral action is a matter of personal motivation, resolve, action, responsibility, and consequence. It requires a sense of personal identity and continued moral commitment over time. The center of moral behavior is the individual person, consciously aware of herself or himself as motivated for individual reasons, and aware of the responsibilities and consequences attending on one’s actions.”<sup>[2]</sup>

—Fran O’Rourke, *Aristotelian interpretations*

Liberal education means insight into *what things are*, into the truth of things, and into how they fit together, how and why they act. The word “liberal” in “liberal education” means freedom from

ignorance, coercion, and vice in order to discover the whole of reality. It never properly means doing or thinking as we please with no relation to reality, including our own nature. The best way to acquire a “liberal education” today might well be simply to imitate James Joyce’s early 1900s sojourns in Paris. There, as Fran O’Rourke recounts, Joyce set himself down in the Bibliothèque de Sainte-Geneviève to read a French translation of most of the works of Aristotle. He had already begun reading Aristotle in his earlier academic life in Ireland.

Of course, today nothing more countercultural could be imagined than a “liberal education” consisting of a careful reading and rereading of Aristotle to understand both present and past times and minds. And yet, when we come across a writer like Fran O’Rourke, who does know his Aristotle, we begin to suspect that, just maybe, we best begin here with Aristotle, whose ostentatious rejection is often held to be the foundation of the modern world. But as Henry Veatch wrote in his incisive 1974 book on Aristotle, when this same modern world has exhausted itself in following the consequences of what happens when we reject Aristotle, it may be best to return to the sanity that always prevails when reading Aristotle.<sup>[3]</sup> This view was also that of Leo Strauss, who understood that the recovery of our souls involved recovering the sanities that we find in Aristotle.<sup>[4]</sup>

But doesn’t the main problem in Paris today revolve around Muslim terror, not the condition of European philosophy? Yet, if we recall Avicenna, Averroes, al Ghazali, and other Muslim philosophers, we will soon see that Aristotle was very much pertinent to most of the issues that we have with Islam today. I recall hearing the famous Lebanese philosopher and politician, Charles Malik, once remarking in conversation that the main intellectual link between Islam and the West was precisely Aristotle. To understand why Islam did not, in the end, follow Aristotle is to understand why terror can be and is claimed to be a good.<sup>[5]</sup> The main problem with Islam does not concern its terror, but its ideas about truth and terror.

To read Aristotle is to begin to know how things are. And to know how and why things are is to be educated liberally.

Aristotle is himself a liberal education. He is the one who best explains to us why we seek to know things “for their own sake,” why we need to know the order of things. No one, even to this day, works his way as carefully though the whole range of reality as carefully and clearly as does Aristotle. And when other thinkers come close, it is usually because they are themselves first readers of Aristotle. To read Aristotle is to begin to know how things are. And to know how and why things are is to be educated liberally.

We cannot deal with Muslim voluntarism, itself a rejection of Aristotle, if the root of our own philosophy—as it has mostly been since the fifteenth century—is basically but another form of the same voluntarism. The initial problem with Islam is, in fact, the rejection of the central teaching of Aristotle that man is a rational animal in which will follows intellect. The will cannot create its own contents. It must first receive then from reason open to what already is. Man cannot define what is real or good apart from his knowledge of *what is*. Aristotle and Islam do not come up in O’Rourke’s book as Aristotle and Ireland/Europe do.<sup>[6]</sup> But still, we would not be wrong to suspect that the present problem of the soul both of Europe and of Islam is linked to each other by the rejection of what is central in Aristotle, who, more than anyone, stood at the origin of the mind of our civilization.

Fran O'Rourke is a man of many parts, even a singer of Irish folk music. He retired in 2016, after thirty-five years teaching in the philosophy department of University College, Dublin. He studied in Cologne and Vienna. His doctorate is from Leuven in Belgium. He has written on Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas, and James Joyce. This book, in fact, ends with a chapter on the influence of Aristotle on Joyce. The chapter serves as a summary of the work of both men. "True genius discerns both the singularity of the grand unity and the minutiae of multiplicity; for that reason it is exceedingly rare," O'Rourke writes.

The brilliance of [Joyce's] *Ulysses* is that of a universal panorama woven from the torn threads and broken shards of multifarious living; its success derives from the writer's mastery of creative analogy. Joyce is himself proof of Aristotle's conviction that analogy is a sign of unique genius, a natural gift that cannot be acquired. Joyce effected in art a fundamental insight gained from his study of Aristotle. (238)

One of the most remarkable themes in this book is how analogy and metaphor can bind all things together, even the most disparate ones. This capacity is due in large part to the mind's ability to abstract the forms of concrete, individual things and in that spiritual form to see the relations that exist between even the most remote or unsuspected things.

For an academic book, it begins unexpectedly with a nostalgic account of the author's family experience on the farms and lands of Ireland. At first, this introduction seems out of place. Yet it is a very poetic chapter. "I loved the wonderful landscapes of the west of Ireland, especially the mutual proximity of land and sea," O'Rourke writes.

"Coming from the flat Irish midlands, I was immediately attracted to the mountains of Connemara. Martin Heidegger once remarked that the philosopher should also be a good mountain climber. This is true not only in a vague metaphorical sense; there is a keen affinity between mountaineering and philosophy, a parallel between the physical activity of one and the spiritual activity of the other." (10)

In this passage, we already glimpse at work that analogous relation of things that enables us to understand one thing by its similarity to another.

We may be tempted to think we are pure spirits, but we are not—and it is best that we are not.

When we come to the end of this introduction to O'Rourke's childhood memories of what he saw and did in Ireland, we begin to realize that what he is really doing is to introduce us to the world that Aristotle saw, not in Ireland, of course, but in Macedonia or any place where nature, human and otherwise, presents itself for us to observe it, to behold it, to think about it, *what it is*. All the way through this book, we are conscious of the fact that to understand *what is* we cannot bypass our own individual seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching things with the faculties that are given to us by the mere and wondrous fact that we exist and exist as human beings, body and soul, our own body and our own soul. And yet, we constitute one being, one substance, one person. We may be tempted to think we are pure spirits, but we are not—and it is best that we are not. O'Rourke wisely repeats the passage in Aristotle's *Ethics* that reminds us that, given a choice, no one would want to be someone else.

Aristotle covers so much. O'Rourke systematically goes through how Aristotle looks on being, the causes, our final destiny, how we know, what mind means, what soul means, why there is a "First Mover" who moves by thought thinking itself. "Existence is naturally desirable; to be happy is to actualize human existence in the best possible manner" (86). We "actualize" our existence by living it. But as human beings existence is not just brought to its perfection automatically or by some outside agent, however much we depend on the cosmos and its origins for what we are initially. I was particularly struck by O'Rourke's awareness that the drama of existence itself is what is played out in each of our human lives. The existence of millions and billions of human beings on this planet is not actualized in some collective form or ideal. It is actualized in each existing human being.

Though we exist as individual persons, because of our knowledge and our power to act on account of it, we are not deprived of the rest of the world.

"We do not have simply a vague desire for the fact of being," O'Rourke writes. "Our happiness derives from the awareness of our own life as good; each man's existence is desirable for himself... Self-awareness is a certainty; it is concomitant self-awareness of ourselves in our knowing the world and as agents within the world" (86). Though we exist as individual persons, because of our knowledge and our power to act on account of it, we are not deprived of the rest of the world. Through knowing, we can become what is not ourselves without changing what is not ourselves. This fact is basically why it is all right to be a single, relatively insignificant human being. We desire our own existence, but this existence opens out onto *all that is* wherein we self-actualize ourselves in terms of our chosen relation to the good that is there and that we come to know, to accept or reject.

