

Philosophy in Ireland

Philosophy in Ireland:

Past Actualities and Present Challenges

Edited by

Susan Gottlöber

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*Do Mhicheál, a chuireann beocht san Fhealsúnacht Mheánaoiseach
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INTRODUCTION

Nevertheless, one might wonder if there are certain conditions of thinking which exhibit various family relations to each other. I want to ask if ‘being between’ constitutes a condition of Irish thought.¹

—William Desmond

Irish Philosophy and Philosophy in Ireland, not necessarily being the same thing, are intrinsically linked. When Thomas Duddy published his book *The History of Irish Thought*,² which remains a milestone to this day, it took up a discussion that had sparked a debate almost 20 years earlier with the publication of Richard Kearney’s *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions*. The debate, triggered by the title of the book, concerned the question whether there is such a thing as a ‘national mind’.³ Thus, as Dermot Moran points out in his review of Duddy’s book, ‘the existence of an Irish intellectual tradition’ remains a ‘vexed issue’.⁴ With few exceptions, such as, for example, the above quoted work by Desmond on *Being Between. Conditions of Irish Thought* or Duddy’s *Dictionary of Irish Philosophers*⁵ there have been no comprehensive studies published with their focus on philosophy in Ireland since. Maybe this is so because it is now clear how greatly diversified Irish philosophy has become. This present volume aims to rectify this lacuna to some extent by being a showcase for the diverse philosophical and intellectual traditions in Ireland, both past and present.

The present collection is based, although not exclusively so, on contributions made at a conference which was held at Maynooth University

¹ William Desmond, *Being Between. Conditions of Irish Thought* (Galway: Cló Iar-Chonacht, 2008), p. 9.

² See, Thomas Duddy, *A History of Irish Thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

³ This question was asked by Conor Cruise O’Brien. For the book, see, Richard Kearney (ed.), *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985).

⁴ Dermot Moran, ‘Review of Thomas Duddy, “A History of Irish Thought”’ <<https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/a-history-of-irish-thought/>> [accessed 4 January, 2019].

⁵ See, Thomas Duddy, *Dictionary of Irish Philosophers* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 2004).

in 2012. This conference celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Irish Philosophical Society and had as its theme: *Philosophy in Ireland: Past Actualities–Present Challenges–Future Potentialities?* Scholars from both Ireland and abroad presented their perspectives on Irish Philosophy and Philosophy in Ireland at the beginning of the 21st century.

However, 2012 was not only a year to celebrate Irish philosophy, it was also a time when we lost one of the great contributors to the study. Thomas Duddy, originally invited as the keynote speaker, had to decline the invitation due to illness and very sadly passed away on 15 June 2012, only a few days before the conference commenced. *Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.*

During the conference it emerged quickly how integrated the three topics of focus were, and indeed how contemporary philosophical discussions in Ireland are not only deeply indebted to the tradition, but also already respond to present and also future challenges and possibilities. It became clear also that the dialogical aspect of Irish philosophising was not only limited to the past as interlocutor but also to the philosophical debates that took place outside of Ireland, both on Continental Europe as well as in the Anglo-American tradition (and here in particular with analytic philosophy).

That from the beginning philosophy in Ireland did not have the self-referential quality that marked its bigger neighbours, seems itself to be part of the Irish intellectual tradition. Thus, Elizabeth Boyle states at the beginning of Chapter One:

It is important to note [...] that, as far as we know, there were no ground-breaking or systematic philosophical works of significant length composed in Ireland during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Rather, the works under discussion here represent Ireland's reception of an established western European philosophical tradition and the reworking of that tradition in fresh literary contexts [...] Christian Platonism (and Neoplatonism).⁶

Ireland in the 20th century saw another set of different interlocutors at play. William Desmond describes the philosophical landscape at the time of the founding of the Irish Philosophical Society in 1962 as follows:

⁶ Elizabeth Boyle, 'Aspects of Philosophical Discourse in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Ireland: Metaphor, Morality and the Mind', in this volume, pp. 2–26 (p. 2).

At the time the Society was founded there was a huge predominance of clerical teachers, even with Chairs in some universities seemingly reserved for particular religious orders [...] This was reflective of a long dominance of clerical presence in Ireland, full of consequences not only in philosophy. It is worth recalling that some of the founders of the Irish Philosophical Society were just those lay teachers who for various reasons found their way to philosophy and teaching positions. At that time also quite a number of the lay teachers would have started out studying for the priesthood, now finding a different vocation on leaving that pathway. Their presence in Irish academic life had a particular doubleness: they had familiarity with the inside of official religious life and yet knew the outside.⁷

This ‘being between’ as Desmond has called it,⁸ may be a trademark of the Irish philosophical tradition. But while in many ways, the present volume also takes up the history of Irish thought, both past and current, it is nevertheless quite different to Duddy’s book. Rather than treating philosophy in Ireland in a systematic and comprehensive way, the contributors provide a glimpse into philosophy in Ireland today, affirming what we have stated above, i.e., how much philosophy in Ireland is informed by the past and by the dialogue with both the European continent and the Anglo-American tradition.

It has to be said that this dialogue with the past has not always been a peaceful one. And yet, through the diversification that philosophy in Ireland has experienced over the past decades it demonstrates how this engagement can be a fruitful one; and, indeed, how philosophical thought is in danger of becoming impoverished without such dialogue.

