

Aquinas and the Question of God's Existence: Exploring the Five Ways

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Abstract

Without doubt, St Thomas Aquinas was the greatest of the medieval philosophers. Aquinas was a prolific writer and he made contributions to virtually every area of Philosophy and Theology. His account of the existence of God is perhaps the best known aspect of his work. This is especially true of the celebrated five arguments he adduced in demonstration of the existence of God. In exploring Aquinas' Five ways, which some commentators regard as Aquinas' substantive contribution to Philosophy of religion, our contention is that they demonstrate the possibilities as well as the limits of natural theology, so far as while Aquinas does not deny that natural reason can establish the existence of God he nonetheless maintains that there are aspects of God's nature that can be known only through the means of divine revelation. Consequently unless we take into account the double emphasis on the possibilities and limits of natural theology, we are sure to underestimate the contemporary relevance of Aquinas' Five ways.

Keywords: Aquinas, God's Existence, Cosmological Arguments, Ontological Arguments, Anselm

1. Preamble

Without doubt, St Thomas Aquinas was the greatest of the medieval philosophers. Aquinas was a prolific writer and he made contributions to virtually every area of Philosophy and Theology. His entire career was dominated by key philosophical and theological issues that have remained relevant in subsequent epochs of philosophy. He was concerned, for instance, to address the vexed question of the relation between faith and reason at the same time he sought, to harmonize theology and philosophy, maintaining, as it were, that there was no conflict between the truths of philosophy and the truths of theology.² Aquinas was also concerned with the question of the existence of God. Perhaps Aquinas's account of the existence of God is the best known aspect of his work. This is especially true of the celebrated five arguments he adduces in demonstration of the existence of God. Some commentators maintain that they constitute Aquinas' substantive contribution to Philosophy of religion and not surprisingly there is hardly any course in philosophy of religion that will not give some attention to Aquinas' five ways, as they are usually called.³

In what follows we will explore Aquinas' account of the existence of God and determine its effectiveness. First we begin by considering the 'Five Ways' and their inner dynamics, paying specific attention to each of the ways one after the other. Second by way of assessment we look at some criticisms of Aquinas. The final step of our reflection concludes with a statement on the contemporary relevance of Aquinas. Let us then focus immediately on the question of the inner dynamics of the Five Ways.

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² Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Elements of Philosophy: An Introduction*, Third Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987), pp. 354-355

³ Cf. William F. Lawhead, *Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, Second Edition (Australia: Wadsworth, 2002), pp. 168-169. See also Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas, Past Masters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), Chapter 1 and Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways: St Thomas Aquinas' Proofs of God's Existence* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), Introduction

2. Aquinas' Five Ways and Their Inner Dynamics

In the *Summa* Aquinas presents five proofs for the existence of God, namely, the proof from motion, the proof from Efficient causality, the proof from Necessary versus possible being, the proof from degrees of perfection and the proof from the order of the universe. The five proofs exhibit similar structure in the sense that in each case Aquinas does not begin with the idea of a perfect being.

Instead of beginning with the innate ideas of perfection, as Anselm does in his Ontological argument, Aquinas anchors the proofs on the idea derived from a rational understanding of the ordinary objects that we experience with our senses. In other words, Aquinas' strategy is to begin with an observed feature of the universe and by analysis and rational deduction, he establishes the conclusion that God is the first cause.⁴ This general outline permeates all the five proofs except that in each case we are dealing with a particular feature of the universe such as the phenomena of motion, efficient causality, the fact of the distinction between necessary and possible being or again the fact of degree of perfection in nature and the fact of order in the universe. Instructively each of the observed facts is empirically given – and this is where Aristotle basically influences Aquinas. Yet the crucial point is that by analyzing the fact in question we then establish the existence of God as the causal explanation for the fact.⁵

