AN APPRAISAL OF THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN THOMAS AQUINAS

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Abstract
The concept and belief in God or gods is central to the great majority of the world's religions. The two key questions philosophy of religion seek to addressed are whether it is reasonable to believe in God, and if so, what kind of God should be believed in. Thomas Aquinas was a medieval and influential theologian, a philosopher of the scholastic period of the 13th century. His immersed contributions to harmonize the truth of philosophy with the doctrine of faith cannot be over emphasized. His outstanding proofs of God's existence as a perfect, living reality, eternal whom we come to know consciously and unconsciously in our daily experience such as prayers, songs, proverbs, and lessons affirms that God exist.

key Words: Concept of God, Thomas Aquinas Religion, Belief, Medieval, Proof.

Introduction
One of the central figures in the history of medieval philosophy is Thomas Aquinas. He is such a central figure well known and arguably the most influential of all the medieval Christian theologian of the scholastic period of 1100-1350 (Peter S Earley& Carl N). Earley, lamented that “medieval philosophy has been among the most neglected of all major period of western philosophy because it was widely believed that medieval philosophy offered little in the way of original thought, since it was shaped by religious commitment”.2 However, scholars in the time past have profoundly altered that impression but worth nothing that there can be no denying the great medieval Philosophers were actually theologians, who sought to harmonize the truth of philosophy with the doctrine of faith. The focus of this paper is to make a critical appraisal of Thomas Aquinas concept of God and show how why his conclusions still command attention and respect in philosophic discourse especially when faith and reason in investigated.

An Overview of the Life and Carrer of Thomas Aquinas
One of the outstanding Aristotelian and reputable Scholar Theologian of the medieval period is Thomas Aquinas (Fredrick,1950). He was born into the family of Landulf de Aquino, a wealthy, influential member of the landed gentry of his time at Castle of Roccia- Secca of the town Aquino in Italy in 1225-74. He began his education in Naples and later became a Dominican Mork, and went to cologne to study under the leading light among Dominican theologians, Albert Magnus. The association with Albert was auspicious for Thomas, as Albert was so impressed with Aquinas for his theological learning of the day in Paris. Albert introduced Aquinas to the works of Aristotle, among others. Known as the philosopher among medieval scholastics, Aristotle would have an immense influence on Aquinas, who went on to write commentaries on the works of Aristotle. It is imperative to note that Aquinas is regarded by many as a philosopher and theologian of the medieval period.

At Paris Aquinas taught and engaging in several debate with the Averroists (Muslims scholars who were against the Christian truth as taught by Christian theologians- Aquinas inclusive) and also with those who renewed the attack on the religious orders. In 1272, Aquinas was sent to Naples to erect a Dominican center where he continued his career (professional) activity until 1274, when Gregory X summoned him to Lyon to take part in the
The Concept of God

The existence of God has been a contentious subject throughout the history of religion and philosophy. The reason for the contention is in the fact of God’s invisibility. Thus, scientific scrutiny of God has come out without empirical conclusion on the existence of God. To Africans, the existence of God is not an academic subject because since childhood we are consciously and unconsciously taught about his existence. That God is a living reality and being and his existence is consciously affirmed in songs, prayers, proverbs and moral lessons. God is the central and focus of religious faith. He is known to be a Holy Being and an ultimate reality that all worship, prayers are ascribed to. He is considered the creator and source of all existing beings. He is spoken of as a perfect, infinite, external and incomprehensible (Grudem, 1994). Many religions and religious thinkers held that God is different from other finite beings and that He must be considered a mystery and beyond human conception (Michael,2011). However, philosophers and theologians – Aquinas inclusive, have assumed that a limited knowledge of God is possible, and has postulated various conceptions and ideas of him in terms of his divine attributes as path of knowledge which underscores the reality of His existence. It is imperative then to note that there are a great number of views about God, which varies tremendously in the details and can be seen as falling into one of the relatively smaller number of types.

First, polytheistic concept of God: This concept believed that there exist a plurality of personal gods which is common among tribal people, as mostly found in most of the African traditional tribal communities (Michael,2011). Henotheism, like polytheism recognizes a plurality of gods, but henotheism restricts its allegiance to one god, who is superior god over others, because he is the god of his tribe. Secondly, monotheistic concept of God: This concept is also known as theism, which holds that only one God exists. He is seen as a personal being, with supreme power and knowledge and moral worth (Michael,2011). He created all other existing beings out of nothing. Evans and Manis (2009), reiterates that even pantheism which is often associated with Hinduism and other Eastern religions, but not uncommon in the West, hold that “it is not enough to think of God as a personal being, that such concepts are thought to not to be personally limiting God, but that God Should be ultimately understood as identical with nature or universe as a whole. In other words, pantheism says, God is not identical with universal, but should be seen as including the universe. The universe in some sense is God, but God is more than the universe.

