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Aquinas and Dōgen on Poverty and the Religious Life

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Abstract

Recent efforts to articulate Buddhist ethics have increasingly focused on "Western" ethical systems that possess a "family resemblance" sufficient to serve as a bridge. One promising avenue is the employment of Aristotelian-Thomistic thinking in seeking to understand certain manifestations of Buddhism. More specifically, we can explore how the thinking of Thomas Aquinas may serve to illuminate the moral vision of the Zen Master Dōgen on specific topics, such as that of "poverty and the religious life." Two texts seem particularly conducive as foci for this approach, namely IIaIIae 186.3 of the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*. This *modus operandi* reveals how Dōgen's views on poverty and the religious life are significantly similar to, and yet in certain respects distinctively different from, those of Aquinas.

At the beginning of *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, Peter Harvey explains his intent to "address issues which are currently of concern in Western thought on ethics and society, so as to clarify the Buddhist perspective(s) on these issues and make Buddhist ethics more easily available to Western

thinkers on these issues." Of course, "what the scriptures and key thinkers [of Buddhist tradition] have said" is central to his project (Harvey 2000:1). Thus part of the task involves finding means to bridge the distance between Western thought and that of the history of Buddhist tradition.

In his preface to *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, Damien Keown mentions Aristotelianism as a "Western" ethical system which bears a "family resemblance" to Buddhist ethics (Keown 1992:viii). By extension, we might say the same of Aristotelian-Thomistic thinking, at least with regard to certain Buddhist thinkers. Masao Abe pointed to such a family resemblance between two thirteenth-century figures, the Italian Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and the Japanese Zen Master Dōgen (1200-1253) (Abe 1985:26).

This family resemblance suggests one possible avenue for the "Western" study of Dōgen's ethics. We might begin with Thomas Aquinas and use him as a framework for, and bridge to, Dōgen. To accomplish this, we would benefit from identifying a common area of concern and corresponding texts offering ample discussion on the topic. I believe we find these conditions met with the juxtaposition of two texts: IIaIIae 186.3 of the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas and Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki* (hereinafter abbreviated "*SZ*"). Both of these texts discuss in considerable detail whether or not poverty is required in order to lead the religious life.

Is Poverty Required? Initial Responses and Clarifications

IIaIIae 186.3 asks "whether poverty is required for religious perfection" (*utrum paupertas requiratur ad perfectionem religionis*). Previously Aquinas explained that religious perfection consists principally in charity (IIaIIae 184.1), and this is the proper goal of those people leading the religious life, who are said to be in a "state of perfection" (IIaIIae 186.1). Thus Aquinas's question amounts to asking "whether voluntary poverty is required for the religious life," and indeed this is how Aquinas poses it in his preliminary list of points of inquiry to be addressed by IIaIIae 186 (*utrum voluntaria paupertas requiratur ad religionem*).

That Aquinas is essentially addressing the matter of whether poverty is required for those leading the religious life is further confirmed in his initial reply to the question:

> *On the other hand, Gregory says, "Some of the just, girding themselves to scale the very height of perfection, abandon all external goods in their desire for the higher interior goods." But to gird oneself to the height of perfection properly pertains to religious, as stated above [that is, in* IIaIIae *186.1 and 2]. Therefore it is proper for them to abandon all external goods by voluntary poverty.*

This *sed contra*, it should be noted, follows upon a series of opinions wherein Aquinas offers arguments opposed to his own view. We will look at these opinions and Aquinas's response to them after exploring what Aquinas has to say in his *responsio*, the more detailed response to the question at hand, and Dōgen's analogous views. But we should first note a few points that we can discern from reading the *sed contra*.

First of all, when Aquinas seeks to assert the role of poverty in the attainment of religious perfection, he begins with a proof text from Gregory to the effect that this is the goal of *some* of the just, and then he attaches this statement to religious. The call to abandon all goods and lead the religious life is considerably less than universal, the number of the called accepted into the religious life a smaller number, and the ability of all those admitted to carry out the task is a number even smaller—this is evident from other passages in the *Summa*, such as the following: "Those who are persuaded to enter religious life must still go through a period of probation, in which they can test the difficulties of religious life. Therefore they are not easily admitted to religious life" (IIaIIae 189.9). That Dōgen saw only "some people" as truly suited and capable of entering the religious life and meeting the demands of poverty is evident in passages like *SZ* 5.20, wherein we learn that while "even in China" there were men "who abandoned hard-to-abandon worldly goods to enter a Zen monastery," nonetheless many were ultimately unable to detach themselves from a desire for profit and thus truly follow the ideal of poverty.

