

Illuminating Dualism and Non-Dualism in Thomas Aquinas's Thought Using Dōgen's Non-Metaphysical Approach

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Japanese Sōtō Zen founder, Dōgen, articulated a holistic paradigm that recognizes and expounds upon the complementarity of dual and non-dual perspectives as a means of illuminating delusion. Can such dual and non-dual perspectives be discerned in the thought of Thomas Aquinas? By way of example, this essay examines Aquinas's ideas on the reality–language–thought relationship, analogical predication, the simplicity of God, and the Eucharist, and finds in these ideas what, by Dōgen's standards, are non-dual perspectives. Being able to recognize dualism and non-dualism in Aquinas's thought in general could be useful on several fronts: to shed light on ideas that may seem paradoxical or contradictory; to add to our knowledge of his innovative use of otherwise limited language to talk about God; to identify areas that have a dualistic bias; to help to integrate his scholastic and mystical insights; and to serve as a foundation for identifying additional areas of dialogue with Dōgen's ideas.

Keywords: dualism, non-dualism, Aquinas, Dōgen, comparative Buddhist-Christian theology

Introduction

This essay analyzes and classifies some of Thomas Aquinas's key ontological and theological ideas through the lens of Buddhist dualism and non-dualism, specifically as rendered by Dōgen, founder of Japanese Sōtō Zen, who used these concepts to illuminate the differences between delusion and enlightenment. I suggest that the dynamic between dual and non-dual perspectives, which has been more emphasized in the Eastern religious traditions, was implicitly present in Aquinas's thought and, made explicit, can provide a potentially useful paradigm for engaging some of his more difficult ideas. Specifically, I suggest that knowing which lens is being applied—dual or non-dual—can provide additional clarity to teachings that appear paradoxical or contradictory; add to our knowledge of his innovative use of otherwise limited language to talk about God; identify areas that have a dualistic bias; help to integrate his scholastic and mystical insights; and serve as a foundation for identifying additional areas of dialogue with Dōgen's ideas.

The essay proceeds in four parts. The first part contrasts Aquinas's and Dōgen's views on the relationship between reality, language, and thought, as a way of illustrating the difference between dual and non-dual perspectives. The second part presents Dōgen's views on the dynamic between dualism and non-dualism. The third part identifies three examples of what I suggest are non-dual views in Aquinas's thought. And the fourth and final part identifies some possibilities and challenges for using the dual/non-dual frame for Aquinas's and Christian thought in general.

Comparing Dualism in Aquinas to Non-Dualism in Dōgen

What are dualism and non-dualism? For Dōgen, dualism has to do with the

discriminating mind, which separates things into subject and object, right and wrong, good and bad, enlightenment and delusion, and so forth, and which tends to over-rely on thinking and intelligence. Non-dualism in turn has to do with knowing the limited consciousness associated with dualism, and directly experiencing the samadhi, or the highest state of consciousness, of the oneness or seamlessness of reality, although not necessarily in a mystical sense. The task of (spiritual) practice is not to get rid of the discriminating mind, but to understand it, and to have it be grounded in a deep realization of oneness.¹ Dōgen notes: “Learning through the mind describes clarification of how the mind is. Clarifying the mind . . . means illumination of the buddha-mind. . . . The selfish mind, though idly proud of knowledge and understanding, possesses only thinking and discrimination. Old One Śākyamuni² said, ‘This Dharma³ cannot be understood by thinking and discrimination.’”⁴ This is not to suggest that dualism/non-dualism can be reduced to discrimination/nondiscrimination, for it is much more than that, as will be seen later; however, such distinction suffices as a starting point.

To illustrate the difference between dual and non-dual thought, we can compare Aquinas’s and Dōgen’s views on the relationship between reality, language, and thought. Neither Aquinas’s nor Dōgen’s view is exclusively dual or non-dual, but rather expresses a particular emphasis: for discrimination in Aquinas and therefore tending more toward dualism, and for seamlessness or nondiscrimination in Dōgen and therefore tending more toward non-dualism. I use their views on the relationship between reality, language, and thought because this is also foundational to their more complex ideas on ontology and theology, which will be discussed later. And I continue to use the word “theology” even for Buddhism, to refer to the soteriological dimensions of that tradition, even if not necessarily tied to theism.

Aquinas’s View of the Relationship Between Reality–Language–Thought

Aquinas did not articulate a well-developed theory of language or rational discourse that we know of,⁵ but we do know that he was influenced by Aristotle and by the normative thinking in the early thirteenth century that considered reality, language, and thought to be isomorphic, that is, alike in some way and also related.⁶ The key concepts for understanding the isomorphism between reality and language for Aquinas are his ideas on *being* and *predication*. In his *Commentary*

¹ For a good introduction to some of Dōgen’s core teachings, see Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi, “Commentary on *Fukanzazengi*,” in *The Art of Just Sitting: Essential Writings on the Zen Practice of Shikantaza*, 2nd ed., ed. John Daido Looi (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2004). For specifics on the discriminating mind and non-dual consciousness, see pp. 75-80.