To do the theme of this book justice, the present volume is divided into two parts: the first part, ‘Past Actualities’, is—in chronological order—mainly dedicated to Irish thinkers or, as in the case of Wittgenstein, thinkers connected to Ireland. It is here mostly that the book takes up Duddy’s treatment of Irish thought and fills in some gaps that were left unaddressed by Duddy.⁹

⁷ William Desmond, ‘The Exile of Thought. On Wayward—Home-bound Philosophizing’, in this volume, pp. 151–83 (p. 151).

⁸ See the title of his aforementioned book, *Being Between. Conditions of Irish Thought*. The ‘between’ is a major concern of a number of Desmond’s works, such as, for example, *Ethics and the Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); *God and the Between* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); or *Being and the Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

⁹ Duddy carefully included not only philosophical positions in the strict sense in his treatment of Irish thought but also poets and writers such as Oscar Wilde and Iris Murdoch. The reader may also note, that many of the leading figures of the so-

The first two chapters take up some lesser discussed aspects of the Irish Medieval intellectual and philosophical tradition.¹⁰ The first contribution by Elizabeth Boyle, ‘Aspects of Philosophical Discourse in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Ireland: Metaphor, Morality and the Mind’, discusses a range of texts, in prose and poetry, in Latin and Irish, which attest to the widespread influence of Platonic thought, and the emergence of Scholasticism, in Ireland during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Focusing on anonymous texts, or texts of disputed authorship, Boyle shows that many authors engaged with Platonism and Neoplatonism at a sophisticated level. She thus effectively argues that the focus on known medieval Irish has in some ways limited scholarly understanding of the nature of medieval Irish thought, and has led to an under-appreciation of the intellectual continuities and developments which characterize Irish philosophical writing between the Carolingian and scholastic periods.

The second chapter on ‘Richard FitzRalph—New Perspectives’ by Michael Dunne likewise examines an author underappreciated in the history of Irish philosophy. Dunne focuses on the figure of Richard FitzRalph, presenting an overall assessment of FitzRalph’s main ideas and their impact. FitzRalph has only recently re-emerged as one of the most influential thinkers of the Fourteenth Century, and remained, according to Dunne, one of Ireland’s most discussed authors for many subsequent centuries.

The third chapter ‘Speaking for Spinoza? Notes on John Toland’s *Origines Judaicae*’ by Ian Leask with its focus on Toland highlights an aspect of the ‘Irish Enlightenment’.¹¹ The paper concentrates mainly on one of Toland’s least known but most radical works—the *Origines Judaicae*, of 1709. Leask attempts to illustrate the way in which Toland both continues and intensifies the naturalistic ‘demythologizing’ of Spinoza’s Theological-Political Treatise, thus making a case for Toland’s Spinozism.

The concluding contribution of Part One by Patrick Quinn, ‘Seeing Through the Fog: Ludwig Wittgenstein’s Search for Clarity’ brings the

called Irish Enlightenment such as, e.g., Berkeley, are not treated in the present volume.

¹⁰ One may note that, on the other hand, a number of the more influential writers, such as, e.g., Eriugena, Peter of Ireland, are not discussed. However, they are extensively treated elsewhere. Cf., for example, Duddy, *Dictionary of Irish Philosophers*, for a comprehensive overview.

¹¹ Cf., David Berman and Patricia O’Riordan (eds), *The Irish Enlightenment and Counter Enlightenment*, vol. 1 (Bristol: Thoemmes, 2002).

reader into the 20th century with reflections on Ludwig Wittgenstein¹² and his efforts to cultivate a ‘clear view’, something which Quinn argues Wittgenstein aimed for throughout his life. Quinn follows the trail of Wittgenstein’s well-documented achievements in this area throughout his writings right up until the end of his life, including in his last work, *On Certainty*. At the same time, Quinn argues, Wittgenstein also demonstrated his own lack of clarity at times, particularly in his approval of Stalin in the 1930’s.

Gaven Kerr’s opening chapter of the second part of the book, ‘Present Challenges’, in many ways is a showcase for philosophy in Ireland. Kerr anchors his reflections deeply in medieval thought and shows how a philosophical problematic that dominated modern philosophical thought and went on to form the framework of contemporary analytic philosophy, arose out of a concern over the mind/world relationship that was inaugurated by Descartes. He argues that such concern was not really present at the height of Scholastic Philosophy and that it emerged out of a combination of a mechanistic worldview in science and the greater influence of Nominalism in later Scholasticism. Kerr proposes that the Aristotelian/Thomistic conception of mindedness as a power that a rational animal has is preferable to the Cartesian view.

Timothy Mooney’s article ‘Merleau-Ponty on Representation and Action Prefiguration’ engages with, and is representative of the lively debate with the so-called Continental tradition. This engagement has a longstanding tradition in Ireland. The dialogue with the Continental tradition has brought forth world leading phenomenologists like Dermot Moran, and has influenced important contemporary Irish thinkers like Richard Kearney. In this chapter Mooney argues ‘that Merleau-Ponty offers a sustained critique of the representation-implementation account, which takes the body as the mere executor of a mental picture’.¹³ Starting by outlining and analysing Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the body schema and of the perceptual field as well as his concept of motor intentionality and its internal relation to representation, Mooney makes an

¹² As Dermot Moran points out in his review there are good reasons to include the Austrian thinker in a publication on Irish thought ‘because he composed much of the Philosophical Investigations living in isolation in Redcross, County Wicklow, in Carraroe, County Galway and in a hotel in miserable post-war Dublin (where the palm house in the Botanic Gardens, one of the few heated buildings in Dublin at the time, was a favorite place for him to sit with his notebook). Moran, ‘Review of Thomas Duddy, “A History of Irish Thought”’.