Aquinas' approach usually referred to as the cosmological approach is distinguished from the ontological approach. The ontological approach, as the term ontology suggests, is an a priori approach that moves from the order of logic to the order of existence. Starting with the idea of God and relying solely on the resources of pure reason, the ontological argument derives the existence of God from the idea of God.⁶ The claim is that the concept of God presupposes his existence, so that, if properly analyzed the existence of God follows from the idea of God as a matter of logic; hence, to deny the existence of God amounts to contradiction in terms.⁷

The ontological argument has a history that goes back to St Anselm of Canterbury, who is credited with the formulation of the original version of the argument. The argument enjoys massive appeal among philosophers of rationalist bent of mind. Indeed, following Anselm's original formulation, several versions of the argument have been proposed by thinkers such as Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza and defended in the twentieth century by Malcom, Hartshorne and Plantiga.⁸

On the contrary, the cosmological approach is an a posteriori approach in the sense that it does not rely solely on pure reason like the ontological argument. Rather as the term "cosmos" suggests it begins with our experience of the universe and based on certain observed features of the universe, it deduces the existence of God as causal explanations for the observed features.⁹ Given its a posterior character, the cosmological argument understandably appeals more to philosophers of empiricist persuasion and is no less popular than the ontological argument.

Unlike the ontological argument the cosmological argument has a much earlier history that goes back to Aristotle. However, Aquinas is arguably responsible for popularizing the argument. Drawing from Aristotle and Avicenna, Aquinas, in the medieval period, developed the most influential version of the cosmological arguments. The argument recurs in several forms in modern philosophy and in contemporary philosophy it has continued to find defenders in thinkers like William Craig, Robert Koons and William Rowe.

In presenting his cosmological proofs for God's existence in the *Summa*, Aquinas begins by criticizing the ontological approach that derives from Anselm. Following the lead of Aristotle, especially Aristotle's epistemology and its emphasis on sense experience as the starting point of knowledge, Aquinas argues contra Anselm that the existence of God is not evident to us. In other words we cannot derive the existence of God merely from the idea of God nor does it amount to a contradiction to deny the existence of God.

⁴ Cf. Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Elements of Philosophy: An Introduction*, Third Edition, p. 376

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Cf. Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Elements of Philosophy: An Introduction*, Third Edition, p. 376; See also Damian Ilodigwe, "Anselm and the Question of God's Existence: Interrogating the Ontological Argument", *Nigerian Journal of Theology*, 2017, Volume 31, pp. 96-110

⁷ Cf. Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Medieval Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), p. 159

⁸ Cf. Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Medieval Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), p. 158

⁹ Cf. Cf. Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Elements of Philosophy: An Introduction*, Third Edition, p. 376

Indeed as Aquinas points out, perhaps not everyone who hears the word “God” understands it to signify something than which nothing greater can be thought, seeing, that some have believed God to be a body. Yet, granted that everyone understands by this word “God” is signified something than which nothing greater can be thought, nevertheless, it does not therefore follow that he understands that the word signifies exists actually, but only that it exists mentally. Nor can it be argued that it actually exists, unless it be admitted that there actually exists something than which nothing greater can be thought; and this precisely is not admitted by those who hold that God does not exist.” (Baird and Kaufmann, 336)

However in denying that we can establish the existence of God merely by analyzing the concept of God, Aquinas does not conclude that a rational demonstration of God is impossible. On the contrary he denies that the proper way to go about it is through the means of the ontological argument as proposed by Anselm. On Aquinas’ view any valid rational demonstration of the existence of God must begin by taking into account our experience of world. If we take our experience of the universe as a point of departure we can then deduce the existence of God as the causal explanation for our experience in which the universe and our experience of it are both effects of God’s causal activity. The logic here, of course, is that the effects always points back to their cause, so that from the effects, we can always reason to the cause.

To achieve a clear and full conspectus of the proofs, their inner dynamics and how Aquinas articulates them, it is important to focus on them one by one beginning with the first, that is, the proof from motion. Of the five proofs, the proof from motion is arguably the most popular and it is also the proof that best illustrates the influence of Aristotle on Aquinas; for, what Aquinas does here basically is to appropriate Aristotle’s proof of the unmoved mover while adapting it to the exigencies of the Christian faith.