Furthermore, the type of poverty referred to here deserves brief mention. Throughout the opinions leading up to the *sed contra*, Aquinas's constructed arguments repeatedly refer to *voluntary* poverty. Both Aquinas and Dōgen clearly distinguish between the voluntary poverty of religious and the involuntary poverty of the laity. In fact, both men believe that, under certain circumstances, it is right for these voluntary poor to provide aid to the involuntary poor (see, for example, IIaIIae 189.6 and *SZ* 2.2). This is one example of what follows from Aquinas's position on the perfection of charity and Dōgen's understanding of the exercise of compassion, teachings to which we will now turn.

"The Virtues": The Background for the Discussion

After reiterating that the religious life is directed toward the perfection of charity, in his *responsio* Aquinas proceeds to assert the necessity of religious withdrawing their affection entirely from worldly things so as to obtain charity. In order to develop his point, he subsequently offers two proof texts from Augustine. The first is taken from the *Confessions*: "For Augustine says, addressing God, 'Too little does he love thee who loves anything with thee which he loves not for thee.'" We should note that the passage Aquinas quotes from Augustine is followed thus: "O Love ever burning, never quenched! O Charity, my God, set me on fire with your love!" (*Confessions*, Bk. 10, 29). Knowing that charity is invoked in Augustine's effusions about love provides some help in following Aquinas's segue to the next passage cited in the *responsio* of IIaIIae 186.3: "Augustine also says, 'The nourishment of charity is the lessening of covetousness; its perfection is the absence of all covetousness'" (Quaest. LXXXIII, 36. *PL* 40, 25). Thus we see that when Aquinas begins to address the pursuit of the perfection of charity by religious, via Augustine he frames the discussion in terms of "a lessening of covetousness."

At this point we should note what Dōgen has to say in *SZ* 3.7; the passage begins as follows:

> *Monks should take care to follow the conduct of the Buddhas and the Patriarchs. Above all, do not covet wealth. It is im-*

> *possible to put into words the depth of the Tathāgata's compassion. Everything he did was for the sake of all sentient beings.*

Analogous to Aquinas's "proof texting" of Augustine in order to lend authority to his argument, Dōgen cites as his authority the exemplary conduct of the Buddha and the Patriarchs; later in the same passage he buttresses this with the observation that "all the Zen Masters warn against the accumulation of wealth." This leads us to the key point we should note about the passage overall: just as Aquinas frames his discussion of the perfection of charity in terms of the lessening and eliminating of covetousness, so does Dōgen frame his elaboration of the exercise of compassion in terms of the lessening and eliminating of covetousness.

Understanding why Aquinas's and Dōgen's views on the voluntary poverty of those leading the religious life unfold in this parallel fashion requires some background information on their respective forms of "virtue-thinking." Aquinas established a hierarchy of virtues; at the very top was charity (*caritas*), which shared with hope (*spes*) and faith (*fides*) the uppermost level as the three theological virtues; these and all other virtues are ultimately subordinate to *caritas*, though interconnected with it in some fashion. As for Dōgen, he established the virtue of compassion (*karunā*) as the most prominent of the four cardinal virtues of Buddhism, a virtue existing alongside and interdependent with *maitrī*, *muditā*, and *upekshā*, at the center of an interconnected web of all the virtues.

A detailed exposition of how charity functions in the virtue-thinking of Aquinas and compassion in that of Dōgen, and the parallels one can draw by juxtaposing the two, would require much more space than is available here, and in any case has been treated elsewhere (see Mikkelson 2005). But we can offer here one juxtaposition helpful for understanding the aforementioned parallel statements on poverty: for Aquinas, charity is connected to a lower virtue, a virtue opposed to the vice of covetousness; for Dōgen, compassion is interdependent with an outer virtue, a virtue opposed to the vice of covetousness.

Obtaining Poverty: Abandoning Covetousness

Covetousness, we will recall, is one of "the seven deadly sins" of Catholic tradition. The alternate term "capital sins" partially derives from Aquinas's understanding; he viewed them as capital vices which were "at the head" (cf. the Latin word *caput*, "head") of other vices, and IIaIIae 118.7 confirms that he regarded covetousness as one of them. In the course of his discussion of this vice, Aquinas affirms that it is opposed to the virtue of liberality (IIaIIae 118.3). As for Dōgen, we find numerous references in his writings attesting to his attention to this vice, and sometimes this is manifest when he is describing the opposing virtue; for example, in the *Shushōgi* and the *Bodaisatta Shishōbō* we find nearly identical passages explaining that the virtue of *fuse*—typically translated as "giving"—means "non-covetousness." Of course, we are limiting our discussion to Dōgen's primer, and therein he informs his monks that in order to lead the religious life, "the essential requisite is to abandon covetousness" (*SZ* 1.4), and subsequent passages reveal the operation of *fuse* in accomplishing this.