These views about God are found in the religions of the world. Monotheistic religion like Judaism and Islam, conceived God to be a Holy Being at its most transcended and personal level. Christianity, one of the monotheistic religion conceived God as both transcended level and also conceived Him as Personal, Holy, and separate from and Independent of nature and humanity (Erickson, 1998). He is the creator and sustainer of all creation.at His transcended level, God conceived as an unknowable and incomprehensible in
his wholeness. On the other hand, God's at His immanence meaning, God is with us, signifying His presence throughout the whole world. At His immanence, God came to man in the person of His Son- Jesus Christ and is with us in the person of the Holy Spirit, to sustains, comfort, guide and teach man his truth and righteousness. Christians therefore conceived God, through one but manifested himself in three ways, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Erickson, 1998) “Trinity”. At the level of the father, God is Personal, Holy, Sovereign, Eternal etc. at the level of the Son; He came to the world, relate with man and died to save man from sin. He is a relational Being. As the Holy Spirit, He is with us to guide, direct, comfort, sustain those who believed in him. He illuminates their heart and convicts them of all good and evil in order to avert the coming judgment of God and eternal life. This is the God Aquinas believed in.

Thomas Aquinas' Classifical Argument for the Existence of God

God's existence is foundational to Christian faith. Belief in God has come under attack in the modern era. The evidential problem of evil has actually resulted to many questions about the reality of God's existence. How can the presence of evil or suffering be reconciled with affirmation of goodness of God? For example, how can we reconcile the justice of God when the righteous are suffering and the evil ones are prospering? To some, the claim that God's existence is incompatible with the empirical observations which confirm both the blindness and randomness of the natural forces, which shapes our universe or the presence of evil in the world. Others dismiss the God-hypothesis as philosophical suspect, being incompatible with human freedom (Gilkey, 1982). Therefore, many arguments for God's existence have been put forward. Most of them fall in a relatively small number of groups. Four of the most important classes shall be considered to see the group Thomas Aquinas belong and why his position for God's existence seemed credible to him and to the Christian faith.

First, Ontological Argument: This group seeks to prove that God exists prioriindependently of or prior to our experience of the worlds. The argument demonstrates God's existence by means of consideration of the mere ideas of God. The proof begins with a commonly held definition and show that by necessity the God who correspond to the definition must exist. The argument was first championed by Amselm, who defined God as "that than no greater can be conceived" (Grenz, 1994). While echoing Augustine famous dictum confession, he said, “I do not seek to understand that I may believe in order to understand” (Grenz, 1994). Though the confession sounded like faith, seeking understanding of God, which came as the opposite of atheism, however, the assumption of the ontological Argument is that such a Being must exist whose existence is merely imagined to exist. The flaw of this argument is that there is the possibility of imagining a Being or concept that has no concrete and tangible existence. For example, one can imagined that the greatest of all goats, strong and with a hundred heads, yet merely exist in the imagination of the one imagining it.

Descartes as cited by Stanley J Grenz (1994), submits that God cannot be an idea in human mind but must exist in reality. He argued that God is the supremely Perfect Being, and if God do not exist in reality, he lacks perfection of existence. Hence, the God so conceived so-not existing in reality is not the most perfect Being. Immanuel Kant, the Lutheran philosopher responded to Descartes's assertion that the ontological argument is invalid because it falsely presupposes that existence is an attribute (predicate). He stressed that Descartes's position, lacks linguistic import. He said, words like “exist” and “is” function grammatically as predicate, as such the statement 'God is' is grammatically valid. Yet cannot function logically in this way because it has added no element to our knowledge in enumerating the attribute of any object (including God), but we add: and the object exist” (Samuel Enoch Stumpf & ames Fieser, 2008). The essence of this assertion is that since we
have the idea of a most perfect being does not exist such a denial would be contradictory because the concept of a perfect Being necessarily includes the predicate of existence.

In spite of the erudition of its proponents, some philosophers reject the ontological argument (Kant inclusive). Aquinas also repudiated Amslem's presentation because it is prior. That I, God is independently of himself and can only be known by mere experience or empirical observation. To Aquinas, no knowledge (hence no knowledge of God) can arise apart from Experience of the world, thus the thomists adage “there is nothing in the mind that is not first in the sense” (Brown, 1998).