The chapters on the ethics and politics of Aristotle are very good. But in reading them, we are conscious of the fact that without that to which Aristotle has argued in his metaphysics, physics, *De Anima*, and logic, we will not catch just how ethics and politics fit into the whole—why man is such a unique being in the universe. Aristotle says that "If man were the highest being, politics would be the highest science." But since he is not the highest being, his own highest practical science is politics. But this politics, at its best, is itself ordered to what is higher than man. He is ordered to what is higher through his own soul as it exists in his own personal being.

This ordering is the ultimate source of his dignity and why politics is ultimately limited, by the good, by the Socratic principle that it is never right, for anyone, including the statesman, to do wrong. "The city came into being that man might be *able* to live, but continues to exist that he may live well" (124). The living well includes all the practical and theoretical things that can manifest what it means to be mortal in this world. The common good means the effort to activation of all the goods man in his variety can bring forth in this world.

When politics has come to be what it ought to be, it turns us finally not to the practical life of this world but indirectly to the contemplative life, to our wonder about what it is all about and how to articulate what we can know about the highest things, even if, as Aristotle also said in the last book of the *Ethics*, it is small in comparison to other, more visible practical things. "There is ambivalence at the heart of wonder. It is not simply the absence of knowledge, but a knowledge that there is something beyond its reach. This finds its explanation in Aristotle's distinction between what is intelligible in itself and what is evident to us" (32). We realize that we are limited beings with a power

of mind that is *capax omnium*, capable of knowing *all that is*. Thus we must grant that “the intelligibility of the real far exceeds our understanding.” It is this realization that is no doubt the primary natural reason why something like a divine revelation might just be both possible and even actual.<sup>[7]</sup> It also explains the “restless hearts” that we so readily associate with Augustine.

“Truth is the affirmation of reality as it is; in so far as something is, it necessarily is; in so far as a judgment is true, it is necessarily true. Truth has an absolute and necessary quality deriving from the unconditional character of existence itself. Once being is, it cannot not be: in so far as an assertion is true, it is true for all time” (91). The contemplative order—beyond politics but not bypassing it—and its relation to the virtues is the proper locus of the truth to which the mind is open. Truth is concerned with the things *that are*, with their affirmation. The practical world is filled with things made, spoken, sung, tasted, with the things that result from our capacity to imitate things, to find out how they work, what they are. The things that are and the things made need not be antagonistic to each other, though they can be when used by men out of their proper order.

O’Rourke, again, is fascinated with the relation of things to each other. He even catches Aristotle’s oft-quoted remark about the relation of humor to intelligence:

Most witty sayings, according to Aristotle, derive from metaphor and beguile the listener in advance: expecting something else, his surprise is all the greater. His mind seems to say, according to Aristotle, “How true, but I missed it.” Such discovery provides the pleasure of easy and rapid learning. (116)

Laughter is a sign, a hint that the universe reveals ultimately a joy that is both expected and unexpected.

We learn by distinguishing one thing from another, by recognizing that this thing is not that thing. We name things; sometimes very different things have the same name. There are many languages that name the same thing differently. Laughter is a sign, a hint that the universe reveals ultimately a joy that is both expected and unexpected. This truth was the marvelous point on which Chesterton ended his *Orthodoxy*. The possibility of wit, of humor, relates to the fact that we can hold in our spiritual souls at the same time words with different meanings, experiences with different understandings about what they are. The simultaneous seeing of all these possibilities makes us laugh.

The subject of wit and laughter again brings up a refrain in O’Rourke’s understanding of Aristotle that gets to the core of things. Aristotle’s view of the cosmos is that ultimately it is coherent. “Nature is inherently coherent; it is not, as he expresses it, a ‘series of episodes’ like a badly constructed tragedy. The perception of the world as an interrelated wickerwork of substances and causes gives foundation to the conviction that the cosmos is essentially and integrally united.” When we read these words, we are not reading the words of an astronaut or an astronomer. What we are reading are the words that flow out of Aristotle, who already sensed and understood how and why things fit together. What follows in line of our true knowledge is not something that Aristotle would not have recognized, but something that he argued to be the case all along.

In conclusion, let me return to the two initial citations that are found at the beginning of these reflections. The first concerns the mind that is found in each member our kind. It is because we have minds that we can worry about, wonder about, what is out there, what is not ourselves. And we can not only pay attention to it, but we can see its diversity and its unities. But we know with our mind not

only what is not ourselves, but also the possibility that we can change, reshape many things. We even suspect that we can and should use things that are just there through no contribution of our own. Indeed, it suggests that the uninhabited world was in fact meant to be inhabited. It was meant to provide a place for a being that knew and acted.

The second citation concerns the fact that it is not the species man that thinks and acts, but its individual members, Socrates, Mary, and Henry. Human life exists in the form of lives of individual persons in given times and places, threescore years and ten. All such beings have talents and capacities that might differ somewhat. At bottom they know that what they do with their given span of time defines what they shall be. O'Rourke is consistent in his insistence that for Aristotle man has a soul but he is not just a soul. His senses and his mind work together to provide him with knowledge of what is not himself. "Responsibilities and consequences" do follow on our actions. These actions in turn are based on knowledge that we initially acquire from our beholding what is out there, what is not ourselves, whether it be in the Ireland of Joyce or the Macedonia of Aristotle.

When we reread Aristotle in the light of Fran O'Rourke's "interpretations," we quickly become aware that the most secure path we can find to a "liberal education" still begins with Plato and leads through the works of Aristotle, whether we read him in French, Greek, or Irish. Most of the reasons given about why Aristotle is out-of-date are either themselves now also "out-of-date" or were never understood with the clarity that Fran O'Rourke saw in the natural things in Ireland that led him to the wondrous things seen and recorded by Aristotle. Finally, this is where we need to begin re-evaluating what we mean by a "liberal education."

Notes

1. Fran O'Rourke, *Aristotelian Interpretations* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press 2016), 206.
2. Ibid, 195.
3. Henry Veatch, *Aristotle: A Contemporary Appreciation* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1974). See also Robert Sokolowski, *The Phenomenology of the Human Person* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2007).
4. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1964).
5. See Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind* (Wilmington: ISI Books 2010).
6. See Joshua Mitchell, *Tocqueville in Arabia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
7. See James V. Schall, *Political Philosophy and Revelation: A Catholic Reading* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press 2014).

Posted: March 25, 2018 in On Letters and Essays.

**Arthur Madigan, S.J., *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews***

This volume brings together ten of Fran O'Rourke's essays published between 2003 and 2015. Most of these first appeared in edited collections, including three collections published in Athens that might be particularly difficult to obtain. Despite being written for different occasions, the essays exhibit a remarkable unity or consistency of viewpoint. They are not so much a series of interpretations of various Aristotelian texts, as a series of interpretations of philosophical and scientific issues from an Aristotelian point of view.

O'Rourke writes in a voice that is both recognizably Aristotelian and distinctively his own. While he is well aware of the exegetical and philosophical work on Aristotle done by (for instance) John Cooper, Terence Irwin, G.E.R. Lloyd, Martha Nussbaum, and Richard Sorabji, his own approach is different, focusing mainly on what the French would call the *grandes lignes* of Aristotle's philosophy or what we might call his Big Ideas. Where recent work on Aristotle in English for the most part ignores Thomas Aquinas, Aquinas is a strong if unobtrusive presence in this book; the bibliography lists eight of his books and the index gives him 29 entries. For the record, O'Rourke's first book was *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Brill, 1992). Readers looking for the latest exegesis of *Metaphysics Zeta 13*, *Nicomachean Ethics I 7*, or similar classic texts may not find what they are looking for in this book. Readers looking for a broadly Aristotelian reflection on contemporary issues are likely to find in it a wealth of stimulating insights.