² Śākyamuni is an epithet for the Buddha, meaning sage of Śākya.

³ “Dharma” here refers to the Buddha’s teachings; also, enlightenment or truth.

⁴ Eihei Dōgen, “The Matter of the Ascendant State of Buddha (*Butsu-kōjō-no-jū*),” in *Shōbōgenzō: Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (herein *Shōbōgenzō*), vol. 4, trans. Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Jodo Cross (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2007), 332. The essay quoted is from the version that is included in the *Secret Shōbōgenzō* and not the essay that bears the same name that is included in the 95-fascicle edition of the *Shōbōgenzō*. The quotation within the quotation is from the *Lotus Sutra, Hōben* 1.88–90. I use the Nishijima and Cross translation of the *Shōbōgenzō* unless otherwise noted.

⁵ Gyula Klima, “Theory of Language,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 371.

⁶ Jorge Gracia and Lloyd Newton, “Medieval Theories of the Categories,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta. Accessed June 27, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/medieval-categories/>.

on [Aristotle's] "*Metaphysics*," he divides being into three modes: 1) as found outside the mind, 2) as found in the mind, and 3) as either potentiality or actuality.⁷ The first mode, being as found outside the mind, he further divides into three types, which he then specifically associates with Aristotle's ten categories of predication, or the ways in which we can linguistically respond to the questions of what, when, where, how, etc. of a thing. The first type of being as found outside the mind is "what a subject is," which corresponds to the predication category of *substance*, which is the primary mode of being. The second type is "what inheres in a subject," which corresponds to the predication categories of *quantity*, *quality*, and *relation*. The third type is "what does not inhere in a subject but somehow affects it," which relates to the predication categories of *state*, *time*, *location*, *position*, *action* (being acted upon), and *passion* (changing as a result of being acted upon).⁸

The way in which Aquinas extends the isomorphism between reality and language to thought, which mediates between reality and language, can be understood from his concepts of *ratio*, *abstraction*, and the *inner word*. The *ratio* of a thing is what the name of the object signifies. The *ratio* is both in the intellect, as the conception of the object, as well as in the object, as embodying the very thing that the concept signifies.⁹ When the *ratio* in the intellect and in the object are the same, the conception of the object in the intellect is said to be true. Aquinas says, with regard to the importance of words or the names we give to things: "[Since] words are signs of ideas, and ideas the similitude of things, it is evident that words relate to the meaning of things signified through the medium of the intellectual conception. It follows therefore that we can give a name to anything in as far as we can understand it."¹⁰ Thus understanding plays a key role in the correspondences between language and thought and between thought and reality.

To understand something requires the ability to abstract from the thing and the mental images we have of the thing.¹¹ Adopting from Aristotle, Aquinas notes that we are able to abstract because of two operations of the intellect—the "understanding of indivisibles," by which we come to know what a thing is, and composition and division, by which we can form affirmative or negative statements. These operations correspond to two principles in reality—the nature of the thing (its quiddity) and its existence (more on this in the third part of this essay). With regard to the operation of composition and division, the intellect can separate only what is truly separate in reality, for example the statement that "Humans are not stones;" otherwise, the abstraction would be a false one. But with regard to the operation of "understanding by indivisibles," the intellect can abstract what is not truly separate in reality without the abstraction being a false one, for example, we can understand in the abstract the greenness of a green apple.¹²

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia super Metaphysicam* (herein *In Meta*) V, lec. 9, n. 889. For the difference between potentiality and actuality, see *In Meta* IX, lec. 5, n. 1824. The difference is illustrated by the example of a piece of wood and a sculpture that is carved from that piece of wood. Before it is carved, the sculpture is in the wood potentially. After it is carved, the sculpture is in the wood actually.

⁸ *In Meta* V, lec. 9, nn. 890–892; Gracia and Newton, 4.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences: Questions V and VI of his Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius* (herein *BDT*), trans. Armand Maurer, 3rd ed. (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), 29; Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* (herein *Super Sent*) I, d.2, q.1, a.3 and d.33, q.1, a.1, ad 3^m, quoted in same, 29 note 12.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (herein *ST*) I, q.13, a.1.

¹¹ *ST* I, q.85, a.1.

¹² *BDT* q.V, a.3 (Maurer trans., 28–29); *ST* I, q.85, a.1, ad 1. See also *ST* I, q.16, a.2 on truth as conformity between intellect and thing and on knowing this conformity as knowing truth.