¹³ Timothy Mooney, ‘Merleau-Ponty on Representation and Action Prefiguration’, in this volume, pp. 102–16 (p. 103).

argument in the final part of his paper for how central imaginative representation is for Merleau-Ponty's idea of developed perceptual awareness.

A different perspective on the relationship of Ireland with its Catholic tradition is then presented by Heike Felzmann in her contribution 'Did the Doctrine of Double Effect Kill Savita Halappanavar? Catholic Reasoning on Obstetric Emergencies and the Savita Case'. Felzmann, using the tragic case of Savita Halappanavar as a case study, examines possible negative consequences of Catholic ethical teaching in the area of medical ethics. Through discussing general arguments in Catholic moral theology on obstetric emergencies, Felzmann highlights how the predominant position supports highly restrictive practices not just in relation to elective abortion, but even in relation to urgent life-saving treatment. Restrictions that also shape, for example, Catholic healthcare practice in the United States. While it can be shown, according to Felzmann, that practices in Catholic healthcare 'appear overall somewhat less restrictive than would be expected on the basis of the predominant arguments in moral theology', Felzmann's conclusion is, nevertheless, that the Irish Catholic discourse that argued that 'from a Catholic standpoint a timely termination would have been permissible'¹⁴ ultimately avoided engagement with the complicating aspects of Catholic doctrines, therefore, too easily claiming compatibility with safe practice.

The penultimate chapter of the book, 'The God Who Is or the God Who May Be: William Desmond and Richard Kearney on the Quest(tion) of God', by Philip Gonzales, also prepares the reader for the final contribution of the volume by William Desmond. Gonzales discusses the work of two of the most important figures in contemporary Irish philosophy: William Desmond and Richard Kearney. Gonzales argues that ultimately Desmond's work better safeguards the God/world distinction by keeping an analogical interval between God and creation while, Kearney's work endangers this analogical space and/or distance by making claims that sound as if God stands in need of man and that God cannot (be)come without man. Gonzales thus ultimately concludes that Desmond's 'metaxological' metaphysics allows more convincingly for God's free creation out of love and the freedom of creation.

The concluding essay by William Desmond, 'The Exile of Thought. On Wayward—Home-bound Philosophizing', in many ways goes beyond Philosophy in Ireland, reflecting on a phenomenon that is very much also

¹⁴ Heike Felzmann, 'Did the Doctrine of Double Effect Kill Savita Halappanavar? Catholic Reasoning on Obstetric Emergencies and the Savita Case', in this volume, pp. 117–37 (p. 117).

an Irish phenomenon: the tension that arises in homecoming after exile. Desmond reflects on the ‘doubleness’ that permeates Irish philosophizing: the doubleness of knowing the inside and yet standing outside of the long standing religious traditions, the doubleness of the Irish both in relation to their own identity and the Continent and, respectively, the British and American but also the doubleness between the ‘Continental and the Anglo-Saxon ways of philosophizing’. He continues to explore, respectively, the relationships between tradition, religion, and poetry and the exile of thought. Desmond’s deliberations on the role of doubleness in Irish philosophizing finally reaches the question of the universities themselves and how much thinking is still possible, or ‘if the universities are in danger of producing another exile of thought’.¹⁵

In this way, the present volume provides a snapshot of the philosophical discourse practiced in today’s Ireland, showcasing Irish Philosophy across different philosophical traditions at the beginning of the 21st century. In addition to Ireland’s size, one may wonder if Ireland just might be fortuitously and uniquely placed geographically, as well as intellectually, to make the different positions meet: of past and present, continental and analytic, religious and secular—a ‘being between’ as Desmond calls it.

The current volume is thus not only on Irish thinkers, many of whom only find a mention, but by Irish thinkers and philosophers who have made Ireland their home. What connects them is a concern for this homeland and the philosophy practiced in it. While, as is so often the case, the opinions of the authors do not necessarily reflect the position of the editor, they are a manifesto of the truly diverse and pluralistic approach taken to philosophy in Ireland. As Kerr describes it in his article:

There are perennial themes in philosophy and we notice them emerging time and again in whatever tradition one follows [...] The future of philosophy in Ireland cannot be with the ever greater specialisation of particular philosophical traditions; because as each tradition grows more and more specialised, its range of outlook becomes ever narrower [...].¹⁶

In times of growing nationalism and a growing hostility towards the other (even when the other is one’s own intellectual past) the contributions in this book may also serve as a reminder that the most fertile philosophical

¹⁵ See, Desmond, ‘The Exile of Thought. On Wayward—Home-bound Philosophizing’, p. 178.

¹⁶ Gaven Kerr, ‘Modern Philosophy and the Space of Reasons’, in this volume, pp. 86–101 (p. 101).

approaches did not come out of isolation, but by developing one's own position in constant dialogue with one's neighbours—and one's past. Only then can it be hoped that philosophy, growing out of these deep connections, will also continue to grow in a fruitful way into the future.