For both Aquinas and Dōgen, therefore, the exercise of a virtue of "giving" (*liberalitas* for Aquinas, *fuse* for Dōgen) promotes the lessening and elimination of the vice of covetousness. This contributes to the perfection of the virtue to which those leading the religious life are dedicated (charity for Aquinas, compassion for Dōgen). Knowing this will help us better understand how the rest of IIaIIae 186.3 unfolds and the analogous material we find in the *SZ*.

Subsequent to the passage quoted above, Aquinas continues his discussion of covetousness and then proceeds to offer the culminating climax of the *responsio*:

> *But when one possesses worldly goods, his soul is drawn to love of them. So Augustine says, "Worldly goods actually possessed are more loved than those that are desired. For why did that young man go away sad, except that he had great wealth? It is one thing not to wish to acquire what one has not, and another to renounce what one already has. The former are rejected as something foreign to us; the latter are cut*

> *off like a limb." And Chrysostom says, "The possession of wealth kindles a greater flame and covetousness becomes stronger. So that to attain the perfection of charity, the first foundation is voluntary poverty, whereby one lives without anything of his own, as the Lord said, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and follow me.'"*

Compare this with what Dōgen has to say in *SZ* 3.4:

> *Students must be utterly poor. One notices that people in this world who have wealth are inevitably plagued by two difficulties, anger and shame. If a person is rich, others try to rob him; and when he tries to prevent this, he suddenly gets angry. Or else a dispute arises, and there is a legal confrontation, which inevitably causes conflict. When one is poor and covets nothing, however, he will avoid such difficulty from the start and will be free and at ease. You can see the proof of this right before your eyes. You do not have to wait for textual confirmation, for even the sages and the wise men of the past condemned anger and shame, as did the devas, the Buddhas, and the Patriarchs. Yet the foolish accumulate wealth and nurse anger. This is a shame among shames. One who is poor and concentrates on the Way has the respect of the old sages and the men of wisdom and brings joy to the Buddhas and the Patriarchs.*

Juxtaposing these passages leads us toward some significant parallels. Most obvious is the recognition that for both Aquinas and Dōgen the ideal of the religious life is not just poverty, but complete poverty, the absence of all possessions. Furthermore, Aquinas sees this as fundamental to the perfection of charity. That Dōgen sees complete poverty as fundamental to the perfection of the virtue of compassion is evident from various passages in the *SZ* wherein the Buddha is drawn upon as an example. In addition to *SZ* 3.7 cited earlier, we can refer to passages like *SZ* 2.2. Therein we are told about a man who, approaching the Abbot Eisai on behalf of himself and his starving fam-

ily, makes the appeal: "Please have compassion and save us." Eisai was initially stymied, for "this was a time when the monastery was completely without food, clothing, and money." Eventually Eisai recalls a presence of some bronze metal intended for a statue, and he gives it to the man to sell for food. Eisai's disciples criticized his action for "making personal use of the Buddha's goods." Eisai replied:

> *You are right, but think of the will of the Buddha. He cut off his own flesh and limbs for the sake of all sentient beings. Certainly he would have sacrificed his entire body to save starving people. Even though I should fall into the evil realms for this crime, I will still have saved the people from starvation.*

Dōgen's concluding comment: "Students today would do well to reflect on the excellence of Eisai's attitude."

In this depiction of an Abbot of an utterly poor monastery manifesting compassion we learn that the Buddha exercised this virtue to the point of "cutting off his own flesh and limbs." These words remind us of Aquinas's observation about the difficulty of renouncing wealth one actually owns; these possessions "are cut off like a limb." In the passages juxtaposed above, both Aquinas and Dōgen note the emotional toll that can be exacted from the covetousness resulting from accumulated wealth. Aquinas observes how the unwillingness of the wealthy young man to part with his wealth causes him sadness; Dōgen speaks of the anger and shame the rich man undergoes in clinging to his wealth. Both thinkers contrast this to the advantage of voluntary poverty. Aquinas tells us that renouncing what one wishes, rather than what one has, is another matter entirely; we renounce it "as something foreign to us"; as for Dōgen, he simply notes how the person who is poor and covets nothing avoids these kinds of difficulties from the start.

Having completed his discussion of covetousness in relation to the perfection of charity, Aquinas culminates his *responsio* with a proof text (Matthew 19.21) in order to support his stated view that as for the requirements of the religious life, "the first foundation is poverty." More importantly, though, this crowning point is an appeal to the principal moral exemplar of Christian tra-

dition, the Lord himself, Jesus the Christ. Dōgen, as we saw, believes that the advantage and value of voluntary poverty is right before our eyes, and we do not need textual confirmation for it; notably, however, in parallel with Aquinas's argument, Dōgen appeals to principal moral exemplars of the Buddhist tradition, most especially the Buddhas. That Dōgen here views poverty as a "first foundation" for the religious life is confirmed elsewhere, such as in *SZ* 3.7; therein we read: "From the early days Zen monks renounced their bodies and lived in poverty. This is recognized as an outstanding characteristic of the Zen school."