The *ratio* and the inner word are at times synonymous for Aquinas,¹³ but there is more to his concept of the inner word than the definition of an object and that in the object to which the definition corresponds. The inner word is the efficient cause of the outer word—that which is vocalized, written, imagined, or meant (as in figures of speech)—and is that to which the outer word refers.¹⁴ The inner word corresponds to realities, while the outer word reflects cultural conventions and designations.¹⁵ The inner word involves the intellectual operations of forming definitions as well as judgments.¹⁶ The inner word is both a product of the mind and is the object of thought.¹⁷ The inner word is the medium between the intellect’s idea of a thing that is apprehended and the reality of the thing itself.¹⁸ The inner word is tied to the act of *intelligere*, which can be taken to mean “understanding.”¹⁹ Importantly, the inner word is not known immediately, but emerges as “an expression of the cognitional content of the act of understanding;”²⁰ and the greater the understanding, the greater the number of inner words that are synthesized into one view.²¹

How is Aquinas’s view of the isomorphism between reality, language, and thought dualistic? What the above illustrates is that the key concepts that undergird his isomorphic view—the three divisions of reality, the two operations of the intellect that permit abstraction, the *ratio* in the object and in the mind, the inner word and the outer word—reveal an approach that emphasizes discrimination, the act of separating into distinct parts and operations. This emphasis on discrimination and the operations of the intellect will become even more pronounced once we look at Dōgen’s view.

Dōgen’s View of the Relationship Between Reality–Language–Thought

Dōgen opens *Genjōkōan*, one of his most celebrated essays, which can be roughly translated as “the actualization of enlightenment,” with: “As all things are buddha dharma, there is delusion, realization, practice, birth and death, buddhas, and sentient beings. As myriad things are without an abiding self, there is no delusion, no realization, no buddha, no sentient being, no birth and death. The buddha way, in essence, is leaping clear of abundance and lack; thus there is birth and death, delusion and realization, sentient beings and buddhas. Yet in attachment blossoms fall, and in aversion weeds spread.”²² What can we discern at first blush from this passage? There seem to be two parts: the first, comprising the first three sentences that deal with

¹³ Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 7–8 and *passim*.

¹⁴ Lonergan, 1–2; *Super Sent* I, d.27, q.2, a.1 sol., quoted in Lonergan, 2 note 5.

¹⁵ Lonergan, 3–4; Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio Libri Peri hermeneias* (herein *In Peri herm.*) I, lec. 2, sec. 21, quoted in Lonergan, 3 note 13.

¹⁶ Lonergan, 4. Note that Lonergan reviews and cites four works of Aquinas with regard to the division of inner words into definitions and judgments; see note 12.

¹⁷ Lonergan, 5–6; Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* (herein *QDP*) q.9, a.5 c and Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (herein *QDV*) q.4, a.1 c, quoted in Lonergan, 6 notes 25 and 26.

¹⁸ Lonergan, 8–9; *QDV* q.3, a.2 c, quoted in Lonergan, 9 note 37.

¹⁹ *QDV* q.4, a. 2 ad 5m; *QDP* q.8, a.1 and q.9, a.5; *ST* I, 27, a.1 c, quoted in Lonergan, 9, note 38.

²⁰ Lonergan, 10; *QDV* q.4, a.2.c, quoted in Lonergan, note 46.

²¹ Lonergan, 11; *ST* I, q.85, a.4; q. 55, a.3; q.58, aa. 2–4; q. 12, aa.8–10.

²² Eihei Dōgen, “Actualizing the Fundamental Point,” in *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen’s Shōbo Genzo*, vol. 1, trans. Kazuaki Tanahashi (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), 29. Here, “dharma” refers to phenomena in general.

the same subjects in different ways; and the second, comprising the last sentence, which seems to be a commentary on the first part. The first part has a cyclical structure, beginning with an affirmation of things and processes, then a negation of the same things and processes, and finally ending with a return to the affirmation of things and processes. The first part is paradoxical, asserting both the affirmation and negation of the same things and processes. The second part seems allegorical and appears to further qualify the assertions of the prior cyclical, paradoxical part. Such perplexing use of language is typical of Dōgen's writings. Taigen Dan Leighton characterizes Dōgen's discourse style as "usually not explanatory, discursive, or logical in the linear manner of modern rationality or cognition. Rather, Dōgen seemingly free-associates, making illuminating connections based on doctrinal themes or imagistic motifs, aimed at proclaiming the non-dual reality of the present phenomenal world as fully imbued with the presence of the Buddha and of the ongoing possibility of awakening."²³

Hee-Jin Kim states that "the single most original and seminal aspect of Dōgen's Zen is his treatment of the role of language in Zen soteriology."²⁴ While this is not necessarily echoed by most Zen scholars, Dōgen's use of language is indeed quite remarkable and continues to gain much scholarly attention,²⁵ including recent comparisons of his style and thought to that of philosophers Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricœur, Martin Heidegger, and Christian mystic-scholastic Meister Eckhart. There are several notable features in Dōgen's work to indicate that he uses language not simply as a medium between thought and reality, but to advance his overall realization agenda. Following are some aspects of Dōgen's view of language.