Remarkably for someone writing on Aristotle, O'Rourke begins (1-19) with a "Portrait of the Author as a Young Aristotelian," recounting his childhood experiences of farm life in the Irish midlands, of Galway and Connemara, of hillwalking and sailing in Ireland, of traveling and mountain climbing in Greece. This narrative establishes a closeness to nature that has fostered O'Rourke's affinity with Aristotle. In this context he then (19-28) raises the curtain on the ten chapters that follow.

Chapter 1, "Wonder and Universality. Philosophy and Poetry in Aristotle," explores the many similarities between philosophy and poetry as Aristotle understood them: their universal scope, their origin in wonder, their aim to express "the elusive mystery of reality" (32). The desire to know the origin of all things, to grasp the totality of the real, lies at the root of poetry and philosophy alike.

Following up on this, Chapter 2, "Philosophy and Poetry in Aristotle. Interpreting and Imitating Nature," gives an Aristotelian take on the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy (*Republic* 607b). Where Plato had intensified the quarrel by separating transcendent truth from sense experience, Aristotle grounded the human search for truth on sensible reality, thereby restoring the unity of knowledge and healing the quarrel. Aristotle understands art as an imitation of nature, not in the sense that a work of art is an image of a natural substance, but in the sense that the human creative process imitates natural growth.

The goal of art, and in particular the goal of tragic poetry, is to increase our astonishment at what we find in nature.

Chapter 3, “Human Nature and Destiny in Aristotle,” presents a comprehensive survey of Aristotle’s understanding of the human being, drawing on his *De anima*, biological works, *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Politics*. While some interpreters play down those texts in which Aristotle asserts that human beings are akin to the divine and suggests that the active mind is in some way separate or separable from the body, O’Rourke takes those passages at full strength, but admits that they are not entirely consistent with Aristotle’s insistence on the unity of the human being. Aristotle believes that our human destiny on some level lies beyond our natural state, even though this threatens his unified metaphysical view of the world. “While it seems Aristotle hoped to discern in man a cipher of transcendence, an element rising above the stream of biological continuity, he did not fully succeed within the terms of his own philosophy” (85).

Chapter 4, “Knowledge and Necessity in Aristotle,” surveys the principal senses of necessity that O’Rourke finds in Aristotle: the necessity of the apprehension of the proper sensibles; the necessity of the principle of non-contradiction; the necessity of truth; the necessity that belongs to Aristotelian causation; the necessity of the form or nature present in individuals; and the necessity of the first mover.

Chapter 5, “Aristotle and the Metaphysics of Metaphor,” argues that the use of metaphor in ordinary speech and in poetry is grounded on the unity in diversity of human nature and of reality generally. The necessary foundation for transferred or metaphorical resemblance is what O’Rourke calls genuine metaphysical analogy. He says, citing Henri Bergson:

if we remove from Aristotle’s philosophy everything derived from poetry, religion, and social life, as well as from a somewhat rudimentary physics and biology, we are left with the grand framework of a metaphysics which, he [Bergson] believes, is the natural metaphysics of the human intellect. (121; this view of Bergson’s is also cited at 28, 181, and 235 and is a leitmotif for the collection)

This natural metaphysics, O’Rourke suggests, is the best explanation for metaphor.

Chapter 6, “Aristotle’s Political Anthropology,” explores three interrelated questions. Is the term “political” proper to humans, or does it also apply to animals? The essential meaning of the term is its distinctively human meaning; it applies to ants, bees, and other such animals only in a secondary and derivative way. How can the polis be described as natural if it does not conform to Aristotle’s definition of a nature (*phusis*), an immanent principle of motion and rest? While the polis does not strictly speaking have such a principle, it does have what O’Rourke calls “a defining *eidos* or form” (136-37) that emerges from the natural tendencies of its members. How can the primacy of the polis be reconciled with the fact that its citizens are in some way independent, with autonomous activities and purposes of their own? The

polis is prior in the sense that is the necessary condition for its members to live and prosper; without it they could not carry on their activities or carry out their purposes.

Chapter 7, “Aristotle and the Metaphysics of Evolution,” argues at length, and in conversation with Darwin, recent evolutionary biologists such as Ernst Mayr, Stephen Jay Gould, and Richard Dawkins, and scholars of Aristotle’s biology such as David Balme, Allan Gotthelf, and James Lennox, that while Aristotle explicitly rejects the evolution of species, “his philosophy is in many ways eminently receptive to the theory” (145). Aristotle’s metaphysics — meaning by this his concepts of act and potency, form and finality, the nature of causation and the explanation of chance — is precisely what theorists of evolution need in order to address the philosophical questions that their theory raises. While the perennial insights of Aristotle’s metaphysics lie beyond the scope of science, including the life sciences, they are important resources for articulating the life sciences.

On a more controversial note, Chapter 8, “Evolutionary Ethics. A Metaphysical Evaluation,” offers a critical appreciation, from an Aristotelian point of view, of Edward O. Wilson’s *Sociobiology* and similar works by Michael Ruse and Richard Dawkins. Most fundamentally, “sociobiology is incapable of recognizing the central philosophical question of self-existence” (208), the question posed by Camus: is life worth living? And this question cannot be detached from the metaphysical question of why anything at all should exist.

In the final analysis, evolutionary ethics is founded upon a biological endless regress in which persons have no ultimacy. Human individuals exist for the exclusive purpose of propagating offspring, whose aim is likewise simply to propagate. To what end? . . . The activity of reproduction is not itself the foundation of morality. (211)

What, then, is the foundation of morality? The answer, O’Rourke suggests, is “the status of each member of the human species as an individual consciously aware of his or her freedom within the totality of the real, and the inescapable demand to make one’s life personally meaningful, with all the possibilities and limits of our common nature” (211-12).

Chapter 9, “Aristotle and Evolutionary Altruism,” continues the Aristotelian criticism of sociobiology. The target here is the claim that human beings are altruistic because altruistic behavior benefits the human gene pool. This is wrong on two main counts. First, observation of animals does not indicate that their behavior is altruistic; but if we do not observe altruism in animal behavior, the project of explaining altruism as a genetic inheritance is wrongheaded. Second, and more importantly, when selfless altruism is found among human beings, it is found not in some supposed tendency of humans to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their species, but in friendships between virtuous people.

Altruism, which it [sociobiology] claims is genetically motivated, is the figleaf providing sociobiology with the appearance of an ethics hitherto difficult to justify within the context of Darwinism. The scandal for traditional ethics has been the

problem of evil; the challenge for evolutionary ethics is the fact of goodness, which makes little sense within the struggle for survival. (225)

In Chapter 10, “Joyce and Aristotle,” O’Rourke, who is also the author of *Allwisest Stagyrte: Joyce’s Quotations from Aristotle* (National Library of Ireland, 2005), presents a fascinating range of data on Joyce’s youthful education in the works of Aristotle, especially the *De anima* and the *Metaphysics*. He then considers at some length the Aristotelian features of *Ulysses*, in particular the recognition that the universe is characterized by analogy or similarity across diversity, the adherence to the principle that art imitates nature (correctly understood, that artistic process is like natural process), the insistence that beauty and tragedy require a certain magnitude, and the commitment to Aristotelian realism as opposed to Platonic idealism. The story of Stephen Dedalus is the story of an Aristotelian confronting both the radical alternative of Platonism and what O’Rourke calls the modern rejection of self. “Aristotelian metaphysics and psychology provide Stephen in *Ulysses* with the vocabulary and concepts he needs to understand himself and to interpret the world” (240).