Susan Gottlöber
Maynooth, August 2019

PART I:
PAST ACTUALITIES

CHAPTER ONE

ASPECTS OF PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE
IN ELEVENTH- AND TWELFTH-CENTURY
IRELAND:
METAPHOR, MORALITY AND THE MIND

ELIZABETH BOYLE

It is important to note at the outset of this study that, as far as we know, there were no ground-breaking or systematic philosophical works of significant length composed in Ireland during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹ Rather, the works under discussion here represent Ireland's reception of an established western European philosophical tradition and the reworking of that tradition in fresh literary contexts, both Latin and vernacular. The tradition to which I refer is Christian Platonism (and Neoplatonism), a worldview which—in different guises and to differing extents—shaped the work of many Late Antique and early medieval Christian thinkers, including Augustine of Hippo, Boethius, John Scotus Eriugena, and Anselm of Canterbury. I hope to show the extent to which some eleventh- and twelfth-century Irish writers were engaged with the works of such thinkers, and, as a result, were moved to explore concepts of truth and reality, wisdom and thought.

De tribus habitaculis animae, a Latin treatise probably composed in Ireland before the year 1100, asserts that the material world is transient, illusory and false.² Truth is only to be found after death. Allowing

¹ There is, however, a substantial—and largely unstudied—philosophical literature in Irish medical manuscripts of the later Middle Ages. These would repay scholarly attention, but are outside the chronological scope of the present study.

² *De tribus habitaculis animae*, ed. by A. Gwynn, *The Writings of Bishop Patrick, 1074–1084, Scriptorum Latini Hiberniae* 1 (Dublin: Institute For Advanced Studies, 1955), pp. 106–24; trans. by E. Boyle, 'Concerning the Three Dwelling-Places of the Soul', in *The End and Beyond: Medieval Irish Eschatology*, ed. by J. Carey, C. Ó Dochartaigh and E. Ní Carthaigh (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications,

ourselves to be seduced by the unreality of the present life is evidence of an unbalanced mind:

What could be more stupid, or more insane, than to be deceived and overcome like children by the shadow and image and similitude of true glory and true pleasure, true beauty, true decency, true honour, and not to seek after, or desire, the true glory itself? Who would choose the image of gold in water, neglecting the gold itself, and would not immediately be believed by all to be an idiot or a madman? Who would love the orb of the sun reflected in a mirror or formed in any other material, more than the sun itself, and would not be derided by all?³

Thus, love of this life over the next is suggestive of insanity. This is because, in a calculation of risk reminiscent of Pascal's Wager, a lifetime of corporeal pleasures is not worth the price of an eternity of punishment. The author develops this calculation of risk into a consideration of the inconceivable enormity of eternity:

Who in their right mind would choose one hundred years of punishment for the sake of one day of pleasure? And yet, wretched and without any wisdom, they do not shun following the pleasures of the flesh, they do not escape the intolerable punishments—not of a hundred years, not of a thousand times a thousand, but of all time, without end—for the sake of forty or sixty years of pleasure, or of any such perishable delight. But however great the difference is between one day and a hundred years, it is certainly nothing like the difference between forty, or sixty, or a hundred years, and an eternity to come, whether of good or evil. For there is some relation between the space of one day and that of a hundred years, although it is minimal: but there is no relation between the space of a hundred years and eternity. If, for instance, the aforementioned space of time were a hundredth or thousandth part of eternity, after a hundredfold or a thousandfold of that time, eternity would cease to exist: which the

2014), pp. 527–45. On its authorship and early manuscript transmission, see, Elizabeth Boyle, 'The Authorship and Transmission of *De tribus habitaculis animae*', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 22 (2012), 49–65.

³ *Quid stultius quidue insanius est quam umbra et similitudine uere glorie et uere delectationis, uere pulchritudinis, ueri decoris, ueri honoris more infantium decipi et superari, et ipsam ueram gloriam non querere, non desiderare? Quis imaginem auri in aqua ipso auro neglecto eligeret, et non statim a cunctis fatuus uel insanus esse crederetur? Quis orbem solis in speculo redditum uel in qualibet materia formatum plus diligeret quam ipsum solem, et non ab omnibus derideretur?': ed. by A. Gwynn, l. 63–70; trans. by E. Boyle.*

definition of eternity does not permit. For if it could in any way end in time, it would not be eternity at all.⁴

These passages are characteristic of the expansive moral, philosophical and theological concerns of *De tribus habitaculis animae*, but they also encapsulate a number of themes found in other medieval Irish texts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, composed both in Latin and the vernacular. One dominant theme is the idea that reality is not what it appears to be, that we need to crack the hard surface of ideas and words, to find the truth which lies within and beyond them. At the same time, that inner truth is fundamentally inexpressible and therefore must be articulated obliquely in order to be understood by the human mind. A measurable concept, such as ‘time’, is inadequate for expressing an immeasurable concept, such as ‘eternity’, and therefore strategies such as the use of simile or metaphor must be employed in the attempt to describe the indescribable. Some medieval Irish authors explored a tension between ‘likeness’ and ‘unlikeness’: on the one hand, they might attempt to describe eternal torment in hell by stating that there is a ‘likeness’ or ‘similitude’ between the bad things which people can suffer during their lifetime (cold, hunger, disease) and the punishment that the damned will suffer in hell, but the same authors also observed that suffering on earth and suffering in hell are fundamentally unlike each other, because eternal punishment is indescribable, and there is no relation between ‘a long time’ and ‘eternity’.⁵

⁴ *Quis cum sano sensu pro unius diei deliciis centum annorum penam eligeret? Et miseri tamen et sine ulla sapientia uoluptatem carnis sequentes non uitant, non effugiunt intolerabiles penas non centum annorum, non milies mille, sed omnium sine fine seculorum pro quadraginta uel sexaginta annorum deliciis uel qualibet corruptibili delectatione. Quantum autem interest inter unum diem et centum annos, non tantum utique sed plus interest inter quadraginta uel sexaginta uel centum annos et eternitatem siue in bono siue in malo futuram. Unus enim dies aliqua proportio est in centum annorum spatio, quamuis ualde modica: at uero centum annorum spatium nulla proportio est in illa eternitate. Si enim uerbi gratia centesima uel millesima pars esset eternitatis predictum eius spatium, post centuplum eius spatium uel millipulum eternitas esse desineret: quod ratio non sinit eternitatis. Que si ullo modo tempore finiretur, eternitas omnino non esset.*: ed. by A. Gwynn, l. 79–93, trans. by E. Boyle.