Second, Cosmological Argument: This argument lies in the presupposition that every know effect has a cause. Thus drawing on evidence provided by sense experience. It is something called posteriori. A posteriori is a move from our empirical observation to the supposition of God as the one who lies behind the world. It is called the first cause argument because it infer that God must exist as the first or unlimited cause of the universe (Jones, 1970). Thomas Aquinas was instrumental to the posteriori argument. Repudiating on the Amselm’s position on the existence of God, he believed that unless I believe I should not understand” (Gilson, 1938). As a Christian theologian, Aquinas believes that there is God; so he concludes that the notion of a non- existence God is a self- contradictory notion” (Brown, 1998). To Aquinas, God's existence is an article of faith for believers, while to a philosopher; it is a conclusion of argument. The same truth can thus be known with Amselm's argument, but did not accept it, mainly because he thought that it involved an illicit transition from the logical realm to the realm of actuality of existing beings. They look to the world for evidence of the existence of God. To this end, Aquinas developed five proofs for God's existence which is cosmological in nature, because it begins with the existence of the cosmos. It finds its root in the classical Greece, and was clearly present in the medieval times as the fifth of Aquinas five way of provide God's existence (C. Stephen Evans & R. Zachary Manis, 2009).

The Third is Teleological Argument: It begins with the fact natural world appears to exhibit purposive order or design, and infer that it's cause must therefore be an intelligent designer. Aquinas stands is taken from the fact of the governance or order of the world. We see things which lack knowledge, such as trees act for an ends, and this is evident from their changes always. Hence they achieve their end or goal not for tortuous but designedly. It is then imperative to note that whoever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it is directed by a perfect being endowed with the knowledge and intelligence. Therefore God is that intelligent Being by whom all natural things are directed to their goal (C. Stephen Evans & R. Zachary Manis, 2009). Thomas Aquinas called this Being God. Teleological argument presupposes that there is an intelligent purpose behind such design and thus assumes that such powerful design must come from God. This is indicative of the fact that the design and harmony in creation as seen in its order and laws is beyond human causation. However, this argument is subjectively defined since where one sees harmony and order in creation, another person sees disorder and chaos (Michael, 2011). The challenges in the world such as natural disasters, war, diseases does not allow humanity to see the intelligence in the order of the world, thereby giving rise to some modern school of thought such as existentialism, which of course has refused to see meaning or purpose in the world (Michael, 2011).

The Fourth is Moral Argument: This is highly credible in the sense that it presupposes and gives general recognition of right and wrong, which naturally underscores the existence of a law giver. The credibility of this position is in the fact that general recognition among human societies of categories designated right and other moral categories called wrong. However,
there is also inadequacy in this position because there is relativity to the conception between right and wrong. This is indicative of the fact that different society acknowledges the moral fields of right and wrong, yet this human society conceive differently the nature of the Conception and definition of right and wrong, hence revealing the moral fluidity among the human community with no formidable basis to argue for a divine a law giver (Michael, 2011). Though to validate this argument is questioned, but are steps towards accounting for the presence of an existing God. Africans accept the fact of God’s existence as a philosophical position, but affirm that their philosophy is based on strong religious understanding. This makes it a basic presupposition not to question the existence of God, but rather, acceptance his existence as unquestionable reality (Mbiti, 1973). This position strengthens the church and its held strongly by the church till today. The church holds that God is One, Holy; invisible yet manifested himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is imperative to note that God is one relational being. His existence is evidence in creation. However, our knowledge of God is basically through faith.

An Appraisal of Aquinas Classical Proofs of God's Existence
This section shall consider Aquinas proofs for the existence of God. First, the proof of change or motion: Aquinas based his argument on a very obvious and undeniable feature of the external world. He argued that material things change. They go from potentially being X to actually being X. For example, leaves on deciduous trees changes from being green to becoming red, yellow and orange in the autumn. Eventually, they fall off the tree all together and the process begins again in the spring season. This fact of the change features is very clear. Therefore positing a prime mover is the only reasonable way to provide an ultimate explanation for the existence of motion. As such, Aquinas vehemently argued that there can be no such things as self -motion. This is because the process we call change or motion involves the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality, as we saw in the case of the leaves. For Aquinas nothing can change or reduces itself from potentiality to actuality. Therefore “whatever is moved must be moved by something else”(Cohen, 2008). As such, there cannot exist an infinity of movers, except if there were such an infinity, there would accordingly be no first motion in the world. But since there is clearly motion in the world, there must be some First Mover which is himself Unmoved. This according Aquinas is God.

Secondly, the proof from efficient cause. This proof resembles the first. It is derived from the fact of motion of the world. Cohen (2008), opines that we find in sensible things an order of efficient causality. Aquinas, however was influenced by an Islamic Philosopher Ibn Sina of 980-1037, who draw a distinction between moving causes by demonstrating the distinction that nothing can be efficient cause of itself since in order to do so it would have to be both prior and posterior to itself; prior as efficient cause a posterior as recipient – than everything must have a cause of existence that is order than itself. To Aquinas, nothing can cause itself to exist. But this orderly efficient cause cannot go on indefinitely, so Aquinas think for the same reason that make an infinite regress in order of moving cause which itself uncaused if there is to be any intermediate causes. Since clearly there are intermediate causes. Since clearly there are intermediate efficient causes, there must clearly exist a first uncaused. To Aquinas, this uncaused cause is God (Milne, 2009).