Is Poverty Required? The First Countervailing Opinion

So far we have reviewed Aquinas's reply to the question as it appears in the *sed contra* and the *responsio*, and noted analogous material in the *SZ*. Now we can turn to the opinions of IIaIIae 186.3 and Aquinas's responses to them. According to the viewpoint offered in the first opinion, "that which is unlawful" (*illud quod illicite fit*) is obviously not required for the religious life, and voluntary poverty is unlawful. This argument is developed on the authority of St. Paul's teaching on almsgiving and Peter Lombard's accompanying commentary. It begins with two successive passages from an authentic Pauline letter (2 Corinthians 8.12-13) accompanied by Lombard's remarks (*PL* 192, 58): "If the will be forward, it is accepted according to that which a man has," which a gloss adds, "that is, keeping back what you need." Then St. Paul says, "Not that others should be eased and you burdened," which a gloss explains, "that is, from poverty." Following upon this is 1 Timothy 6.8 (not recognized by modern scholars as authentically Pauline but nonetheless holding this status with Aquinas and others in the thirteenth century) and the accompanying commentary: "But having food and wherewithal to be covered," the same gloss says, "although we brought nothing into this world and carry nothing away, we should not give up these temporal goods altogether" (*PL* 192, 358).

As for Dōgen, not only does he address the topic of poverty on several occasions, but more than once his remarks are in response to countervailing opinions on the subject brought before him; thus some sections of the text

provide a nice parallel to the format of the *Summa*. Pertinent to the subject at hand is the following viewpoint submitted for Dōgen's consideration:

> *One day a visiting priest said: "Recently the method of renouncing the world seems to be to prepare a small amount of food in advance so that one does not have to worry afterwards. This is a small thing, but it helps in the study of the Way. If such items are lacking, practice is disrupted. But, according to what you have said, there should be no such preparation, and everything should be left to fate. If this is really so, won't trouble arise later? What do you think?"* (*SZ* 4.15)

For both Aquinas and Dōgen, the countervailing opinion before them asserts the wisdom of "keeping back what you need" rather than renouncing all possessions. Aquinas specifically addresses food, and evidently lumps together reference to all other necessities ("food and wherewithal"), as does Dōgen ("such items"). In both cases, the "objectors" offer the view that following the religious life does not require poverty; on the contrary, provision of the necessities helps one in the quest. Both opinions, furthermore, appeal to the legacy of their respective traditions in justifying the practice.

Aquinas and Dōgen Reply to the First Countervailing Opinion

Neither Aquinas nor Dōgen respond with a mere personal opinion on the matter; rather, they proceed by invoking the authority of their tradition within which their own view falls in line. Dōgen rejects the opinion presented by the priest in the following manner:

> *For this we have the precedents of all the former Masters. This is not just my personal view; the Buddhas and the Patriarchs all followed a similar method. . . . It is not easy to determine and plan for tomorrow. What I do now has all been done by the Buddhas and the Patriarchs; it is not something that I do because of my personal concepts.*

Elsewhere, however, Dōgen did offer a response to this viewpoint solely on personal opinion without reference to any authority; for example, in *SZ* 2.6, Dōgen notes the viewpoint that "If one practices Buddhism with the necessities provided for, the benefits would be great" and responds: "This does not strike me as true."

As for Aquinas's response to the first opinion, he begins by acknowledging the authority of 2 Corinthians 8.12-13 and the accompanying commentary. But he seeks to correct the conclusion by inserting additional explication from another gloss from Peter Lombard (*PL* 192, 58): "The Apostle did not write those words (namely, the words 'not that you should not be burdened,' that is, by poverty) to indicate what would be better, but he feared for the weak, whom he advised to give in such measure as not to suffer want." (Here Aquinas is consistent with his view articulated in IIaIIae 117.1, which we will have occasion to review in our discussion of the third opinion below.) Having provided what he maintains is the proper context for understanding the (authentically) Pauline proof texts (and the accompanying commentary), Aquinas proceeds to validate the authority of 1 Timothy 6.8 and its gloss as well, while proceeding to drive home his point: "Similarly, the other gloss [on 1 Timothy 6.8] is not to be understood as saying it is unlawful to renounce all one's temporal goods, but that it is not necessarily required."