Let me close with some marvelously suggestive lines from the Introduction:

We are the only animals that can be happy. Other animals have no share in well-being or in purposive living; their purpose is life, that of man is the good life. Morality and happiness are personal; virtue depends upon ourselves. As a result there is no hiatus between ‘is’ and ‘ought’: the notion of a ‘naturalistic fallacy’ is alien. Man’s ‘is’ is already an ‘ought’, his existence embraces obligation . . . . The distance between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ is that between our raw state and the self-project we discern; the dynamism and tension is the freedom experienced as we cover that distance in reflective acts of self-attainment. (26-27)

Such is the wonderfully humane Aristotelian vision that O’Rourke offers for our consideration.

**Dousa, Thomas M. *The Catholic Library World*; Pittsfield Vol. 87, Iss. 3, (Mar 2017)**

In some periods of the past, Aristotle held pride of place in the philosophical firmament as a lodestar for other thinkers. The poet Dante famously characterized the Stagirite as “the master of those who know,” and Saint Thomas Aquinas referred to him simply as the Philosopher. Within the current philosophical landscape, Aristotle’s thought no longer enjoys the position of preeminence that it did in the past. Yet Aristotle still has much to offer philosophers today, if they have but the willingness to hear his voice and ponder his message. One such listener is Fran O’Rourke, professor emeritus of philosophy at University College Dublin and author of the well-regarded monograph *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (2005). In *Aristotelian Interpretations*, he offers readers ten essays, originally written between 2003 and 2015, that expound and develop various aspects of Aristotle’s philosophy.

The book opens with an autobiographically colored introductory essay in which O'Rourke discusses his personal affinity for Aristotle's attitude to nature and reality, an affinity he traces back to his own experiences growing up in, and coming to know, the Irish countryside. The following two papers explore the similarities and differences between philosophy and poetry in Aristotle, one focusing on the element of wonder shared by these fields and the other on the different ways in which the philosopher and poet imitate nature. The next three essays turn to philosophical anthropology, with a paper on Aristotle's view of human nature and destiny; epistemology, with an article on his understanding knowledge and necessity; and metaphysics, with a chapter on the metaphysics of metaphor according to Aristotle. The sixth paper, on the political anthropology of Aristotle, discusses the metaphysical basis for his famous characterization of the human being as a "political animal" (*zoon politikon*). The following three essays turn to questions of biology and ethics as they relate to evolution. One lays out the possibility of applying Aristotle's metaphysical framework to evolution as a biological process, another presents a critique of sociobiological ethics in light of Aristotelian thought, and the third deepens this critique with special reference to the question of whether sociobiological theory adequately explains human motivations for altruistic behavior. The final chapter returns to a Hibernian theme, examining the influence of Aristotle upon the famous modernist Irish writer James Joyce. O'Rourke shows that Aristotle's philosophy, which Joyce encountered as a student in Dublin and Paris, left a lasting impression on his thought. Eighty pages of endnotes provide ample documentation, while a well-stocked bibliography and excellent indexes round out the volume.

The foregoing list of chapters cannot begin to do justice to what is truly a splendid book. O'Rourke couches his exceptionally clear exposition and well-considered application of Aristotle's philosophical ideas in fresh and sprightly prose that reflects his enthusiasm for his subject. Although the essays were written over a number of years and for different occasions, the recurrence of certain themes throughout—above all, that of Aristotle's "unrestricted openness [to] the fulness of reality" (27) as it plays out in his metaphysics and theory of knowledge - gives the volume an intellectual unity and coherence that make it much more than the sum of its parts. Indeed, underlying O'Rourke's *Aristotelian Interpretations* is a truly integral vision of Aristotle's thought. This scholarly, yet eminently readable, book will be a marvelous addition to any academic library supporting a program in philosophy.

**Angela Curran, Bryn Mawr Classical Review 2018.10.22**

Fran O'Rourke, a professor at University College, Dublin, writes on a wide range of topics in Aristotle. This collection brings together ten of O'Rourke's essays, previously published between 2003 and 2015. The volume begins with a personal introduction written for this volume in which O'Rourke reflects on his life growing up in on the Western coast of Ireland

and how this upbringing instilled in him a love of philosophy and Aristotle, in particular. The collection ends with a fascinating discussion of the James Joyce-Aristotle connection. The chapters in between engage in a lucid and insightful manner on a host of themes in Aristotle ranging from metaphysics, poetics, ethics, politics, and science.

With a volume of previously published work, there is always the danger that an author will bring together essays with no common thread solely for the sake of making his or her work available to a broader audience. Fortunately, with this volume, O'Rourke has chosen essays with, broadly speaking, a common theme. "Each essay is in one way or another motivated by the attitude of marvel that Aristotle recognized as the wellspring of philosophy, which he himself conveys frequently in his writings" (p. 21). As O'Rourke reads Aristotle, wonder or marvel (O'Rourke uses "wonder" and "marvel" interchangeably as translations of "thauma") is "especially revealing of human knowledge and inquiry" (p. 31). By this, O'Rourke seems to mean that the attitude of wonder, which is "the reflective admiration of that which we know but do not fully comprehend," is the impetus for knowledge (*epistēmē*) and is even an 'incipient knowledge' (*gnosis*)." For when we marvel at things in nature we become aware that what we are immediately acquainted with surpasses our understanding (p. 31). O'Rourke says that Aristotle's phrase from the *Parts of Animals*, "all things are marvelous," could serve as the motto for the volume. For, as O'Rourke reads Aristotle, the wondrous or marvelous is for Aristotle the motivating factor behind all areas of inquiry, whether they are philosophical or artistic, ethical or scientific (p. 39).

The view that Aristotle thinks that poetry is a source of knowledge is a strong focus of much contemporary analysis of the *Poetics*. O'Rourke contributes to this debate in three chapters in the first part of the book (Chapters 1, "Wonder and Universality, Philosophy and Poetry in Aristotle," 2, "Philosophy and Poetry in Aristotle: Interpreting and Imitating Nature" and 5, "Aristotle and the Metaphysics of Metaphor"), by discussing the role that wonder plays not only in the origins of philosophy but also in poetry. The first two chapters examine the role that wonder and a desire to understand play in explaining the shared work of philosophy and poetry. Both activities share a common origin in the lived experiences of human beings. The desire to understand more fully the items in one's experiences is the impetus for human beings to do philosophy and to make and appreciate poetry. The best poetic plots "jar and jolt" the viewer's categories of experience by presenting a series of incidents that are unforeseen, yet shown upon reflection to follow one another, by necessity or probability (p. 35).