First, for Dōgen, language is expression. Every single thing, including non-sentient beings, has a unique way of expressing itself, which allows communication and connection across the universe.²⁶ In *Keisei-sanshiki*, Dōgen relates the story of Layman Tōba, who one night was enlightened upon hearing the sound of a stream. The day before, he had heard a Zen teacher speak about insentient beings expounding the truth. Dōgen asks reflectively whether it was the teacher's words or the sound of the stream that awakened Tōba, and also whether it was Tōba who was awakened or the stream. The story illustrates the notion that nature itself is always speaking the truth and its preaching can be heard by those who are awakened.²⁷ The second question also destabilizes the notion of subject-object and highlights the two-way-ness of communication, with both parties simultaneously expressing and receiving.

Second, language is perspectival. In *Sansuigyō*, Dōgen explains that the word "water" is a human designation based on human understanding. Nonhuman beings, however, see water

²³ Taigen Dan Leighton, *Visions of Awakening Space and Time: Dōgen and the Lotus Sutra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24.

²⁴ Hee-Jin Kim, *Dōgen on Meditation and Thinking: A Reflection on His View of Zen* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 59.

²⁵ In addition to Kim's work, there are several excellent articles and monographs on Dōgen that include analyses of his unique treatment of language. See Steven Heine, "Kōans in the Dōgen Tradition: How and Why Dōgen Does What He Does with Kōans," *Philosophy East and West* 54, no. 1 (Jan. 2004): 1–19; Leighton, *Visions of Awakening Space and Time*; and Shohaku Okumura, *Realizing Genjokoan: The Key to Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010).

²⁶ Kim, 60–61.

²⁷ "Keisei-sanshiki: The Voices of the River Valley and the Form of the Mountains," in *Shōbōgenzō*, vol. 1, 109–111 including translator's note.

differently. For fish or gods or hungry ghosts, the thing that we refer to as “water” would have a different designation altogether. In this panoply of perspectival understandings, the human designation is by no means primary, but just one among many. There is no common understanding shared by all beings, and language therefore carries with it all linguistic possibilities. Based on this, Dōgen invites reflection upon this question: Is it one object that is perceived differently by different beings or different things mistakenly thought to be one object? He suggests that there is not one object, “original water” as it were, nor water of many kinds. Water is only itself, independent of the understanding or designations of beings.²⁸ Kim notes, *mutatis mutandis*, that there is no “original language” and that such a “*radicalization* of language calls for a complete changeover of humanity’s collective delusion and self-centeredness with respect to the nature and function of language.”²⁹

Third, human language, while limited, can serve as a vehicle for realization. Kim explains that “enlightenment, from Dōgen’s perspective, consists of clarifying and penetrating one’s muddled discriminative thought in and through our language to attain clarity, depth, and precision in the discriminative thought itself.”³⁰ In *Sansuigyō*, Dōgen speaks harshly against Zen Buddhists who eschew rational thought and understanding and hold the view that enlightenment lies only in practices, expressions, and stories that are nonrational and incomprehensible (which are ubiquitous in the Zen tradition, for example the story of a student getting hit by his teacher with his “training stick” every time the student asked what is the meaning of Buddhism). This is a thoroughly incorrect interpretation according to Dōgen, for the incomprehensible is either comprehensible to buddhas or incomprehensible not for the reasons that these people think them to be. Dōgen says, “How pitiful they are who are unaware that discriminative thought *is* words and phrases and that words and phrases *liberate* discriminative thought!”³¹ According to Kim’s analysis, “if the cause of affliction and suffering lies in language, the way to release oneself of this predicament is in language itself. In fact, such a language-bound situation ... is the only locus where one can attain realization. Dōgen thus focalizes languages as the *agent* of liberation.”³²

Fourth, language is alive for Dōgen and integral to existence itself. Language is not just a way of capturing and describing reality, but is a way of constructing reality.³³ To illustrate this, consider some examples of Dōgen’s rhetorical strategies. One strategy involves freely switching an expression of the form ABCDE to other permutations, as for example when he switches from “Mind itself is Buddha” to “Itself Buddha is mind.”³⁴ Another is reconstructing meaning through syntax changes, as in changing “All sentient beings without exception have Buddha-nature” to “All sentient beings, all existence, are Buddha-nature” or to “All sentient beings in their completeness, Buddha-nature.”³⁵ A third is to be self-referential. In Dharma hall discourse 60 in the *Eihei Kōroku*, Dōgen notes that he gives a Dharma hall discourse for the assembly, and then does not give it, leading one to wonder whether it is forthcoming, until the realization that the

²⁸ “*Sansuigyō*: The Sutra of Mountains and Water,” in *Shōbōgenzō*, vol. 1, 221–2.

