

Finnegans Wake II.2: The Nightlesson

("Here's looking at Euclid")

Jeremy Colangelo – English 9096A – October 29, 2013

Stephen Dedalus's lesson in the "Nestor" episode of *Ulysses*:

—You, Cochrane, what city sent for him?

—Tarentum, sir.

—Very good. Well?

—There was a battle, sir.

—Very good. Where?

The boy's blank face asked the blank window.

[. . .]

—I forget the place, sir. 279 B. C.

—Asculum, Stephen said, glancing at the name and date in the gorescarred book.

—Yes, sir. And he said: *Another victory like that and we are done for.*

(*U* 2.1-14)

—Wait. You, Armstrong. Do you know anything about Pyrrhus?

[. . .]

—Pyrrhus, sir? Pyrrhus, a pier.

All laughed. Mirthless high malicious laughter. Armstrong looked round at his classmates, silly glee in profile. In a moment they will laugh more loudly, aware of my lack of rule and the fees their papas pay.

—Tell me now, Stephen said, poling the boy's shoulder with the book, what is a pier.

—A pier, sir, Armstrong said. A thing out in the water. A kind of bridge. Kingstown pier, sir.

[. . .]

—Kingstown pier, Stephen said. Yes, a disappointed bridge.

The words troubled their gaze.

—How, sir? Comyn asked. A bridge is across a river.

(U 2.18-41)

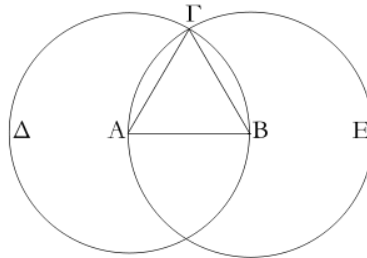
His questions showed me how complex and mysterious were certain institutions of the Church which I had always regarded as the simplest of acts. The duties of the priest towards the Eucharist and towards the secrecy of the confessional seemed so grave to me that I wondered how anybody had ever found in himself the courage to undertake them; and I was not surprised when he told me that the fathers of the Church had written books as thick as the *Post Office Directory* and as closely printed as the law notices in the newspaper elucidating all these intricate questions.

(D 6)

Euclid's First Postulate, rendered here in the original Greek.

Note the delta and epsilon on the circles – predecessors of the sigma for ALP and HCE.

Ἐπὶ τῆς δοθείσης εὐθείας πεπερασμένης τριγώνων ἰσόπλευρον συστήσασθαι.
 Ἔστω ἡ δοθείσα εὐθεῖα πεπερασμένη ἡ ΑΒ.
 Δεῖ δὴ ἐπὶ τῆς ΑΒ εὐθείας τριγώνων ἰσόπλευρον συστήσασθαι.



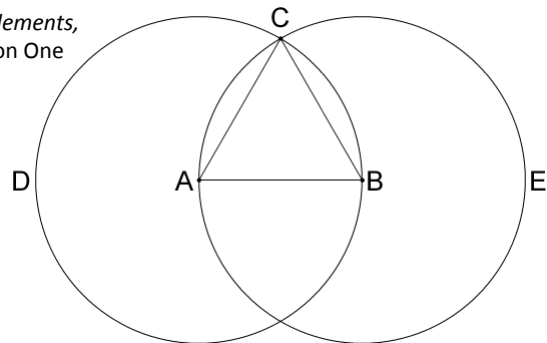
Κέντρο μὲν τῷ Α διαστήματι δὲ τῷ ΑΒ κύκλος γεγράφθω ὁ ΒΓΔ, καὶ πάλιν κέντρο μὲν τῷ Β διαστήματι δὲ τῷ ΒΑ κύκλος γεγράφθω ὁ ΑΓΕ, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ Γ σημείου, καθ' ὃ τέμνουσιν ἀλλήλους οἱ κύκλοι, ἐπὶ τὰ Α, Β σημεία ἐπεζεύχθωσαν εὐθεῖαι αἱ ΓΑ, ΓΒ.