In Chapter 5, O'Rourke offers an insightful discussion of metaphor's power to evoke marvel and astonishment. Indeed this chapter is the best illustration of what O'Rourke calls Aristotle's "metaphysical" approach to knowledge and inquiry, which is a consistent theme throughout the book. Metaphors make use of analogical reasoning. A good metaphor (for instance, an old man is a "withered stalk") encourages the listener or reader to search out the

common notion that unites two terms (*Rhetoric* 3.10, 1410b18). O'Rourke sees Aristotle as a forerunner of cognitive accounts of metaphor, which stresses the role of metaphor as a tool to discover "likeness in unlikeness" (p. 116) by jolting the mind with the surprise of recognition (p. 115). Thus, O'Rourke sees metaphor as a prime illustration of the metaphysical nature of a human being's knowledge, even in an everyday context. For in grasping the similarity introduced by the metaphor, the listener goes beyond the confines of immediate experience and moves closer to the metaphysician's understanding of the similarity between all beings as beings (p. 118).

Chapter 3 looks at Aristotle's views on what we can know about human nature. Humans occupy a special role in the natural world as beings possessing *logos*, reason. The capacity for reason distinguishes humans from all other animals (p. 59). O'Rourke's examination of knowledge in Aristotle leads him to a wide-ranging and interesting discussion of Aristotle's hylomorphism to explain the relation between body and soul. The problem is that Aristotle also thinks that a human being's nature contains an element of divinity (p. 84). O'Rourke concludes that the divine and immortal aspect of a human being ultimately threatens Aristotle's views on the unity of individual human beings as hylomorphic composites of form and matter, and points to the idea that, "the destiny of Aristotle's man lies beyond his natural state, and is in some sense beyond his control" (p. 84).

Chapter 4, "Knowledge and Necessity in Aristotle," examines the metaphysical foundations of Aristotle's empiricism. While all knowledge begins with sense experience, understanding is ultimately anchored in a principle that governs truth, the principle of non-contradiction. O'Rourke explores a significant difference between Aristotle and modern empiricists: scientific knowledge is not only universal in scope, but necessary in character, and made possible through explanations of the ultimate causes of primary substances, fixed natural kinds that are ultimately understandable through their final causes (p. 96). Thus, Aristotle's essentialism is the foundation of his epistemology.

O'Rourke considers the often-raised objection to Aristotelian essentialism that not all human beings have the capacity for rationality, for instance, mentally impaired human beings. He maintains that Aristotle can respond by saying that the "necessity" of humans' being rational animals is "hypothetical": what is necessarily the case is not that all human beings are rational, but that necessarily, *given the adequate and proper circumstances*, all humans acquire rationality, as "an acorn will become an oak tree" (p. 96). "Attainment of an individual's final immanent purpose is dependent upon the natural conditions being present for its development; this occurs, not by necessity, but for the most part" (p. 96). By extension, a baby human being will become a rational animal, given the appropriate conditions.

O'Rourke continues with a discussion of Aristotle's essentialism in Chapter 6, "Aristotle's Political Anthropology," which is a fascinating discussion of what is involved in Aristotle's

definition of a human being as a political animal. One central problem concerns how to reconcile the idea that the individual depends on political association to flourish with Aristotle's view that the best sort of life described in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 10 consists of life of contemplation (*theōria*). O'Rourke addresses this problem by understanding the claim that a human being is a rational animal as a claim about essence. The essence of a human being involves *logos*, the capacity to reason and communicate (1253a10). *Logos*, so understood, can only be fulfilled within a community (p. 142). We need to be part of a polis, then, to develop and exercise the natural and distinctive capacities for discriminating right from wrong and communicating through language. While humans are happiest when contemplating, they nevertheless achieve what is most distinctive about their nature when they participate in the shared life of political association (p. 143).

Chapter 7, "The Metaphysics of Evolution," is a carefully argued essay that is grounded in a close reading of Aristotle's work as well as a familiarity with contemporary criticisms of Aristotle. The chapter addresses the important question whether Aristotle's doctrine of substantial form necessarily excludes evolution. This question is of interest because contemporary critics who maintain that his ideas rest on an outmoded view of biology have dismissed Aristotle's metaphysics and his theory of scientific explanation. O'Rourke argues that Aristotle would not accept evolution because of his doctrine of the fixity of the species (p. 173). However, O'Rourke argues that Aristotle's notion of form, "construed as the power of constructing new individuals of that form" (p. 172) is compatible with evolution. Heredity is determined at the genetic level, and genes have form (*eidos*), even if this form is also open to mutation (p. 174). Aristotle's insight about form as the principle that explains the growth and development of an individual can then be seen in modern discussions of genetic form. O'Rourke concludes: "the principles of his metaphysics acquire new verification and relevance" (p. 174).

Chapter 8, "Evolutionary Ethics: A Metaphysical Evaluation" and Chapter Nine, "Aristotle and Evolutionary Altruism" present O'Rourke's view on how Aristotle would respond to contemporary sociobiological discussions of evolutionary ethics. These approaches, such as those found in E. O. Wilson, argue that we are ethical because being so is fitness-enhancing for the species. O'Rourke concludes that Aristotle would reject such an approach to ethics. Aristotle's ethics offers us reasons why we should want to be moral: being ethical is what makes possible human happiness and flourishing (p. 195). Aristotle's approach would be pointless if biology is destiny. Ultimately, according to O'Rourke, sociobiological approaches to ethics fail because they do not come to terms with the nature of a human being as a rational being that chooses to fulfill that nature through individual actions that express universal as well as personal values (p. 197).

One topic for further debate concerns O'Rourke's claim that wonder and understanding occupy similar roles in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *Poetics*. This claim is an essential aspect

of O'Rourke's cognitive reading of the *Poetics*, according to which poetry is the source of knowledge about human affairs. Jonathan Lear, a skeptic about the cognitive view, thinks that the relationship between wonder and understanding in the *Poetics* is the opposite of that presented in the *Metaphysics* (Lear, "Katharsis," in A. O. Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, Princeton 1992). Wonder at the natural world gives rise to philosophy and the inquiry into the ultimate nature of things (*Metaphysics* 1.1). However, in the *Poetics* Aristotle says that events are astonishing (*thaumaston*) when they occur "contrary to expectations but on account of one another" (*Poetics* 9, 1452a4-5). Lear interprets this to mean that it is the understanding that unexpected events occur on account of one another that gives rise to amazement while, in the *Metaphysics*, it is the other way around. O'Rourke seems to concede Lear's point, but then suggests that amazement can lead to mystery, which leads to inquiry, so there is no problem in thinking that wonder prompts understanding in the same way in these two texts (p. 35).

Here I think O'Rourke may be conceding too much ground to Lear, and a stronger response is available to him. When things happen contrary to expectations, this is astonishing, and it produces a desire to understand why the unexpected event occurred. When the plot links incidents via a necessary or probable connection, the audience can reflect on the structure of the plot and come to understand, in retrospect, why the events, while unexpected, were a result of what went before. So, astonishment gives rise to a desire to understand and the search for an explanation, just as Aristotle outlines in *Metaphysics* 1.1.

In O'Rourke's work, a clear picture emerges of the critical role that metaphysics plays in Aristotle's approach to philosophy, art, ethics, science, and politics. With its focus on the topic of wonder as the wellspring of philosophy, *Aristotelian Interpretations* succeeds in providing a fresh perspective on tried and true topics in Aristotle, as well as advancing a fruitful discussion of the relevance of Aristotle's essentialism for contemporary philosophy.