²⁹ Kim, 61–62.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

³¹ *Sansuigyō* as translated in Kim, 62.

³² Kim, 63.

³³ *Ibid.*, 63–64.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 67–68.

announcement itself must have been the discourse to which he was referring.³⁶ Part of the reason that Dōgen engages in such rhetorical strategies is because for him, the expression of truth (*dōtoku*), in verbal language or otherwise, simultaneously and dynamically contains what has been (explicitly) expressed, and (implicitly) what has yet to be expressed, what is possible to be expressed, and what is inexpressible.³⁷ When an expression of truth is first intuited and affirmed, it takes time for the expression to express itself with all its energy. There is no discontinuity in its expression during that time. Dōgen says, “Expression of the truth now and insights of former times are a ‘single track,’ and they are ten thousand miles apart.”³⁸

Comparison

How does Aquinas’s isomorphism illustrate dualism and Dōgen’s realizational use of language illustrate non-dualism? As noted previously, Aquinas’s thought is not purely dualistic, nor is Dōgen’s purely non-dualistic. In fact, my overarching aim in this paper is to show that they are using both dualism and non-dualism in skillful ways. What I hope to have shown in the above accounts of Aquinas’s and Dōgen’s views of the relationship between reality, language, and thought are tendencies: toward dualism for Aquinas and toward non-dualism for Dōgen.

In a simplistic way, we can think of the difference between dualism and non-dualism in terms of what Aquinas identifies as one of the operations of the intellect: that of joining and dividing.³⁹ Dualistic thinking, with its focus on separating and discriminating, emphasizes the operation of dividing. In Aquinas’s account, we can tell what is the difference between reality, language, and thought. They are isomorphic, meaning that they share a certain likeness, but are also different, at least in terms of what occurs in the mind and what occurs outside of the mind. Non-dualistic thinking, with its focus on the seamlessness of reality, emphasizes the operation of joining. In Dōgen’s account, the differences that were clear in Aquinas’s account are destabilized: language is not confined to humans, but is the way in which all things express themselves; names of things are radically perspectival and carry with them all linguistic possibilities; language is both limiting and liberating; and language is integral to existence and is a way of constructing reality itself.

Another, perhaps even simpler, way of clarifying the difference between dualism and non-dualism is illustrated by the example of “running” and “runner.” Aquinas says that we signify one thing by “running” and another thing by “runner;” “running” signifies in the abstract, whereas “runner” signifies in the concrete.⁴⁰ In contrast, Shohaku Okumura says of the practice of Dōgen’s Zen that “there is no such thing as the self outside of our action. There is no runner beside the action of running. Runner and running are exactly the same thing. If there is a

³⁶ Leighton, 23–24.

³⁷ Kim, 64.

³⁸ “*Dōtoku*: Expressing the Truth,” in *Shōbōgenzō*, vol. 2, 333–334. This touches a bit on Dōgen’s views of time and space, which are of great scholarly interest and too complex to be treated here. See Leighton’s *Visions of Awakening Space and Time* for an excellent exposition of, and reflection on, Dōgen’s views.

³⁹ *BDT* q.V, a. 3, trans. Armand Maurer, 30.

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Exposition in librum Boethii De hebdomadibus* (herein *BDH*), trans. Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan, 22, quoted in Eleonore Stump, “God’s Simplicity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 140.

runner outside of running, then the runner is not running.”⁴¹ From this comparison, we gain the impression that dualism and non-dualism are not just conceptually different, but that they are actually fundamentally different ways of understanding.

Dualism and Non-Dualism in Dōgen

With this sense of the difference between dualism and non-dualism, we can now delve a little more deeply into Dōgen’s views on the dynamic between them. In *Genjōkōan*, Dōgen says, “When you see forms or hear sounds, fully engaging body-and-mind, you intuit dharma intimately. Unlike things and their reflections in the mirror, and unlike the moon and its reflection in the water, when one side is illumined, the other side is dark.”⁴² What Dōgen is describing in this passage, according to Kim’s exegesis, is the dynamic between dualism and non-dualism as salvific foci. Specifically, Kim says, “Non-duality, as the core of the middle way, is designed to overcome the limitations, restrictions, and dangers inherent in all dualities such as being and nonbeing, defilement and purity, good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, and life and death. Its purpose is to free ... [people] ... from clinging to and fixating on those dualities, in order to realize the state of non-duality.”⁴³ In Kim’s analysis, non-duality is not superior to duality, and neither does it refer to something metaphysical,⁴⁴ nor is it some “pure enlightenment experience,” as has been propounded by D. T. Suzuki and some members of the Kyoto School.⁴⁵ Kim stresses that “non-duality is *not* extra-, trans-, pre-, post-, or antiduality. It is always necessarily rooted in duality. Therefore, *non*-duality functions within, with, and through *duality*. The non in non-duality signifies dynamicity.”⁴⁶ It is the dialectic between what can be understood as “not two and not one” or “neither the one nor the many.” Duality is predicated on non-duality and vice versa. This intimacy is what Dōgen means when he says, “when one side is illumined, the other is dark.”⁴⁷ So this way of seeing is primarily an epistemological claim, but with ontological implications.