2. 1. The Proof From Motion

The first proof is the proof from motion and it occurs in *Summa Theologiae*, 1, 2, Article 3. One point to remark about the argument from motion is that Aquinas uses the term motion in the broad sense that connotes change and not merely in terms of locomotion.¹⁰ This broad sense of motion embraces the reality of coming to be and ceasing to be; the reality of generation and degeneration, so that the term applies arguably to everything in the universe, so far as nothing is immune to change and corruption.¹¹ Perhaps this is why it is said that the only real law in the end is the law of change.

Indeed Aquinas is not in doubt that change is a basic feature of the universe. Nonetheless in drawing attention to this feature of the universe Aquinas’ purpose is to account for the cause of motion. If things are susceptible to change how do we explain the motion we observe in the universe? To answer this question Aquinas advances a number of points concerning the nature of motion – points which depend on Aristotelian doctrine of Act and potency.¹² First Aquinas argues that anything in motion does not move it-self but is moved by another. In other words nothing can reduce itself from potentiality to actuality but in order to be reduced from potentiality to actuality it requires to be moved by something which is already in actuality. So unless a thing is moved by something already in actuality we cannot account for its motion.¹³

Yet the paradox here is that that which is in act and so moves another to act cannot account for its own motion by itself but must be accounted for by another. In other words, if, it is able to reduce that which in potentiality to actuality because it is already in actuality, we cannot account for its motion unless we can account for that which moves it to act. So the fact that that which is in act is able to move another to act implies that we need to be able to account for that which moves it to act.¹⁴

This moment of Aquinas’ argument is crucial because it means that any candidate we propose as the cause of motion will need to be accounted for; for, so long as it is not pure act, so that this invariably sets up a regress of causes such that if B moves A, we need to account for that which moves B otherwise we have not accounted for A.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Cf. Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Elements of Philosophy: An Introduction*, Third Edition, p. 376

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Medieval Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), p. 338

¹⁴ Ibid.

Similarly if we posit that C is causally responsible for moving B, we still have to account for that which moves C and suppose we posit that D moves C the regress is not arrested but continues; for, in positing that D moves C we have to ask for that which moves D. Now suppose we say that E moves D we need to find the cause of E itself in order to account for all the previous steps in the series. In the end it emerges that the search for the cause of motion in the universe goes on and on. Yet so long as the regress continues we cannot say we have successfully accounted for the cause of motion in the universe.

The idea that the search itself leads to a scenario of regress of causes evidently is a crucial step in the unfolding of Aquinas' argument, for, if the regress continues it means there could be no first mover, and if there is no first mover, there could be no other mover, given that all subsequent movers move only as much as they are moved by another and ultimately by the first mover.¹⁵ So it appears that if we must account for the series of movement from B to A and from C to B and from D to C and from E to D and so on and so forth as the regress allows, it must be the case that there is a cause which itself is not moved but its own cause. Indeed given that such cause is its own cause, it dispenses us from having to search for that which puts it into motion, so that it can then put others in motion. Indeed the situation within the series is such that each cause moves another, but, then, it-self requires to be moved by another. The postulation of a first cause that is its own cause does away with this scenario.¹⁶

In other words we have a situation relative to which there is a cause which puts others in motion without itself requiring to be put in motion by another since it is its own cause. On Aquinas' view unless we assume there is such a cause we cannot overcome the infinite regress of causes that bedevil our attempt to account for the cause of motion in the universe. And if the regress persists in spite of our best effort it means we have not explained anything, in fact, since the ground of the last member of the series of causes remain unaccounted for, so that whatever explanation they constitute as per the cause of motion in the universe is superfluous.