Parsing the answer Aquinas has provided us so far requires the recognition that he is exploiting the distinction between religious and laity in order to advance his argument. Clearly Aquinas sees the aforementioned three Pauline passages and their accompanying commentaries as authoritative not for one leading the religious life, but for the lay person. Such an individual is certainly not *required* to lead a life of poverty; on the other hand, neither is poverty for the layperson *unlawful*. Thus the objector fails in the attempt to establish poverty as not required for religious because it is unlawful, for if poverty is not unlawful for the laity, certainly it is not unlawful for religious.

Having established the layperson as the proper subject of the Pauline-Lombard proof texts, Aquinas concludes his argument with reference to a layperson as a moral exemplar, drawing upon the authority of Ambrose's commentary on 1 Kings 19.21:

> *Hence, Ambrose says, "Our Lord does not wish" (that is, by necessity of precept) "to pour out our wealth at once, but to dispense it; unless one wishes to do as Elisha, who slew his oxen and fed the poor with what he had so that no domestic care would hold him back."*

Elisha is destined to become a great prophet, but as Aquinas presents him here, at this point in his life he acts as a layperson who performs the supererogatory act of discarding all his possessions and embracing poverty in order to follow the prophet Elijah.

Momentarily shifting focus to the laity and subsequently employing a layperson as a moral exemplar in order to advance the propriety of absolute poverty for a monk is a line of argument also advanced by Dōgen. One day, when a monk asked Dōgen about the essentials of Buddhist practice, he responded: "Students must first of all be poor. If they have much wealth, they will certainly lose the desire for study." In driving home his theme Dōgen concludes with an anecdote about a man named P'ang:

> *P'ang, although a layman, was not inferior to monks. His name is remembered in Zen because, when he first began to study under a Zen Master, he took all the possessions from his house with the aim of throwing them into the sea. Someone advised him: "You should give them to the people or use them for the cause of Buddhism." P'ang replied: "I'm throwing them away because I consider them an enemy. How can I give such things to others! Wealth is an adversary that brings grief to body and mind." In the end, he threw his treasures into the sea and afterwards earned his living by making and selling baskets. Though a layman, he is known as a good man because he discarded his wealth in this way. How much more necessary is it then for a monk to discard his treasures!* (*SZ* 3.11)

Both Aquinas and Dōgen praise a layperson who, engaging in supererogatory action, dispenses of all their possessions. Furthermore, both men im-

plicitly praise their respective exemplars for recognizing that possessions are a hindrance best cast away—they "hold him back" (Aquinas), they are "an enemy . . . an adversary" (Dōgen). But we do see here a difference in the manner and intent of eliminating all possessions. Elisha, in the process of obtaining complete poverty, provides for the poor, something Aquinas evidently finds praiseworthy, and consistent with the demands of charity. Quite naturally we would expect Dōgen's exemplar to manifest similar behavior, given the demands of compassion (we may recall at this point the discussion of *caritas* and *karunā* presented earlier). Yet the Dōgen passage shows P'ang literally tossing away his wealth, declaring it an adversary not only to himself, but to others. Certainly in other passages we see Dōgen praise people for relinquishing wealth in order to help others. But in this passage, Dōgen's focus seems more weighted toward the Buddhist doctrine of non-attachment. Of course, compassion and non-attachment are not mutually exclusive teachings, but we must remember that the context for the above passage is Dōgen's emphasis on the importance and value of absolute poverty, a teaching he is directing specifically toward those who are expected to achieve it, namely monks.

Is Poverty Required? The Second Countervailing Opinion

So far we have reviewed Aquinas's response to his chosen question through the *sed contra*, the *responsio*, and his answer to the first opinion, and noted the analogous material in Dōgen. We may now proceed to review the second opinion advanced in IIaIIae 186.3 and see where the subsequent analysis takes us.

The second opinion offers the objection that "whoever exposes himself to danger sins," and voluntary poverty exposes the individual to two kinds of danger. Juxtaposing the authority of Proverbs 30.9 and Ecclesiasticus 27.1, we learn that poverty has compelled many to sin by acts of theft (a spiritual danger); juxtaposing the textual authority of Ecclesiastes 7.13 and Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* IV, I, 1120a2, we learn that money is the means by which a man lives, and thus a "defense" against "the loss of the man himself" (a bodily danger). Thus voluntary poverty is not required for religious perfection.

Similarly, in *SZ* 1.16, Dōgen's call to voluntary poverty meets a monk's objection that in Japan one cannot rely on begging for food (since the custom in China has largely not been transmitted), so this will lead to sin, for "[i]f someone like me seeks offerings from believers, he is guilty of receiving donations he is not entitled to receive." (Accepting such offers, we can readily perceive, would be understood as a kind of theft, thus parallel to the "spiritual danger" argument Aquinas outlines above.) Furthermore, the monk proceeds to relate the advice given to him: obtain support for practice from a parishioner or patron for a temporal means of livelihood, which "is not a coveting of wealth and property." Unlike the passage in the *Summa Theologiae*, no mention is made here of the "sin" of exposing oneself to bodily danger, but the advisor does assert that the simple acceptance of voluntary poverty is unnecessary and "all wrong" and will not ward off hunger and cold, bodily dangers which impede practice of the Way; the result will inevitably be retrogression.