How is this salvific? Kim says that for Dōgen, dualism and non-dualism are paradigmatic of all x and non-x pairs.⁴⁸ For instance, let us take delusion and realization. Dōgen says in *Genjōkōan*, “Those who have great realization of delusion are buddhas; those who are greatly deluded about realization are sentient beings.”⁴⁹ According to Shohaku Okumura, realization for Dōgen is about becoming enlightened as to one’s delusions.⁵⁰ Realization and delusion then are not two and not one. When one side is illumined, the other side is dark. It is the dynamic process of getting clarity in the mess of our discriminative thinking.⁵¹

⁴¹ Shohaku Okumura, “To Study the Self,” in *The Art of Just Sitting: Essential Writings on the Zen Practice of Shikantaza*, 2nd ed., ed. John Daido Looi (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2004), 106–107.

⁴² “Actualizing the Fundamental Point,” in *Shōbōgenzō* (Tanahashi trans.), 29–30.

⁴³ Kim, 32.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 33–34.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 34–35.

⁴⁹ “Actualizing the Fundamental Point,” in *Shōbōgenzō* (Tanahashi trans.), 29.

⁵⁰ Okumura, *Realizing Genjokoan*, 57–58.

⁵¹ Kim, 63.

Examples of Non-Dual Views in Aquinas's Thought

In Aquinas's thought, there are some concepts that I suggest have this same quality of not-two- and not-one-ness, although they are not explicitly categorized as non-dual. The following three examples, which correspond to some of Aquinas's key ontological and theological concepts, illustrate this.

Analogical Predication

The first example is his analogical predication when it comes to language about God, which differs a bit from the predication that was discussed earlier. The primary difference stems from the sharp distinction that he draws between God and creatures, particularly as to God not having attributes that are distinguishable from Godself and God's identity, from what can be affirmed of God. Aquinas notes that when we use words, we typically do so either univocally, that is, the same word has the same meaning each time, e.g., the word "tomorrow," or equivocally, that is, the same word has different, unrelated meanings, e.g., the word "pitcher." In reference to God, however, neither of these apply. For example, the sense in which we use the word "good" is different in the statement "God is good" versus "Mother Teresa is good." It is not univocal because goodness is identical to God's identity, whereas goodness is an attribute of Mother Teresa. And yet the two uses of "good" are also not unrelated, so they are not equivocal. This is because the way in which we can speak of Mother Teresa's goodness bears some similitude to God's goodness. When we speak about God in this manner, Aquinas says that our predication is analogical and that what we say is literally true of God; except, of course, when we are talking about God in figurative or metaphorical terms.⁵² I am suggesting that analogical predication is a non-dual rendering of predication because it is neither equivocal, that is, not-two, nor univocal, that is, not-one. We can also notice that he switches between the dual rendering of predication for creature-talk, that is either univocal or equivocal, and the non-dual rendering for God-talk.

Simplicity of God

The second example is Aquinas's concept of the simplicity of God. Aquinas distinguishes between the *essence* of something, which is what makes something what it is and that makes it recognizable and understandable to us as such; and the *existence* of something, which refers to the presence of that thing, which we affirm or deny. For example, we can recognize a unicorn, and deny that such animals exist. To Aquinas, *being* involves both essence and existence.⁵³ Here again his sharp distinction between God and creatures is relevant. God is the only being whose essence and existence are one and the same, and this is what it means to be simple.⁵⁴ For creatures, what something is (its essence) is different from the fact that something is (its existence).

Aquinas has three primary claims associated with God's simplicity. First, God has no parts in terms of space and time; God is everywhere and always. Second, God has no accidental

⁵² *ST I* q.13, a.5; Brian Davies, "The Limits of Language and The Notion of Analogy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 392–396.

⁵³ *ST I*, q.3, a.4; John F. Wippel, "Being," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 77.

⁵⁴ *ST I* q.3, a.4; *BDH*, 33 and 35, quoted in Stump, 140.

properties; God is pure essence. And third, whatever can be said about God’s intrinsic attributes is simply the unity of God’s essence.⁵⁵ We can see from these claims how difficult it is to engage in clear discriminative thought when it comes to God.