### **Mark Hederman, *Studies* (Dublin), June 2018**

Who is the greatest philosopher that ever lived? Many might hesitate to answer that question, Fran O'Rourke does not. For him Aristotle is, without any doubt, the holder of that title. This book substantiates the claim. The magnanimity and comprehensiveness of Aristotle's dictum that 'every realm of nature is marvellous' sums up O'Rourke's conviction and describes also his own connaturality with his hero. The maxim also serves as an underlying and unifying motif for this volume of original essays. *Aristotelian Interpretations* considers themes of perennial interest, offering new avenues of interpretation, illustrating how Aristotle's thought may be creatively applied to a variety of timeless and contemporary questions. Each chapter concerns itself with central themes of metaphysics, aesthetics, political anthropology, ethics,

and epistemology. The result is a panoramic survey of Aristotle's philosophy showing that, far from being just a figure of historical interest living over two thousand years ago, this remarkable thinker provides us with a vision which is applicable and relevant. While many of Aristotle's empirical presuppositions are obviously out of date, science having taken such gigantic strides in the meantime, his deeper intuitions and unrivalled wisdom have perennial validity.

Aristotle's philosophy, as well as being comprehensive and profound, is noted for its common sense, its belief in and reverence for nature, and its overall confidence in the human mind's capacity to discover and to formulate truth. Those who might find somewhat flat, dull, and forbidding, a preliminary glance through Aristotle's *Ethics*, for instance, should remind themselves that such an apparent banality is the result of total absorption of such thought into our cultural bloodstream. Aristotle's books have become the warp and woof of life as we were born into it. They formed the shape and fabric of the cultural shelter woven around us. That is why this book by Fran O'Rourke is such a godsend.

'We are the only animals who can be happy . . . Morality and virtue are personal . . . and virtue depends upon ourselves,' this author tells us in his introduction, echoing the master he has been studying all his life.

As for the book itself: Aristotle, in *On Poetics*, says that a good story is one in which events occur 'unexpectedly but on account of each other.' So it is with this collection of essays by Fran O'Rourke. Each essay builds from the previous, and an introduction provides a masterly and poetic vindication of the symmetry of the whole along with the credentials of the author. The collection is the work of a lifetime. Retired as Professor at University College Dublin in 2016, O'Rourke has presented to a wider readership a summary of those aspects of his subject which have pertinence to our twenty-first century preoccupations. This he does with fluency and flair. The ten essays which make up the chapters span more than ten years during which some were delivered as lectures and most were published in distinguished journals from 2003 to 2015.

Living in Ireland in the Twentieth Century many of our unquestioned assumptions about reality, unbeknownst to us, were unshakeable truths worked out by that ancient genius Aristotle. Our philosophy, over twenty seven centuries, as many have said, amounted to footnotes to Plato and Aristotle. We inherited from the Greeks a way of life, an explanation of ourselves, an architecture for civilisation. Most of our words to describe any of our important enterprises are Greek: politics, ethics, economy, philosophy etc. The list is almost half our vocabulary. Every time we invent, or are overwhelmed by, something new we reach

for a Greek word to label it. The ‘tele’, the ‘phone’, ‘gamma’ rays, ‘micro’soft, ‘paedophile’, ‘psychopath,’ all Greek words. We may, quite understandably, have thought that we had changed considerably in the twenty or so centuries which separate us from the ancient Greeks, but they set the parameters and the direction so definitively that they determined much of our more recent lifestyles, from pharmacology to the Olympic Games.

This volume presents a survey of Aristotle’s thought. There are chapters on poetry, politics, and philosophy; a presentation of Aristotle’s teaching on metaphor and analogy; all delivered with the confidence and the skill of one who is familiar with the subject and yet full of sympathy for the reader who is not. The author is also aware of the cultural prejudices which most certainly alienate a twenty-first century readership from so ancient and so prestigious a philosopher. The writing has an urgency that engages and each sentence has a pertinent ring. Perhaps the most captivating chapters are those [four] which challenge contemporary ‘sociobiology’ and so-called ‘evolutionary ethics.’ O’Rourke uses Aristotle to question such popular writers as Edward O. Wilson, Michael Ruse and Richard Dawkins. Here we have a robust Aristotelian challenge to the condescending dismissal of all ethical theory before the nineteenth century. O’Rourke ably refutes the assertion that ‘all human behaviour, including morality and religion, is based upon genetics.’ ‘Sociobiology is incapable of recognizing the central philosophical question of self-existence’ (208), which cannot be detached from the metaphysical question of why anything at all should exist.

In the final analysis, evolutionary ethics is founded upon a biological endless regress in which persons have no ultimacy. Human individuals exist for the exclusive purpose of propagating offspring, whose aim is likewise simply to propagate. To what end? . . . The activity of reproduction is not itself the foundation of morality (211).

What, then, for O’Rourke is the foundation of morality? ‘The status of each member of the human species as an individual consciously aware of his or her freedom within the totality of the real, and the inescapable demand to make one’s life personally meaningful, with all the possibilities and limits of our common nature’ (211-12).

A chapter on Joyce shows how indebted to Aristotle was the author of *Ulysses*. Not just because all those educated in Catholic Ireland were steeped in the underpinnings of his thought, but because Joyce’s very approach to creativity derives from a serious study of Aristotle’s works. O’Rourke, it should be remembered, is also the author of *Allwisest Stagyrite: Joyce’s Quotations from Aristotle* (National Library of Ireland, 2005). He presents a convincing display of data on Joyce’s youthful education in the works of Aristotle,

especially the *De anima* and the *Metaphysics*. He then considers at some length the Aristotelian features of *Ulysses*, in particular the recognition that the universe is characterized by analogy or similarity across diversity, the adherence to the principle that art imitates nature (correctly understood, that artistic process is like natural process), and the commitment to Aristotelian realism as opposed to Platonic idealism. The story of Stephen Dedalus is the story of an Aristotelian confronting both the radical alternative of Platonism and what O'Rourke calls the modern rejection of self. 'Aristotelian metaphysics and psychology provide Stephen in *Ulysses* with the vocabulary and concepts he needs to understand himself and to interpret the world' (240).

However, an even more interesting thought is hinted at: in *Finnegans Wake* Joyce may have overleaped Aristotelean causality altogether in search of an a-causal principle. An interview with Samuel Beckett in 1957, reveals the suggestion that 'Joyce's fictional method does not presume that the artist has any supernatural power, but that he has an insight into the methods and motivations of the universe ... a perception of coincidence.' This might correspond to Jung's preoccupation with 'Synchronicity: an A-causal connecting principle,' which he describes as 'the parallelism of time and meaning between psychic and psychophysical events, which scientific knowledge so far has been unable to reduce to a common principle . . . The occurrence of meaningful coincidences which, in themselves, are chance happenings, but are so improbable that we must assume them to be based on some kind of principle, or on some property of the empirical world.'

O'Rourke paints a picture of himself in the introduction as a child in rural Ireland who had access to a pre-electric age, and therefore who lived in a natural world similar to the one which Aristotle might have inhabited. We in Ireland are not so estranged from our roots that we can forget the soil in which we were nurtured. Poets such as Seamus Heaney, quoted in this introduction, are able to refresh our memories in this regard. It was through this world of unspoilt nature that both these philosophers, Aristotle from Stagira in Greece, and Fran O'Rourke from Ratheniska, in the Irish midlands, made the discoveries which formed their minds and hearts. 'A country childhood affords endless experiences of nature in its fresh sensuality'(2), O'Rourke declares with pride. These lifetime reflections of Fran O'Rourke on one of the greatest philosophers the world has known, both in their original inspiration as talks delivered throughout his professorial career, and now in their comprehensive and yet accessible form, should be required reading for all, especially those of us who think the world began when we arrived.