Aquinas and Dōgen Reply to the Second Countervailing Opinion

As to the potential bodily danger of voluntary poverty raised by objectors in these passages, Aquinas and Dōgen both address the problem directly. According to Aquinas,

> *bodily danger [does not] threaten those who, for the sake of following Christ, renounce all their possessions and entrust themselves to divine providence. Thus Augustine says, "Those who seek first the kingdom of God and his justice should not be worried that they will lack what is necessary."*

As for Dōgen, he maintains that

> *in fact, I have not read in all the Buddhist scriptures of a single Buddha or Patriarch in India or China or Japan who died of hunger or cold [in following the Way]. In this world there is an alloted share of clothing and food for each person while he is alive. It is not obtained by seeking, nor does one fail to*

> *obtain it even if one does not seek it. Just leave it to fate and do not let it trouble you.*

Elsewhere, Dōgen's exhortation to voluntary poverty speaks of "the legacy left by the Tathāgata" to his disciples, and "even if we do not consider accumulating things, we will find that they are supplied naturally. Each person receives his allotted share, bestowed by heaven and earth" (*SZ* 3.12). We can discern considerable similarity in Aquinas's and Dōgen's respective responses. First and foremost, both men essentially deny that voluntary poverty puts one in bodily danger. Furthermore, one should not worry whether or not one's needs for survival will be met; if one follows Christ (Aquinas)/the Way (Dōgen), then divine providence (Aquinas)/heaven and earth (Dōgen) will provide.

Immediately prior to the above response in *SZ* 1.16, however, Dōgen entertains the hypothesis that voluntary poverty could result in death, and has this to say:

> *In a non-Buddhist work is said: "In the morning hear the Way, in the evening die content." Even if you should die from hunger and cold, follow the Buddhist teaching if even for one day or just for one moment. In ten thousand kalpas and one thousand lives, how many times are we born and how many times do we die! All this comes from our deluded clinging to the world. If just once in this life, we have followed the Buddhist teachings and then starved to death, we have truly attained to eternal peace.*

Far from courting spiritual danger via voluntary poverty, as suggested by the monk earlier in this section, Dōgen insists upon the spiritual benefit of the practice (namely, contentment and eternal peace), which would accrue even to one who paid the ultimate price, so to speak. For our deluded clinging to the world, which perpetuates the cycle of rebirth, voluntary poverty is an antidote, even if death is a result (though as we have just seen, Dōgen has never heard of this happening).

For his part, Aquinas also insists that, despite the concerns expressed in the second objection, one does not face spiritual danger via voluntary poverty; rather, "spiritual danger comes from poverty when it is involuntary, because a man falls into many sins through the desire to get rich which torments those who are involuntarily poor." According to 1 Timothy, "They that will become rich fall into temptation and into the snare of the devil." Next to this we can offer a point Dōgen makes in *SZ* 6.5: "When the Buddha was still alive, Devadatta's jealousy was aroused by the daily offering of five hundred cart-loads of provisions. He brought harm not only to himself but to others." As Reihō Masunaga comments, this Devadatta was the Buddha's cousin, and his jealousy motivated him to commit evil acts; indeed, "his crimes were so numerous he fell into hell while still alive. Jealousy over the 500 cart-loads of provisions, offered by a wealthy donor, motivated Devadatta to commit his evil acts" (Masunaga 1978:118). While there is no direct analogy to Aquinas's point here, Dōgen does offer an example of one whose imperfect embrace of voluntary poverty leaves him partially within the mind-set of the involuntary pauper, thus vulnerable to the kind of temptations and subsequent sinful actions which lead one into the realms of hell. Elsewhere Dōgen offers this observation of such people:

> *Nowadays some people seem to have renounced the world and left their homes, but, when one examines their conduct, they have neither truly renounced the world nor left their homes. The first requisite for one who leaves his home to become a monk is to separate from Self and from all desires for fame and profit.* (*SZ* 5.20)

As we see, Dōgen views one who fully embraces voluntary poverty as one who separates himself from the desire for riches. Aquinas's final point about spiritual danger makes a similar observation; the "desire [for riches] is put aside by those who follow voluntary poverty, while it is even stronger in those who already have wealth." For his part, Dōgen contrasts the voluntary poor as models of behavior, and contrasts them with the evil conduct of "the men of extravagance" (*SZ* 5.5); he later criticizes the rich, who typically lack

moderation and self-restraint when it comes to wealth and thus are prone to sins of arrogance and self-pride (*SZ* 5.22).