In view of this consideration it emerges that the postulation of the first cause is a matter of metaphysical necessity, since it is apparently warranted by the need to resolve the problem of regress associated with accounting for the cause of the motion in the universe. Here, as in other contexts, Aquinas is following Aristotle who arrived at a similar conclusion.¹⁷ A key concern of Aristotle physics is to account for the phenomenon of motion. But in addressing the issue Aristotle felt the need to postulate the unmoved mover to shore up his physics, so that in the face of this dilemma physics looks up to metaphysics for its salvation.¹⁸

Not surprisingly, Aristotle's physics of motion consummates in his metaphysics of motion with the unmoved mover – the highest substance – installed as the ground of motion. While there is no doubt that physics falls squarely within the jurisdiction of philosophy of substance since Aristotle's preoccupation ultimately is to understand the nature of *being qua being*, this metaphysical excursion consummates in the postulation of the unmoved mover, since Aristotle is convinced that without presupposing the universal of all universals we have still not accounted for the nature of ultimate reality.¹⁹

Analogously, like Aristotle whom he fondly called 'the philosopher', Aquinas is also convinced that the postulation of the uncaused cause is a natural outgrowth of the logic of regress that infects our explanatory initiative, if finally we are to resolve the question of the cause of motion in the universe.²⁰ Given that Aquinas writes in a Christian environment and his philosophy is at the service of propagation of the Christian faith, Aquinas appropriates Aristotle's logic of the unmoved mover and puts it at the service of his proof of the existence of God, so that just as physics became a stepping stone to the metaphysics of the unmoved mover, the issue of the cause of motion in the universe will provide a basis for Aquinas in offering a rational demonstration of the existence of God.²¹

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Cf. Damian Ilodigwe, "Two Senses of Metaphysics in Aristotle: Exploring the Sythesis" in *Bodija Journal*, 2015: pp. 20-38

¹⁷ Cf. William F. Lawhead, *Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, Second Edition, pp. 173-174

¹⁸ See Damian Ilodigwe, "Two Senses of Metaphysics in Aristotle: Exploring the Sythesis" in *Bodija Journal*, 2015: pp. 20-38

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Medieval Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), p. 338

²¹ See Damian Ilodigwe, "Two Senses of Metaphysics in Aristotle: Exploring the Sythesis" in *Bodija Journal*, 2015: pp. 20-38

In developing his five proofs of God's existence, Aquinas is not oblivious of his debts to Aristotle.²² Indeed both the tone and structure of the proofs bear the imprint of Aristotle. This is obviously true of the proof from motion but it is no less true of the rest of the proofs. This general pattern we find in respect of the argument from motion is replicated in the rest of the arguments, so that once we are familiar with the argument from motion we can relate easily with the rest of the proofs, since they exhibit the same structure. To see this let us now focus on the proof from efficient causality in what follows.

2. 2. Proof from Efficient Causality

Like the proof from motion the proof from efficient causality expresses Aquinas' debt to Aristotle. As is well known efficient cause is one of the four causes Aristotle identifies in his *Metaphysics*.²³ Indeed Aristotle's four causes are integral to his metaphysics of substance and constitute the core element of Aristotle's response to the dilemma of change and permanence that goes back to Parmenides and Plato.²⁴ In his *Physics*, Aristotle distinguishes material cause from formal cause as he distinguishes these from efficient and final cause. Material cause is the material from which a thing is made whereas the formal cause is the shape or form it assumes. In assuming a form or shape an agent is responsible for this development and that is what Aristotle refers as to efficient causality. It has to do essentially with the question of the coming to be of individual substances and the point is that no individual substance brings itself into being and if in being already no individual substance is responsible for reducing itself from potentiality to actuality in respect of whatever else it becomes.²⁵

In articulating his proof from efficient causality Aquinas essentially follows Aristotle's definition of efficient causality as laid down above. His overall concern, however, is to appeal to the phenomenon of efficient causality in making a case for the existence of God. Consequently he begins, as he did with the previous proof, by drawing attention to the fact of efficient causality. Aquinas' purpose is not simply to remark the fact of efficient causality but to take this as evidence for the existence of God. Thus to demonstrate the existence of God Aquinas interrogates the fact of efficient causality. On his view, immediately we analyze the phenomenon of efficient causality we are struck by the further fact that while the efficient causality of a thing is responsible for bringing the thing into being, or reducing it from potentiality to actuality in other contexts, no efficient causality is its own cause.