**Markus H. Woerner, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 2017**

‘In all natural things there is somewhat of the marvellous’ (Aristotle, *De Partibus Animalium* 645a 17–18).<sup>1</sup> Aristotle’s own guide to his researches functions equally as the motto that permeates this wide-ranging, personally committed, scholarly and lucidly written collection of articles by an Irish Aristotelian. O’Rourke (21) admits that not everyone will agree with all his interpretations of Aristotle or the conclusions to which he commits this author. However, they have considerable relevance for the discussion of contemporary truth-claims concerning metaphysics, ethics, anthropology and poetics. They form a confident invitation to debate. Like foci of an elliptical planetary orbit, the book’s topics centre on the relation between metaphysics and poetics on the one hand and on relations between the philosophy of nature and human nature on the other, forming an integrated whole. Their treatment shares a radically open attitude to reality and resists philosophical or scientific reductionism. The author explains in the Introduction that this attitude has been part and parcel of his Irish upbringing. This introduction is remarkably personal, contending that philosophy is a love of wisdom embedded in people’s ways of life, not primarily an academic activity.

In Irish folk traditions and specifically for James Joyce, Aristotle was ‘the Wise’, equally highly regarded with King Solomon, in spite of the fact that he was acknowledged not to know everything: ‘Three things Aristotle did not understand: the coming and going of the tide, the working of the honeybee, and the mind of a woman’, says an Irish triad. Wisdom, from this point of view, is not the perfected or elitist knowledge of experts, disconnected from real questions of the living world and from human experience of what it means to flourish or to fail as a human being. It is personal, existential and open to experience. Correspondingly, *Aristotelian Interpretations* is not primarily intended to provide in-depth scholarly exegesis of Aristotle’s texts for their own sake. For the most part, the book discusses issues involving a critique, in terms of an Aristotelian framework, of problematic contemporary metaphysical or ethical claims. For O’Rourke, Aristotle’s insights form, as Henri Bergson believed, ‘the natural framework of the human intellect’, since it is possible to disentangle this framework sufficiently from its historically contingent features. It rests on ‘the spontaneous urge to accept the visible world around us as real and intelligible’ (235) rather than sceptical relativism or methodical doubt. Yet relying on such a framework need not, and should not, generate dogmatic attitudes.

Hence, O’Rourke uses a circumspect but optimistic ‘realist’ method of extrapolating insights, particularly from Aristotle’s metaphysics, psychology and his zoological writings. At the opening of his book he discusses the origin of philosophizing. This is wonderment as ‘a reflective admiration of that which we know but do not fully comprehend’ (31) and its unlimited scope (*thaumazein tou pantos*). O’Rourke extends this claim by seemingly going further than ‘the philosopher’: poetry is equally based on wonderment of unlimited scope. In both cases, wonder and its range of objects are ultimately reflected in the human soul, which ‘is somehow everything that is’, providing intelligibility (Aristotle, *De Anima* 431b 21).

There is a specific sense in which the poet has greater freedom of understanding than the philosopher. Whereas the philosopher, while interpreting nature, uses concepts in order to grasp ultimate causes and principles of what he initially experiences as wondrous, the poet, by 'imitating' nature, creates wonderment in the audience, using imagination, metaphor, parable or allegory. By generating and resolving marvel in the audience, he does not explain reality conceptually. He actively brings to the fore what might be the case as either likely or necessary. He also aims at the universal, what it means to fail as a human being, for instance, but reveals it to the audience in a process of re-enacting actions and characters of specific types as unexpectedly, yet intelligibly linked to one another. This imitative process (*mimesis*) is analogous to the causal activity of nature itself. Most importantly, *mimesis* is an ability characteristic of human beings, since they are the most imitative of animals (Aristotle, *Poetica* 1448b 6–7). This activity is fundamentally linked with the human ability to reason. Both are attempts to make reality intelligible.

Three of O'Rourke's chapters at the beginning of the book specify this view. The final chapter on 'James Joyce and Aristotle' exemplifies the volume's first and principal focus by paying homage to the greatest Irish writer of the twentieth century. These chapters are concerned with the relation of philosophy and poetry to reality, their similarity and difference. Metaphor, and its working as 'transfer to one thing of a term belonging properly to another name' (Aristotle, *Poetica* 1457b 7), plays the crucial role in clarifying this relation. This transfer is based on the recognition of likeness in unlike things, providing imprecise precision in respect of what it conveys. Aristotle praises it in poetry because obscurity has a welcome place here, scorns its use in philosophy because it has an air of wondrous strangeness and lacks clarity. However, for O'Rourke, analyzing its role and its disclosing function is crucial to an understanding of their analogous relations to reality. Among the four kinds of transfer of signification in metaphor (genus to species, species to genus, species to species, and according to analogy) (Aristotle, *Poetica* 1457b 7–9), O'Rourke attempts to show that proportional metaphor, which involves 'intrinsic analogy' (Cajetan), is not only crucial for understanding the unity and diversity of human nature (ch. 3), and of knowledge (ch. 4), but foremost for grasping the unity in diversity of beings in the cosmos as a whole (ch. 5). This 'power of universal reference and comprehensiveness' (107) of analogy that underlies proportional metaphor makes it metaphysically significant. Consequently, O'Rourke does not use intrinsic analogy merely as a four-part ratio functioning as a *logical tool* of comparison between anything that can be counted, measured or compared in diverse areas of reality. For O'Rourke, through implicit sympathy with neo-scholastic '*analogia entis*' (Przywara 1962) as a metaphysical '*Ur-Prinzip*', and by side-stepping discussion of long-lasting disputes in Aristotelian-Thomist traditions of which he is nonetheless fully aware, analogy becomes much more than a logical tool or principle of cognition; it becomes part of metaphysics. However, there are two issues one might raise here. First, in Aristotle's writings, the analogous unity of being itself remains an open problem, in spite of the fact that 'the term "being" is used in many senses, yet not equivocally, but all of these are related to something which is one and a single nature' (Aristotle, *Metaphysica* 1003a 33f), namely

substance, and in spite of formulations such as ‘being from one’ or ‘aiming at one’ (Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* 1096b 25–29). Second, a radically different understanding of ‘being’, originating from an interpretation of the same text in Aristotle (*Metaphysica* VI), but presupposing the ontological univocity of ‘ens’ of Scotist traditions which re-emerge in contemporary philosophy (Deleuze 1994), remains unmentioned by O’Rourke. For him, metaphysics in the sense of seeking a first science of being qua being, and investigating the first causes and principles common to all beings, is the widest horizon for understanding the range and working of analogy.

An indication of the importance of analogy for our understanding of reality becomes obvious in Aristotle’s zoological investigations. They frequently use analogies between parts of different kinds of animals as a method of scientific ordering (‘What the feather is in a bird, the scale is in a fish’). Here O’Rourke uses an inductive generalization backed by a reason to go further: Whatever applies to analogies in zoology, applies to them generally, for him. By referring to the similarity of relations – a relation of relations in itself – among a diversity of beings, the widest possible frame for grasping universal unity among diverse substances can be formulated, since they transcend the unity of the individual, species, genus and categories of being. However, analogical relations do not represent a super-genus or a super-category; they create connections *across* categories.