⁵ This ‘inexpressibility topos’ is widespread not only in medieval Irish, but also in Anglo-Saxon, homiletic literature. The topos is already found in the Old Irish period (before ca. 900): for example, the ‘Old Irish Homily’ states that ‘there are, moreover, likenesses of the kingdom of heaven and of hell in this world. The likeness of hell therein first, i.e., winter and snow, tempest and cold, age and decay, disease and death’; *Ataat dano cosmuliusa flatha nime 7 ifirnn isin bithsa.*

Similarly, people are described as being both like and unlike God. According to the biblical account, God made man in his own image and patristic authorities predicted that when mankind was resurrected to face final judgement it would be in the likeness of Christ;⁶ and yet the corrupt and sinful human body, formed from clay, is unlike God. Indeed, as we shall see, sin could be perceived as actively erasing the likeness of God in man, thereby making man increasingly unlike that thing to which he also bears some similitude. This similitude can be seen, for example, in the threefold structure of the human mind—divided into ‘intellect’, ‘will’ and ‘memory’—which was understood as a reflection in human nature of the threefold nature of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The idea of ‘reflection’ is a key one: the world was often characterised as a reflection of the eschatological kingdoms, thereby suggesting that the world is ‘like’ heaven and hell in the way that a reflection in a mirror provides a ‘likeness’ of the thing that it reflects, but it is unlike that thing in substance because it is only a reflection.⁷ This study examines a selection of medieval Irish texts which use allegory and metaphor on the one hand, and simile, or ideas of likeness and unlikeness, on the other, in order to investigate the strategies used by medieval Irish authors to express what, for medieval thinkers, was the ultimate inexpressible truth, namely union with the divine. These sophisticated conceptions of the relationship between the human and the divine, the material and the immaterial, are an important feature of the philosophical discourse of eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland.

De tribus habitaculis animae tells us that reality and truth are hidden beyond the unreality and falsehood of the material world. In the same vein, allegory is a form of veiled language, the meaning of which lies beyond its surface. But in the Middle Ages it was also a container for ideas which transcended linguistic barriers; as a means of expression it possessed a common vocabulary which could be understood across medieval

Cosmuilius iffirnn dano and chétamus .i. gaemridh 7 snechta sin 7 uacht. aes 7 crine. Galar 7 báss: ed. and trans. by J. Strachan, *Ériu*, 3 (1907), 1–10 (pp. 5 and 9). The same idea is found in *De tribus habitaculis*: ed. by A. Gwynn, l. 5–11.

⁶ Based on interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:49. For discussion of this aspect of eschatological doctrine in an eleventh-century Irish context, see, Elizabeth Boyle, ‘Neoplatonic Thought in Medieval Ireland: the Evidence of *Scéla na esérgi*’, *Medium Ævum*, 78 (2009), 216–30 (pp. 220–21).

⁷ As we shall see below, in relation to the idea of ‘vision’, the Pauline statement that now we see as if through a glass darkly, but that in heaven we shall see ‘face to face’ (1 Cor. 13:12) was conducive to the use of metaphors based on mirrors and reflection (see, for example, *De tribus habitaculis*, l. 204, 249–55).

Christendom. Or, given the depth and complexity of some allegorical texts, we might say rather that it possessed a common vocabulary which literati across medieval Christendom could at least try to uncover: one reader might not interpret the allegory in the same way as another, but all would know that the words are only the surface carrier of the more profound idea which lies within. To use the metaphor suggested by the author of *De tribus habitaculis*, the words are the ‘image of gold in water’; the meaning is ‘the gold itself’. There were many different modes of religious thought operating simultaneously and inter-connectedly in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland. Scholars have long argued that there was a particular interest in texts which were informed by the literal and historical methods of biblical exegesis.⁸ However, I suggest that some of the most challenging and interesting texts produced in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland used more abstract thought, particularly allegory and metaphor (in a manner often imbued with the vocabulary of Christian Platonism), as a vehicle for conveying sophisticated moral and theological concepts.

We might consider a Latin poem which, employing the vernacular Irish technique of *dúnad*, begins and ends with the same phrase *Mentis in excessu* (‘In ecstasy of mind’). The poem begins:

In ecstasy of mind through pleasant places in a wide countryside
 It chanced that I seemed to wander with hasty steps:
 Thus gazing at length on wondrous sights and things
 I was held captive. Then suddenly appeared to me
 A woman uttering a stream of lamentable complaints to the skies:⁹

⁸ Hildegard L. C. Tristram, ‘Der insulare Alexander’, in *Kontinuität und Transformation der Antike im Mittelalter*, ed. by W. Erzgräber (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1999), pp. 129–55; Hildegard L. C. Tristram, ‘Latin and Latin Learning in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*’, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 49–50 (1997), 847–77; Erich Poppe, ‘Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory: The Lesson of *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise*’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 37 (Summer 1999), 33–54 (p. 39); Pádraig P. Ó Néill, ‘Old Wine in New Bottles: the Reprise of Early Irish Psalter Exegesis in Airbertach Mac Cosse’s Poem on the Psalter’, in *Authorities and Adaptations: the Transmission and Reworking of Textual Sources in Medieval Ireland*, ed. by E. Boyle and D. Hayden (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2014), pp. 121–40.