Καὶ ἐπεὶ τὸ Α σημείον κέντρον ἐστὶ τοῦ ΓΔΒ κύκλου, ἴση ἐστὶν ἡ ΑΓ τῆς ΑΒ· πάλιν, ἐπεὶ τὸ Β σημείον κέντρον ἐστὶ τοῦ ΓΑΕ κύκλου, ἴση ἐστὶν ἡ ΒΓ τῆς ΒΑ. ἔδειχθη δὲ καὶ ἡ ΓΑ τῆς ΑΒ ἴση· ἑκατέρω ἄρα τῶν ΓΑ, ΓΒ τῆς ΑΒ ἐστὶν ἴση, τὰ δὲ τῶν αὐτῶν ἴσα καὶ ἀλλήλους ἐστὶν ἴσα· καὶ ἡ ΓΑ ἄρα τῆς ΓΒ ἐστὶν ἴση· αἱ τρεῖς ἄρα αἱ ΓΑ, ΑΒ, ΒΓ ἴσαι ἀλλήλους εἰσὶν.

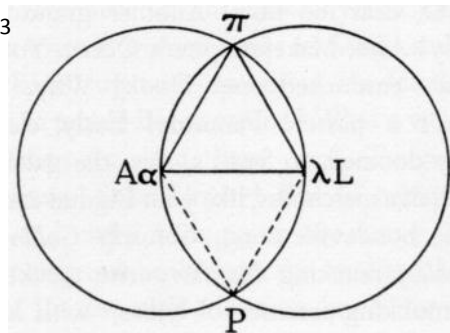
Ἰσόπλευρον ἄρα ἐστὶ τὸ ΑΒΓ τρίγωνον. καὶ συνέσταται ἐπὶ τῆς δοθείσης εὐθείας πεπερασμένης τῆς ΑΒ, ὅπερ ἔδει ποιῆσαι.

Proposition One of Euclid's *Elements of Geometry* (vol. 1 p. 241-2) describes how one may “on a given finite straight line [AB] . . . construct an equilateral triangle [ABC].” The process involves imaging points A and B as the centers of respective overlapping circles (D and E) which each have a radius equal to the length of line AB. If one imagines a point C at either the top or bottom intersections, lines AC and BC will, as Euclid shows, be equal in length to line AB, meaning that the resulting triangle will be equilateral.

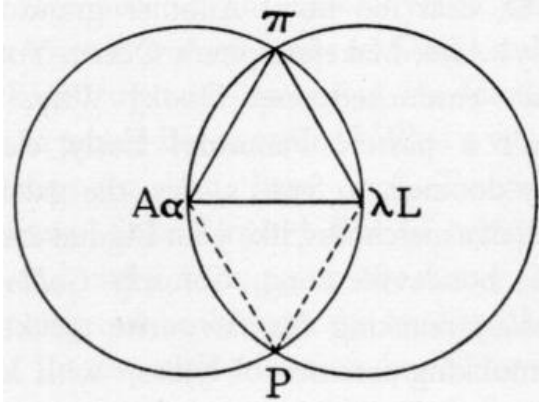
Euclid's *Elements*, Proposition One




FW 293



The arrangement of the notes shows how Shem, Shaun, and Issy are deriving their mother ALP, and her sigla Δ , from their arrangement relative to the central block of text.



Pige pas.



Dark ages clasp the daisy roots, Stop, if you are a sally of the allies, hot off Minnowaurs and naval actiums, picked engagements and banks of rowers. Please stop if you're a B.C. minding missy, please do. But should you prefer A.D. stepplease. And if you miss with a venture it serves you girly well glad. But, holy Janus, I was forgetting the Blitzenkops! Here, Hengegst and Horsesauce, take your heads¹ out of that taltub! And leave your hinnyhennyhindyou! It's haunted. The chamber. Of errings. Whoan, tug, trace, stirrup! It is distinctly understuttered that, sense you threehandshighs put your twofoots large timepates in that dead wash of Louisa Murph and until such time pace one and the same Messherrn the grinning statesmen, Brock and Leon, have shunted the grumbling condontouts, Starlin and Ser Artus Ghinis. Foamous homely brew, bebattled by bottle, gageue de guegerre.² Bull igiel bear and then boiragain bulligan. Gringerin gringerin. Staffs vergus-herds and bucke³ vursus barks.

Siddix powder for slogan plumpers.

Hoploits and atthems.

PANOPTICAL
PURVIEW OF
POLITICAL
PROGRESS
AND THE
FUTURE PRE-
SENTATION
OF THE PAST.

¹ What's that, ma'am? say it.
² As you say yourself.
³ That's the lethemuse but it washes off.
⁴ Where he fought the shessock of his stimstammer and we caught the pepettes of our lovelives.

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