Obviously, analogies are not the same as proportionate metaphors which are their linguistic expressions. Metaphysical principles such as act and potency are perfectly realized in every particular being (‘This eye actually sees and is capable of seeing’) and affirmed by *perfect* transfer to different entities as intrinsic to them (‘This bird flies, this fish swims – both move’). Yet proportional metaphors (‘Old age is to life as the sunset is to day;’ hence ‘the sunset of life’) involve an *imperfect* transfer of an attribute from its primary to its secondary subject, because the transfer to another entity of a name which primarily does not belong to it happens via a relation of similarity in some secondary or accidental sense, grasped creatively by the imagination rather than by reasoning alone. These metaphors denote something in an unverifiable, imprecisely precise way that nonetheless carries the conviction of truth and creative insight. The more vivid metaphors are, the more they disclose an actuality (*energeia*), the better they fulfil their proper function. By taking up some of Aristotle’s hints (Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1411b 21–33; 1412a 4–6), O’Rourke (112) suggests that *energeia* is the metaphysical foundation of metaphoric resemblance. Here his own poetico-metaphysical stance becomes most apparent. It is the analogical understanding of the unity of reality through reason and imagination which is open to creative discovery. Hence, ‘Aristotle and the Metaphysics of Metaphor’ (ch. 5) forms the central part of the collection. Its constitutive metaphysical presuppositions, such as the distinction between potency (*dynamis*) and actuality (*energeia*), form (*eidos/morphe*), which accounts for the basic similarity and relative continuity of beings of the same class, and matter (*hyle*), together with teleology (*telos/entelecheia*), are equally fundamental for the second focus of *Aristotelian Interpretations*, dealing with the relation between biological nature and the human being. This part is a critical response to claims made by modern theories of evolution (E. O. Wilson;

M. Ruse; R. Dawkins) which see it in terms of quasi-metaphysical, teleological explanations of the origins and final purpose of the living cosmos. Three of O'Rourke's chapters (chs 7 to 9) deal with Neo-Darwinist theories of evolution, particularly with their drastic ethical implications. He shows persuasively that they are essentially reductionist. It also turns out that despite the fact that Aristotle himself rejected evolution as a theory of a common ancestry for animals, and although he recognized man's link to primates (Aristotle, *De Partibus Animalium* 689b 31–33), O'Rourke's interpretative use of metaphysical principles, particularly that of form, allows him to accommodate the evolution of species for several reasons. Since Aristotle's form-concepts do not refer to Platonic non-material essences but refer to immanent, incarnate principles of individual substances, they are to some extent elastic. Nature, by proceeding from the inanimate to the animate by small steps, sometimes actually makes it difficult to decide whether something is animate or not (Aristotle, *De Partibus Animalium* 681a 15–17 [a sponge as plant]; Aristotle, *Historia Animalium* 487b 9–10 [a sponge as animal]). Aristotle was familiar with evolution as accidental change, happening to members of a species while they remain sufficiently similar for the most part. He also knew that abnormalities, should they increase qualitatively and quantitatively in living beings, may lead to the form of another animal (Aristotle, *Politica* 1302b 38–40). But could a series of accidental changes amount to substantial change? Provided that evolution includes the latter, when something of a certain kind (an ape) mutates into something of a different kind (a human being), then there must remain at least some element of the old which is a real potency to the new, exerting a formative as well as a transformative power which cannot be explained by matter alone, since matter is only receptive of form. Pure chance as a cause here must also be excluded, unless one admits the quiescent presence of virtualities, i.e. of forms in inexplicable disguise. Hence, real potency to something different cannot be denied in substantial change.

O'Rourke sees an analogous understanding of form at work in modern genetics, to be found in the discussion of information carried by DNA. Here, form is to be understood as the real and actualizing principle, structurally determining what things are in their permanence and change. However, he adds a caveat: 'We may affirm the reality of form although we may not fully grasp its nature. It is sufficient to point to its effects and operations...' (178). This turns form into an almost occult entity, to be explored further but directing research in an attempt to explain what has yet to be explained. Here O'Rourke provides a cutting critique of Neo-Darwinist theories of sociobiology, their implications for ethics and, more radically, for our understanding of what it means to be a human person and what the point of living is. Their authors (Wilson, Ruse) conclude that all human behaviour, including morality, is carried out for the sake of genetic evolution. Consequently, the value of ethical behaviour is restricted to the biologically causal conditions from which it arose. On their view, morality's key function in this process is to promote the survival of human genes, because these alone are of enduring value and purpose, not individuals or groups (Dawkins). Correspondingly, personal freedom to choose one's moral goals and the means to achieve them is based on self-deception. O'Rourke argues instead that substituting causal conditions for moral reasons falls victim to a

genetic fallacy of deriving an *ought* from a (questionable) *is*. Adducing causal conditions and their development offers no sufficient reason why we should adopt them as a moral norm. Acting as a moral person involves taking possession of one's biological heritage, controlling it by forming one's moral personality – with the capacity to selfreflect, to deliberate and to choose responsibly, using reason and will. Responsibility presupposes personal freedom. This complex process of free self-determination with the *telos* of flourishing as a personal human being (happiness) is 'not entirely explicable in biological terms' (199). If it were, it would defeat its own meaning, specific function and purpose.

The 'figleaf' that provides sociobiology with the appearance of ethics is genetically motivated biological altruism, understood as self-destructive behaviour performed for the benefit of others. However, it is hard to reconcile with the claim of evolution by natural selection, because it reduces fitness for survival rather than increasing it. Yet, 'selfless altruism required for the successful propagation of the species is nowhere to be found among humans' (216). Some saints and heroes may count as exceptions, but they do not act for the sake of promoting the selfish gene. Aristotle's analysis of types of friendship, particularly of friendship of equality between virtuous individuals, provides a more adequate model, beyond altruism and egotism, for explaining the dynamic interplay of self-love and love of the other, to be aimed at in moral behaviour.

O'Rourke ends his discourse by eulogizing James Joyce, who prides himself on being an Aristotelian owing to his Jesuit and early university education, and his reading experience in Paris. Many elements of his writings, even some of the principles of organization in his works, particularly *Ulysses*, bear witness to this. They abound with Aristotelian allusions. Chief among them – although hitherto unrecognized, O'Rourke argues – is analogy as a principle of artistic construction that joins literary diversity in unity. By expressing himself differently in different parts of his work while simultaneously retaining unity of style, Joyce consciously adopts the unity of analogy as a principle of literary production. O'Rourke's book exemplifies the remarkable synthetic power and attraction of an Aristotelian framework for grasping unity across diverse areas of reality. It also provides a powerful critical tool for assessing metaphysical claims made by contemporary science. It consciously counteracts an understanding of our world as composed not of realities but of relativities. Yet it is not self-reflective in the sense that the reasonableness of its convictions is questioned, since 'one might not be sure that one always holds them reasonable' (quoting Joyce's *Stephen Hero*, 233).

More importantly, the use and meaning of analogy as key to understanding 'being' is not left undebated in the history of philosophy, initiating a grand dispute between Thomist and Scotist schools of thought, a debate which does not appear to have ended today. It is hard to see that it can be solved simply by reference to a philosopher's or a writer's character, as implied in Johann Gottlieb Fichte's remark: The kind of philosophy which one chooses depends on what kind of human being one is: because a philosophical system is not like lifeless household effects which one might reject or accept as one wishes; instead, it is animated by the soul of a human being who possesses it. (J. G. Fichte, *Erste Einleitung in die*

*Wissenschaftslehre* 1794, para 5) On the other hand, it is not unrelated to character, as noted by Stanislaus Joyce talking about his brother and also noted by O'Rourke (233).

In sum, *Aristotelian Investigations* is a must-read for anyone who wants to discuss contemporary Aristotelianism.

### **Note**

1. All references to Aristotle's work are to the edition edited by Jonathan Barnes (Aristotle, 1984).

### **References**

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