Aquinas acknowledges that God’s simplicity can be rather enigmatic for us. He says, “We signify one thing by ‘*esse*’ [the act of being that makes a thing to be] and another thing by ‘*id quod est*’ [that which is] just as we signify one thing by ‘running’ . . . and another thing by ‘runner’ . . . For ‘running’ and ‘*esse*’ signify in the abstract . . . ; but ‘*id quod est*,’ that is ‘an entity,’ and ‘a runner,’ signify in the concrete. . . .”⁵⁶ Herein lies part of the dilemma, for how could anything be abstract and concrete at the same time? This has led some to argue that God must be either only *esse* or only *id quod est*. Eleanore Stump argues that this goes blatantly against what Aquinas himself says. To make matters even more complex, Aquinas also says, “With regard to what God himself is, God himself is neither universal nor particular.”⁵⁷ To resolve the conundrum of simultaneously abstract and concrete and neither universal nor particular, Stump suggests quantum physics as a useful metaphor. She says that in quantum physics we can acknowledge the depth of what we do not know, but still be able to reason and say much about the subject; and we can think of God’s simultaneous *esse* and *id quod est* in a way similar to how we conceive of light as being either particle or wave, and when we talk about it, we just need to be careful to know to which aspect we are referring. For example, we can say that God is love, knowing this is meant in the abstract sense, and that God is loving, knowing this is meant in the concrete sense.⁵⁸ Recalling that for Aquinas language is isomorphic with thought and reality, Stump adds that perhaps one of the most important claims that relates to God’s simplicity is that “the ultimate metaphysical foundation of reality is something that has to be understood as *esse*, but also as *id quod est*.”⁵⁹

In this example we encounter again the limitations of dualistic discriminative thinking, which separates things into either abstract or concrete, or either universal or particular, which is sufficient for creaturely existence, but inadequate for Aquinas’s view of God. Is it just a matter of perspective, as Stump suggests? This proposition should strike us as still a dualistic way of thinking, another way of framing the problem as an either-or. I suggest instead that what Aquinas is pointing to in his doctrine of the simplicity of God is a non-dual, nondiscriminative way of thinking, that is predicated on the dual, discriminative way of thinking. The fundamental problem that Aquinas confronts is how to use language, which is inherently discriminative, to talk about God, who is inherently beyond discrimination. David Burrell suggests that what Aquinas has done is to admit as possible a form of predication that applies only to God, namely, the form of “to be God is to be,” which looks like, but is syntactically and ontologically different from, the form of predication that we are accustomed to, namely “to be ___ is to be ___.” The former differs syntactically and ontologically from the latter because the latter applies to creatures or

⁵⁵ Stump, 135.

⁵⁶ *BDH* 22, quoted in Stump, 140.

⁵⁷ *ST I*, q.13 a.9 ad 2; Stump, 141. According to Aquinas, we abstract the universal, i.e., something that can refer to many individuals, from the particular by considering the nature of the species and removing those aspects that apply only to the particular, e.g., abstracting “horse” from a particular horse. See *ST I*, q.85, a.1, ad 1.

⁵⁸ Stump, 135–137.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

objects that are of composite nature, which God's nature is not.⁶⁰ Thus all of the statements that Aquinas does say of God—that he is perfect, good, eternal, one—while appearing to be affirmative statements, are actually indirect statements of denial because they deny that which can be logically affirmed of creatures.⁶¹ While Burrell does not categorize Aquinas's move in terms of dual/non-dual, his observation aligns well with the image of “when one side is illumined, the other is dark.”

The Lord's Supper

Perhaps the signal exemplar of the pattern of not-two and not-one in Christian thought is the person of Jesus Christ himself: singular in his personhood/subjectivity and hypostasis, and dual in his fully human and fully divine nature, in unconfused, unchangeable, indivisible, and inseparable manner.⁶² The third and final example flows from Aquinas's understanding of Jesus Christ's non-duality, and involves Aquinas's view of the sacrament of the Eucharist, the celebration of the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples before he was to suffer. In the following discussion, I refer specifically to the celebration of the Eucharist in the Catholic Church, which differs in some significant ways from the celebration in other Christian Churches.

For Aquinas, the Eucharist has a three-fold meaning that has to do with the past, the present, and the future, each of which he assigns other names in addition to “Eucharist.” With regard to the past, the Eucharist is seen as a Sacrifice that commemorates the passion of Jesus Christ.⁶³ This commemoration is not a simple remembrance, for Aquinas notes that “the Sacrifice which is offered every day in the Church is not distinct from that which Christ Himself offered;”⁶⁴ while also maintaining that “. . . Christ's passion and death are not to be repeated, (for) the virtue of that Victim endures forever. . . .”⁶⁵ Here we see clearly that Aquinas's rendering of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that transpired in history and its commemoration in the sacrament of the Eucharist can be understood as another instance of not-two and not-one, and therefore non-dual.