⁹ *Mentis in excessu lati loca ruris amena/ Forte michi subitis gradibus lustrare uidebar:/ Sic ego mira diu rerum spectacula cernens/ Captus eram. Subito michi tunc apparuit una/ Femina que miseris spargebat ad astra querelas.*: ‘Versus Allegorici’, ed. and trans. by A. Gwynn, *The Writings*, pp. 84–101, l. 4–9.

The poem, as it is preserved in the only extant manuscript copy, British Library MS Cotton Titus D. xxiv (*saec.* XII^{ex}), where it is attributed to a bishop Patrick, is accompanied by extensive interlinear glosses. The poem's editor, Aubrey Gwynn, argued that the poem and the glosses were written by the same person, whom he identified as Patrick, bishop of Dublin (d. 1084), but this is something which cannot be proven conclusively.¹⁰ The glossator interprets the allegory for us, and tells us that the wide countryside in which the narrator is walking is 'scripture'. The woman whom he encounters is glossed as *studiositas*. As the poem proceeds, the woman, 'studiousness', mourns her dead husbands and regrets that no man will now take her as a wife. She introduces herself as Egle, and speaks of her three sisters, Esper, Medusa and Arethusa, and the glossator tells us that they are 'intellect', 'memory' and 'eloquence'.¹¹

The visionary structure of the poem is reinforced by its conclusion, in which the poet tells of the departure of the woman, Egle, 'study or studiosness', according to the glossator:

Then did she fly away, taking oath once again to visit
 Our doors: but I, coming home weary, seemed to be once more
 In my own house, whence I had been borne away to these sights of the
 mind.
 In ecstasy of mind.¹²

¹⁰ Doubt was cast on Gwynn's identification of the poet as Patrick of Dublin by Martin Brett, 'Canterbury's Perspective on Church Reform and Ireland, 1070–1115', in *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century: Reform and Renewal*, ed. by D. Bracken and D. Ó Riain-Raedel (Dublin: Four Courts, 2006), pp. 13–35 (pp. 33–35); see also, Boyle, 'The Authorship'.

¹¹ The source for this is Fulgentius: ed. by R. Helm, *Fabii Planciadis Fulgentii V.C. Opera* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1898), pp. 83–107 (p. 97): *Nam et nos in bucolicis ideo mala aurea decem psuimus, scilicet decem eglogarum politam facundiam; nam et Hercules aurea mala de horto Hesperidum tollit; quattuor enim Esperides dictae sunt, id est Egle, Esper, Medusa et Aretusa, quas nos Latine studium, intellectus, memoria et facundia dicimus, quod primum sit studere, secundum intellegere, tertiam memorari quod intellegis, inde ornare dicendo quod terminas. Hinc ergo ornatum aureum studii uirtus rapit.*; trans. by L. G. Whitbread, *Fulgentius the Mythographer* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), pp. 119–35 (p. 129, § 20).

¹² *Tum uolat hec iurans iterum se inuisere nostra/ Limina: set rediens ego lassus in ede uidebar/ Nam propria, qua raptus eram ad spectacula mentis/ Mentis in excessu:* ed. and trans. by A. Gwynn, l. 252–5. This conclusion is comparable with other allegorical vision texts, e.g., Alan of Lille, *De planctu naturae: Hujus imaginariae visionis subtracto speculo, me ab exstasi excitatum in somno, prior mysticae apparitionis dereliquit aspectus.* (PL 210, 482C); 'Accordingly when the

In terms of the text proper, it would appear that the narrator had been literally transported—out of his body—in order to witness these ‘sights of the mind’, and yet the glossator reminds us that this out of body experience is only metaphorical: the gloss states: ‘in ede: i. in carne, that is, in the flesh, because to be outside the flesh is to contemplate those things that are outside the flesh, i.e. incorporeal things. But to be in the flesh is to think about fleshly things, i.e., corporeal things, not to wander outside the mind as is done above’ (gloss on l. 253). That being ‘outside the flesh’ is explicitly stated to be a metaphor for the contemplation of incorporeal matters, and that the glossator can see the ‘visionary’ element of the text in purely figurative terms, should perhaps be borne in mind by those who seek to interpret vision texts as accounts of historical events, whether as near death experiences or as ecstatic moments of divine inspiration.¹³ In this case at least the vision is self-consciously, and self-referentially metaphorical. In this connection, we might consider a late Middle Irish (possibly twelfth-century) poem in which the term *aislinge* (‘dream’ or ‘vision’) is used to characterise an unambiguously allegorical text. In the poem beginning ‘Aislinge Augustín áin’, we read about the following vision:

Noble Augustine had a vision (*aislinge*) after he had recited the psalms at matins; he saw himself on a plain in flight before eight wolves.

Fleeing from the swift paws of the wolves he went to a small pleasant wood; he found no protection there from the eight rapacious wolves.

Then he came again, as he thought, to a very great wood; he found no shelter in one place or another until he came to one particular tree.

[...]

