Introduction

Meister Eckhart’s doctrine of analogy has long been recognized by scholars as central both to his philosophy of Being and to his self-defense against the Cologne Inquisition (1326–27). It is commonly accepted that Eckhart’s interpretation of analogy “is closely connected to that of Thomas, even if it is so in a very one-directional manner.”¹ Heribert Fischer, the one-time editor of Eckhart’s Latin works, states that Eckhart’s quoted examples on analogy are for the most part taken over verbatim from Aquinas.² Alain de Libera has emphasized the important uses by Eckhart of central texts on analogy from Aquinas, and Ruedi Imbach has outlined the connection between Aquinas and Eckhart on the doctrine of Being.³

The aim of this chapter is to present a select review of modern research (1980–2010) on Eckhart’s doctrine of analogy, especially in relation to Thomas Aquinas. As part of this review, an introductory section by Jennifer Hart Weed will set up the present context in modern American scholarship.

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on the issues of analogy in Aquinas. This is required since some earlier accounts of Eckhart in relation to Thomas Aquinas were made against the background of Renaissance Thomism, especially in terms of Thomas de Vio’s (Cajetan’s) interpretation of proper proportionality. Also, some modern studies of Eckhart limit attention to Aquinas’s early account of analogy in his *Commentary on the Sentences*. As we will see, this latter work was not Aquinas’s final word on analogy, and for Eckhart the interpretation of analogy in the *Summa contra gentiles* and the *Summa Theologiae* was of central importance. Analogy finds its place in Aquinas and Eckhart in terms of explaining the doctrine of creation and creatures. It was never intended to be an independent treatise on analogy. Both authors presupposed and used the treatises on logic from the schools, especially the sections on signification and equivocation. Hence, analogy has a central theological role in dealing with scriptural and patristic interpretations of the dynamic interaction of Creator and creature. In other words, the doctrine of the transcendence and immanence of God in the world conditions their approach to the issue of analogy.

Some modern Thomist interpretations of Eckhart on analogy exhibit a strong bias against Eckhart’s doctrine, holding that his position is deficient in comparison with Aquinas’s treatment. Etienne Gilson notes that “Even while they are participating in their source, the analogues have nothing of the form they receive *positively rooted in them* . . . Being is, so to speak, imputed to beings by God without ever becoming their own being, about the same way as, in Luther’s theology, justice will be imputed to the just without ever becoming their own justice.” Both Bernard J. Muller-Thym and Gerard B. Phelan insisted that the doctrine of the analogy of proper proportionality overcomes the limitations of a doctrine of mere external attribution in Eckhart and the doctrine of symbolic predication in Maimonides. Cornelio Fabro has provided a particularly negative account of Eckhart on analogy. More recently, W. Norris Clarke, SJ, in his handbook

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4 But see the new work by Joshua P. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy: Re-Reading Cajetan’s De Nominum Analogia* (Notre Dame: 2010) for a rehabilitation of Cajetan on analogy of proper proportionality.