With regard to the present, the Eucharist is seen as Communion or Synaxis (an assembly for liturgical purposes, from the Greek word for “gathering”) because it is the sacrament that gathers people to achieve ecclesial unity. With regard to the future, the Eucharist is seen as Viaticum (a special term for the Eucharist given to one who is dying or in danger of death, from the Latin word for “provisions for the journey”) because the sacrament both foreshadows our full enjoyment of God, which will happen in heaven, and also supplies the means to get there. The sacrament is also seen qua Eucharist (from the Latin and Greek words for thanksgiving and gratitude) as thanksgiving for the gift of Christ, “because it really contains Christ, Who is full of

⁶⁰ David B. Burrell, C.S.C., *Exercises in Religious Understanding: Jung, Anselm, Aquinas, Augustine, Kierkegaard* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 96–97.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 94–95.

⁶² See the Chalcedonian Definition.

⁶³ *ST III*, q.73, a.4.

⁶⁴ *ST III*, q.22, a.3, ad 2. See also *ST III*, q.75 for Aquinas's exposition on transubstantiation, the changing of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ at the level of substance, subsequent to consecration. And see *ST III*, q.48, a.3 for Aquinas's understanding of the passion of Jesus Christ as sacrificial.

⁶⁵ *ST III*, q.22, a.5, ad 2.

grace.”⁶⁶ Here Aquinas’s rendering of the significance of the Eucharist in the past, the present, and the future is reminiscent of Dōgen’s view of the expression of truth as simultaneously and dynamically containing what has been expressed, what has yet to be expressed, what is possible to be expressed, and what is inexpressible, as well as the continuity of the expression from which insights flow, forward and backward, along a single track. This is the dynamicity of non-dualism.

Conclusion

What I hope to have demonstrated are some of the skillful ways in which both Aquinas and Dōgen addressed what they understood to be the limitations of dualistic, discriminative thinking for describing the nature of reality. Dualism and non-dualism were key for Dōgen, who used these concepts to illuminate the differences between delusion and enlightenment. His way was to see non-dualism as predicated on dualism, and as being in a dynamic dialectic with it, which not only gets beyond the limitations of discriminative thought, but also clarifies those limitations and opens a new realm of understanding that is not-two and not-one. Contrasting Aquinas’s and Dōgen’s views on the relationship between reality, language, and thought highlighted some of the limitations in Aquinas’s account, such as its anthropocentric bias. Analyzing Aquinas’s thoughts on analogical predication, the simplicity of God, and the Eucharist through the lens of Dōgen’s dualism/non-dualism in turn allowed us to see that Aquinas was switching between dual and non-dual perspectives in these reflections, which hopefully made some of these thoughts seem less paradoxical.

Beyond the examples analyzed in this essay, I suggest that it would be salutary to discern and explicitly distinguish dual and non-dual perspectives in Aquinas’s thought for several reasons. First, the not-two and not-one paradigm may be a useful lens in general as another tool for understanding how Aquinas modifies creature-based language to apply to God-talk. Second, a non-dual lens may illuminate additional areas in Aquinas’s thought that might benefit from de-anthropocentrism. Third, a non-dual perspective might also serve as a focal point for integrating Aquinas’s scholasticism with his mysticism. And fourth, the dynamicity of dual/non-dual perspectives, given its importance in Dōgen’s thought, might serve as a foundation for additional explorations into dialogues between these two great thinkers.

As mentioned at the outset however, dualism and non-dualism are not just conceptually different. Non-dualism, even if it is rooted in dualism and vice versa, resists a purely rational understanding. In Dōgen’s Zen, a deep understanding of non-dualism arises only through assiduous meditation practice and guided study of the nature of discriminative thinking.⁶⁷ There are no parallel practices in Christianity. While the Eucharist as understood by Aquinas has significant non-dual aspects, these are not highlighted as such.

Another challenge is that non-dualism tends to either flatten or conflate concepts that we may be accustomed to thinking of separately, like runner and running, or to open up myriad possibilities that transcend our usual ways of thinking, like Dōgen’s polysemantic understanding

⁶⁶ *ST III*, q.73, a.4.

⁶⁷ Okumura, *Realizing Genjokoan*, 75–77.

of language. When applied to Aquinas or to Christian thought in general, non-dualism may reveal conflicts with teachings that are intentionally hierarchical or dualistic. These challenges notwithstanding, I suggest it is a worthwhile and promising endeavor to experiment with seeing Christian thought through the lens of Zen Buddhist dualism and non-dualism.

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