Augustine writes a clear account which is brought from him to Jerome; Jerome gives his true interpretation and it is brought from him to Augustine.

mirror with these images and visions was withdrawn, I awoke from my dream and ecstasy and the previous vision of the mystic apparition left me.’ (James J. Sheridan, trans., *Alan of Lille. The Complaint of Nature*, Mediaeval Sources in Translation 26 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), p. 221).

¹³ See, for example, Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Thanks should be given to the noble Son of the Father—lasting is his fame—that he [*sc.* Augustine] escaped from the jaws of the wolves after rising from his sleep.

The wolves are the eight principal vices—their attack is fierce—they pursue every person on the yellow-surfaced earth.

The little wood is pure constant prayer—lasting its fame—the great renowned wood stands for the psalms including the blessed *Beati*. [...] ¹⁴

This poem draws on a number of elements, including other Irish textual traditions regarding the particular efficacy of Psalm 118 in the Greek Bible (or 119 in the Hebrew), that is, the *Beati*.¹⁵ In the verses which follow those just cited, the poet offers an entirely allegorical interpretation of the *Beati*, the Psalm composed in the form of an alphabetic acrostic, and the longest verse composition in the Hebrew Bible. Here what concerns us is that Augustine's *aislinge*, like our Latin poet's 'sights of the mind', is explicitly understood as allegorical.

In this regard, it is worth examining in some depth the Latin poet's (and his glossator's) conception of vision, in its intellectual and spiritual senses. In *Mentis in excessu*, after his encounter with the Hesperides, and with the lionesses—pride and despair—who are defeated by the maidens—humility and hope—our narrator sees five horses:

Then did I see five steeds swiftly through the countryside
 Speeding, who reared and threw their rider
 Who alone sat and rode these steeds:
 For, to his grief, he held them on no bridle.
 One of them was far swifter than the wind,

¹⁴ *Aislinge Augustín áin/ ar ngabáil psalm 'sin tiugnáir/ co fáca a bith ar in moig/ oc teiched re hocht conaib./ Luid dochum feda bláith bic/ ar teiched na con croibglic/ nocha fuair a dítin ann / ar in ochtar con craescham./ Ar sin do-luid, andar leis/ co fid romór do-ridis/ ní fhuair a dín thair ná thall/ co ráinic cosin aenchrann./ ... Scribaid Augustín ord nglé berar uaid co Ciríne;/ beirid Ciríne a breith fir/ is berar uaid d'Augustín./ Bertha a buide, buan a blad/ re Mac uasal an Athar/ a thernam a craesaib con/ ar n-éirge dó as a chodlad./ Is iat na coin, cruaid a cath/ ocht n-airig na ndualach;/ a-tát i ndiaid cach duine/ ar in talmain tonnbuie./ Is í in chaill bec, buan a blad/ in urnaigthe glán grésach;/ is í in chaill mór co mbloid/ na psaim 'm in mbiait mbennachtaig.:* ed. and trans. by B. Ó Cuív, 'Three Middle Irish Poems', *Éigse*, 16 (1975–6), 1–17 (pp. 3–5).

¹⁵ See, for example, Osborn Bergin, ed. and trans., 'A Mystical Interpretation of the "Beati"', *Ériu*, 11 (1932), 103–06.

And outpassed in speed the birds and fleeting deer.
 Coursing over the sea he seeks no ship from man,
 And with one leap he rises from earth to highest heaven.
 But I wondered to see the rider move more swiftly than the steeds:
 For as each of them bounded forward on its own course,
 The speedier its flight; the further went its lonely rider ahead.¹⁶

Significantly, some of this section of the poem appears to be identical with a quatrain of a Middle Irish poem beginning *Is mebul dom imrádud*, which was dated by Gerard Murphy to the tenth century. Murphy's translation renders the quatrain thus:

Without a ferry in their perverse path
 they go over every sea;
 swiftly they leap in one bound
 from earth to Heaven.¹⁷

In the Middle-Irish poem it is flighty thoughts which travel in this manner, offering a further example of the workings of the mind being described through extended metaphor. We might note the similarity with 'Aislinge Augustín áin', where the vices are portrayed as animals running swiftly across the landscape. In the case of *Mentis in excessu*, the five horses which run swiftly across the landscape are the five senses;¹⁸ and the rider, who can move more swiftly than any of the senses, is the soul. The one horse which is faster than the others, and which can outpass in speed the

¹⁶ *Tunc ego ruris equos spatium cito quinque uidebam/ Transuolitare, suum qui precipitando ruerunt/ Sessorum qui solus equis insedit eisdem./ Nullis nanque miser frenis agitabat eosdem./ Ex quibus unus erat multo uelocior Euro./ Qui superabat aues cursu ceruosque fugaces./ Qui mare transuolitans nauem nec poscit ab ullo./ Quique solo celum saltu concendit ad altum./ Set mirabar equis uelocius ire sedentem./ Nam propriis gradibus cursu quam fertur equino/Vt ciciusque uolat, solus sic longius ibat:* ed. and trans. by A. Gwynn, l. 63–73.

¹⁷ *Cen ethar 'na chlónchéimmim/ cingid tar cech ler;/ lúath linges 'na ónléimmim/ ó thalmáin co nem.:* ed. and trans. by G. Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics, Eighth to Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956, repr. Dublin: Four Courts, 1998), pp. 38–43 (pp. 40–1), which seems to me to render *Qui mare transuolitans nauem nec poscit ab ullo./ Quique solo celum saltu concendit ad altum*. There are other similarities (*is lúathiu ná in góeth* seems to equate to *Ex quibus unus erat multo uelocior Euro*), and the metaphorical portrayal of the flightiness of thought in *Is mebul dom imrádud* suggests the same intellectual approach as we encounter in both *Mentis in excessu* and *Aislinge Augustín áin*.