Thirdly, the proof of contingency and necessity. This position demonstrates that God is necessary of existence. The argument is based on a familiar feature of the world. That thing came into being and passes out of being. They are born and one day dies. This is true to everything to which we have access by means of our sense. One might then say the object that comprises the material world is contingent which is to say, that the reason for their existence lies outside themselves. Aquinas held that those creatures (possible beings or living Beings), since it is of their very nature that they are both capable of existing and not existing, it means that they are dependent for their being. It then implies that there was a
point at which they did not exist. If the universe was entirely comprised of possible beings, then nothing will exist right now – unless there were a being that was intrinsically necessary for their contingent creatures (Tsanoff, 2014).

Fourthly, the proof of the degrees of perfect or grades of being. This position delineates that creatures are graduated. That is, its various aspects are of varying value and good in the world. For example, a healthy horse is better and more valued than a sick one; it is nobler to give money to charity, than to squander it at a night club. To Thomas Aquinas, various things are measured as both better and truer and so on. If there are exists things that are hot or hotter, there must be something that is hottest; if there are things that are good and better, there must be something that is best. This is to say, there is a being that is maximum in every genus which is therefore the cause of every being in that genus (Macquarie, 1971). Aquinas called this being God.

Fifthly, the proof of Governance. This proof is sometimes referred to as order of creation. The creation is directed to an end or goal, and that God is on the throne directing all natural things to their goal. Aquinas argued that to act intentionally or deliberately is to act with an end in view. A clear example of an international behavior is deliberate human action, which is goal-directed. When I am deliberate about achieving X by means of Y and set about choosing Y, I am directing myself with a goal in view – the obtaining of X- that I regard it in some sense as worthy of pursuing and therefore 'good' that my pursuit of it be considered purposeful or intentional. Note also that the pursuit of goodness which is an abstract through universal object implies rationality. How can one explain the purposeful behavior of non-rational being, Acorns and chicken eggs? How is it that they regularly strive for goals if they lack reason? It is obvious that the acorn regularly appears to strive to become an oak tree and the egg inclines to hatching into a chicken. To Aquinas, all these do not happen by chance, but do so regularly by signals (Peter S Earley & Carl N). Therefore such creatures cannot direct themselves to such goals due to their lack of reason, then they must be directed by something else that has knowledge and intelligence, such Intelligible being is God.

A closed examination of the cosmological argument shows that every known effect has a cause. Thus since the world has a cause, the cause must have its causation in a greater being that is far beyond human creation. However, this argument seems inadequate since it could be carried to a logical conclusion by asking the cause of God since everything has a cause. It is imperative to note that Aquinas proofs of God's existence constitutes a substantial intellectual achievement which was faith based, and among the most famous of western philosophy. However, they are only as strong as the assumptions on which they are based. A closed examination of the first three proofs is especially vulnerable in this regard. Since, contrary to Aquinas, there may be no logical problems with tracking an infinite chain of causes back through infinity (Stumpf & Fieser, 2008). Again, though appeared to be successful, the first three proofs indicate that Aquinas considered philosophical corroborations of the religious notion of God, and we must remember that they were composed in the context of his theological task. In spite of the tendencies in the first three proofs, his arguments advanced beyond his time. Philosophers in the later centuries relied, refined, and modified versions of Aquinas arguments.

The forth proof is also questionable simply because its assumption that fire for example is the maximum of heat as developed by Aristotle, though, science rejects this contention today. The final proof is premised on the natural purposes.Philosophers following Aquinas believed that it is reasonable to prove God's existence based on the appearance of the natural order in the world. They argued that the world exhibits design, indicating that a reasonable designer produced a natural design around us (Stumpf & Fieser, 2008). In spite of its tendencies, theologian could no longer argue that a cosmic designer – (God) was the only possible explanation of the design.
Conclusion
The credibility of Aquinas position was faith based. This is because it is the first place to begin the discourse on the existence of God because it makes reference to the inner existence of God in the human heart. There are scriptural indications that the human mind actually entertains or recognizes the existence of the Divine Being (Rom. 1:18-21; Psalms 14:1). The scripture also affirms the existence of God as derived from human contemplations of nature (Psalms 19:1-2; Acts 14:17). Therefore, the presence of design and conceivable laws or patterns in nature is normally employed as an argument for the existence of a maker or designer. Though repudiating Amselm's Ontological argument, Aquinas held strongly that God is a living reality and his existence is consciously affirms and seen through his divine works or 'effects' evidenced to all through our sense and experience of the world.

Works Cited.