Is Poverty Required? The Third Countervailing Opinion

Moderation is the theme of the third opposing opinion in IIaIIae 186.3:

> *"Virtue consists in the just mean," as Aristotle says. But he who renounces everything by voluntary poverty does not seem to observe the just mean but rather goes to the extreme. Therefore he does not act virtuously, and hence this does not pertain to the perfection of life.*

Aquinas's hypothetical objector draws upon *Nichomachean Ethics* II, 6, 1106b36; therein Aristotle asserts: "Virtue is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect." Understanding how the objector applies Aristotelian reasoning to the passage requires us to read a bit further in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, at least as far as chapter eight, where we subsequently learn that vices are extreme states not only to each other but in relation to the mean. Thus, according to the objector, the renouncer of all possessions, taking things to the extreme, acts viciously, not virtuously, and only the latter is consonant with leading the religious life. Indeed, in IIaIIae 117.1, Aquinas himself maintains one should not "dispose of his funds in such a way that he is without the means of livelihood," using Aristotle as his proof text: "In the desire to help others the generous man does not neglect his own interests" (*Nichomachean Ethics* IV, 1, 1120b2).

Dōgen himself does not specifically identify virtue as situated between two vices. But Dōgen, as a Buddhist, inherited an idea central to the Buddha's Enlightenment, namely the Middle Path, the way between all opposites. Since, for the Buddha and for Dōgen, morality proceeds from Enlightenment, we would logically expect virtue to manifest itself between opposite extremes. Directly relevant to the issue at hand is the acknowledgment that the Buddha himself recognized proper and true Buddhist practice as lying between the extremes of the hedonism he left behind at home and his years of hard ascetic practice. Yet *prima facie* the absolute poverty Dōgen endorses

sounds much like the extreme asceticism the Buddha explicitly rejected. Thus we can construct, from a Buddhist perspective, an argument against poverty for religious parallel to the one constructed by the objector of the third opinion in the *Summa*. As we noted previously, *SZ* 1.16 presented the view of absolute poverty as a kind of extreme behavior that is "all wrong" and "will only lead to retrogression." We also see in Dōgen's primer a parallel to the remark noted in IIaIIae 117.1: *SZ* 3.12 presents a monk who remarks that in China temple provisions ensured that monks "did not have to worry about their livelihood; in Japan, however, there is no such arrangement, so "if we cast aside our belongings, it serves to disrupt the practice of the way" and thus "it would seem a good idea if our clothing and food could be provided for."

Aquinas and Dōgen Reply to the Third Countervailing Opinion

Aquinas begins his response as follows:

> *According to Aristotle, the just mean of virtue is measured "by right reason," and not by the quantity of a thing. Therefore whatever can be done according to right reason does not become sinful by reason of quantity, but more virtuous. Now, it would be contrary to right reason if one were to use up all his goods through intemperance or for no useful purpose. But it is in accordance with right reason for one to renounce all his riches in order to give himself to the contemplation of wisdom.*

As in his response to the first opinion, Aquinas does not deny the validity of the proof text advanced in the third opinion, but he provides an additional reference from the same source in order to clarify what he takes to be its true meaning. Yes, virtue consists in a just mean between the two extreme vices, but the exercise of that virtue is itself determined "by right reason," and the renunciation of all goods is not necessarily inconsistent with this principle if the motive is proper. If we choose to question Aquinas's justification of the "extreme" behavior of absolute poverty as "virtuous," we might note that Ar-

istotle himself states: "Hence in respect of what it is, that is, the definition which states its essence, virtue is a mean, with regard to what is best and right an extreme" (*Nichomachean Ethics* 1006b36).

That the proper exercise of virtue is itself a kind of extreme resonates with Dōgen and Buddhist tradition. Recall as an example our earlier discussion of the four cardinal virtues of Buddhism. Translators seeking to capture their precise meanings have rendered the *brahma-vihāras* as "limitless kindness" (*maitrī*), "limitless compassion" (*karunā*), "limitless joy" (*muditā*), and "limitless equanimity" (*upekshā*). The exercise of limitless compassion by the Buddha is repeatedly asserted and held up for emulation by Dōgen in the pages of the *SZ*. Recall a passage from *SZ* 3.7 quoted previously: "It is impossible to put into words the depth of the Buddha's compassion. Everything he did was for the sake of all sentient beings." That this compassion for others is limitless is reinforced by the next sentence: "There was nothing that he did, no matter how small, that was not done for others." Subsequently, he links this exercise of the virtue of compassion to absolute poverty:

> *It was to benefit people in the ages when the Law had declined and to encourage the practice of the Way that he set an example, by refusing to accumulate wealth and by becoming a beggar himself. Ever since, all the Patriarchs of India and China and all those who were known to the world as fine Buddhists have been poor and begged for their food. In our school all the Masters warn against the accumulation of wealth. When other sects speak well of Zen, the first thing they praise is its poverty.*

Having established the extreme of absolute poverty as consistent with virtuous behavior, both Aquinas and Dōgen also appeal to "secular" examples outside of their religious tradition in order to buttress their arguments. Subsequent to the initial response to the third opinion of IIaIIae 186.3 quoted above, Aquinas adds:

> *We read that even some of the philosophers did this [i.e. renounced all riches]. Thus Jerome says, "The famous Crates of*

> *Thebes, once a wealthy man, threw away a large amount of gold when he went to Athens to study philosophy, for he thought that he could not possess gold and virtue at the same time."*

Note that the proof text for Aquinas's argument here is from a religious source, namely a passage from the letters of Saint Jerome, a Doctor of the Church. But Aquinas quotes Jerome in order to present an example of someone who is not "religious," both in the general sense of being outside Christian tradition and the more specific sense of not being a "religious" as it is used in medieval Catholic terms—that is, an example of someone who is not a member of a monastic or mendicant order.

As for Dōgen, we read the following:

> *In order to study the Way, you must be poor. In both Buddhist and secular works, we find examples: some persons were so poor that they had no home to live in; others like Ch'u Yuan, drowned in the Ts'an-lang river . . .* (*SZ* 5.5)

Dōgen appeals to both Buddhist and secular works on behalf of his exhortation to take up absolute poverty, though it should be noted that, like Aquinas's reference to Crates of Thebes, he advances his argument not by citing a secular text but by presenting the example of a person leading a "non-religious" life. (Ch'u Yuan served as a statesman during the Warring States period; evidently after his exile he lived in poverty until he eventually drowned himself, though not in the Ts'ang-lang river, as Dōgen says here and in *SZ* 2.23, but in the Mi Lo River—see Cleary (1986:54)).

In this context we can also recall *SZ* 3.11 discussed earlier, wherein Dōgen remarks about a layman named P'ang. Previously, when juxtaposing this passage to the first answer presented in IIaIIae 186.3, we noted how both Dōgen and Aquinas praised a layperson for engaging in a supererogatory act of dispensing with all their possessions, though we noted a clear difference in the exemplars presented: Elisha fed the poor with his renounced riches, whereas P'ang simply threw them away. However, juxtaposing P'ang to Crates of Thebes, the moral exemplar Aquinas offers in the answer to the

third opinion, yields other comparative observations. First of all, neither man chooses "to use up all his goods through intemperance or no useful purpose," as Aquinas puts it. Rather, both these laypersons recognize wealth as obstacles to pursuing a higher path—the contemplation of wisdom for Jerome, the study under a Zen master for P'ang—and therefore simply "throw away" their wealth.

Furthermore, in our earlier discussion of Elisha and P'ang as exemplars, we noted that Dōgen concluded with the observation: "Though a layman, [P'ang] is known as a good man because he discarded his wealth in this way. How much more necessary is it then for a monk to discard his treasures!" "How much more a person leading the religious life should be poor than a layperson" is also the point Aquinas employs in his conclusion of this third answer: "Therefore it is even more in accordance with right reason that a man renounce all his possessions to follow Christ perfectly. So Jerome says, 'Naked follow the naked Christ.'"

Conclusion

In our analysis we have been able to follow an orderly progression through the *sed contra*, *responsio*, and the first three opinions and subsequent answers of IIaIIae 186.3, noting sufficient analogous material in the *SZ* for effective comparison and contrast. The remainder of the text—expressed in opinions four, five, and six, and the respective answers to them—address leading the religious, and absolute poverty in relation to happiness (four), the episcopal state (five), and almsgiving (six). While we do find in Dōgen's primer passages reminiscent of some of this *Summa* material, when properly considered in their original contexts we lack a critical mass of material sufficient for the continuation of the line-by-line analysis heretofore employed; conversely, Dōgen's discussion of absolute poverty in numerous other places lacks sufficient analogies in the *Summa*. Thus we would do well to set aside further comparison of Aquinas and Dōgen on the topic until another vehicle provides sufficient opportunity for discovering contextually rich comparisons.

Employing Aquinas as a bridge to understanding Dōgen's views on poverty and the religious life reveals several points of similarity, while at the same time uncovering distinctive differences. Given the sheer volume of their

respective collective works, we can anticipate that they share many other concerns worthy of our attention. Perhaps the *modus operandi* of this article could also contribute to further Western explorations of Dōgen's ethics.

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