¹⁸ Wolves also appear in *Mentis in excessu* but are interpreted by the glossator as demons (l. 152).

birds and fleeting deer, is the sense of ‘sight’. But no matter how fast ‘sight’ can travel, the ‘soul’ is always faster. The glossator tells us that this is because ‘the soul runs more swiftly in thought than it sees or hears or touches and the rest’ (gloss on l. 71). And in the next gloss, we learn that the rider, or soul, is always ahead of even the fastest horse because: ‘the five senses do not perceive anything except bodily things but the soul knows and comprehends even incorporeal things. The soul even comprehends bodily things which it does not see through the eye of the body’ (gloss on l. 73). Thus, although sight is the superior of the five senses, it is still inferior to the *oculis animi*, the eye of the mind.

The idea that sight is the pre-eminent sense derives from Augustine who, for example, in his *De Trinitate* wrote that sight is the sense which exceeds all the rest: *sensus corporis maxime excellit* (*De Trin.* 11.1.1–2). Augustine also tells us that the *oculis animi* exceeds corporeal sight.¹⁹ In *Mentis in excessu*, the superiority of spiritual vision is further articulated in a gloss towards the end of the poem. The poet speaks of the heavenly hosts and the difficulties of articulating their magnificence. He writes:

Who could sing the silent speech of people who see men’s hearts?
 Who the endless abiding joy of the mind?
 Who the united choirs singing hymns and praises,
 And the love that burns in the hearts of each and all?
 Who the lyres and every apt form of melody,
 Psalters and strange harps or threefold organs?
 The golden temples, the market-place, the throne, the seated king.
 Kind, gentle in manner, yet just and mighty,
 Fearful, unshaken, ruling his realms in righteousness?²⁰

The gloss on the word Psalter tells us that: ‘all these things signify either praise of God or heavenly choirs or certainly the delight itself at the vision

¹⁹ On Augustine’s schema of corporeal, intellectual and spiritual vision, see, Thomas Finan, ‘Modes of Vision in St Augustine: *De Genesi ad litteram* XII’, in *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity*, ed. by T. Finan and V. Twomey (Dublin: Four Courts, 1992), pp. 141–54.

²⁰ *Quis populi tacitam cernentis corda loquelam?/ Quis quoque leticiam mentis sine fine manentem?/ Quisque choros socios ymnos laudesque canentes./ Omnis et ardentum cuntis quoque cordis amorem?/ Quisque lyras aut omne genus modulaminis aptum./ Psalterium cytarasque nouas aut organa terna?/ Aurea templa forum cathedram regemque sedentem/ Mitem, more pium, iustum tamen atque potentem./ Terribilem stabilem, recte sua regna regentem.:* ed. and trans. by A. Gwynn, l. 201–9.

of God'.²¹ The association between vocal praise of God, in the form of choirs and, specifically, the singing of psalms, on the one hand, and the beatific vision on the other, is to be found in other medieval Irish eschatological texts. For example, I have written elsewhere about the significance of *teorfégad* ('contemplative vision'), as it is outlined in the eleventh-century vernacular sermon *Scéla na esérgi*.²² As a whole, the sermon offers significant evidence for the use of complex vernacular philosophical vocabulary, as indicated by the deliberate coining of the glossing calque, *teorfégad*, which emphasises the contemplative and visionary sense of the Irish loanword *teoir*, from Latin *theoria* (as opposed to the sense of 'idea' or 'theory', for which *teoir* is usually employed). Other significant vernacular terms deployed in the text include *folud* ('substance') and *aicned* ('essence', 'nature').²³ For present purposes, it should be noted that in *Scéla na esérgi*, the beatific vision is specifically identified as a counterpoint to the singing of Psalms of praise:

The just, however, have no other occupation there except what the prophet David promised when he said: 'Happy are the men who live in your house, O Lord, they will praise you and they will wonder at you perpetually through the eternal ages'. It is not through speech, however, or through corporeal external voices that the holy will make this praise of God, but through spiritual, contemplative vision, and by inward examination of their form and their intellect.²⁴

The experience of the elect in heaven is thus cast as an active intellectual endeavour. We can observe a similarity between the depiction of the beatific vision in *Scéla na esérgi* and that in the Latin treatise *De tribus habitaculis animae*. There, we are told that in heaven there will be no physical lack, no old age or death or night and no hunger or thirst:

²¹ *Psalterium: aut dei laudem hec omnia significant aut choros celestes aut certe ipsam delectationem uisionis dei*: ed. by A. Gwynn, p. 97; my translation.

²² Boyle, 'Neoplatonic Thought', pp. 222–23.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

²⁴ *Ni dingnet im[murgu] na fireóin nach monor aile thall acht aní dorairngert in fáith Daid co n-érbairt. Mongenair don fairind atrebait it [t]egdais[s]iu, a Choimdiu, not-molfat 7 not-adamraigfet do grés triasna saeglaib suthainib. Ni ó briathraib immorro nó ó gothaib corpdaib sechtair dogénat na nóim in molad-sa for Dia, acht o theorfegad spiralla 7 o scrútan inmedónach a ndligid 7 a n-intliuchta*: ed. by R. I. Best and O. Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre. The Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1927), l. 2673–7; my translation.