The carpenter, for instance, mediates the coming to be of the table by imposing the form of a table on the wood, the original material from which the table is made. Yet the truth is that the carpenter itself is not its own cause as no efficient cause is its own cause. While the carpenter helps us to explain the coming to be of the table, we cannot explain the being of the carpenter in terms of the carpenter but must explain the being of the carpenter in terms of his parents, so that the carpenter is a function of Joseph and Mary if Joseph and Mary are the parents of the carpenter, John.²⁶

Yet it is clear that if the matter is stretched further we could not say that Mary and Joseph understood as the efficient cause of John is responsible for bringing themselves into being. Yes they are efficient cause of John but they are not the cause of themselves. They were brought into being by their own parents as well, let us say, Daniel and Margaret.²⁷ The point that no efficient cause is its own cause is part of what Aquinas means by saying that there is an order of efficient cause in the world and nothing could be more evident than this if every efficient cause points beyond itself in respect of the question of its origination. Yet there is a more fundamental point Aquinas presses in respect of the alleged order of efficient cause in the world, namely, that if we continue to interrogate the being of each efficient cause in order to understand its coming into being, we discover that we are confronted with regress of efficient causes, for, given that no efficient cause is its own cause the moment we posit an efficient cause for a thing, we are faced with a scenario of having to posit another efficient cause for the efficient cause in question since it cannot be its own cause.

²² See Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, "Editor's Introduction" *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

²³ See Damian Ilodigwe, "Two Senses of Metaphysics in Aristotle: Exploring the Synthesis" in *Bodija Journal*, 2015: pp. 20-38

²⁴ Damian Ilodigwe, "Parmenides and the Question of the One, *West African Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 2018, Vol. 18, pp. 114-138

²⁵ Cf. William F. Lawhead, *Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, Second Edition, pp. 174-175

²⁶ Cf. Damian Ilodigwe, "Two Senses of Metaphysics in Aristotle: Exploring the Synthesis" in *Bodija Journal*, 2015: pp. 20-38

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The emergence of regress of efficient causes within our explanatory scheme, in attempt to account for the efficient cause of A, recalls a similar situation in respect of the proof from motion. In fact from the moment of this emergence of regress of causes there is virtually nothing that separates the two proofs for from now on the question is whether we can allow this regress to persist and if we allow it to persist what this might mean for our attempt to account for the reality of efficient causality. The first point we must note in respect of the regress is that there is a certain dependence within the order of efficient causality and this is what we see in the fact that the attempt to account for A leads to J and M and J and M in turn leads to D and M. Yet the fact is that if we insist on our original thesis that no efficient cause is the cause of itself the regress is bound to persist. But if the regress persists, can we finally lay to rest the problem of the cause of efficient causality?

Obviously given this scenario, the way to secure an ultimate account is to arrest the regress of efficient cause by positing a first cause which is its own cause and does not depend on another efficient cause for its generation. Unless the regress is arrested it means the situation cannot be resolved. It means in other words that we cannot explain the fact that things come into being and are brought into being by another thing. Just like the argument from motion the necessity of overcoming the regress becomes the final step in the chain of premises that establishes the existence of God.

Indeed as Aquinas says clearly in concluding the proof, "Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name God".²⁸ The similarity between the structure of the proof from efficient causality and the proof from motion is clear. Once the necessity of postulating the first cause in order to arrest the regress is established, one argument appears to collapse into the other as they uphold the existence of God as following logically from the fact of efficient causality or again the fact of motion.

But, as in previous case, it remains to be seen whether there is a necessity to arrest the regress and whether we will arrive at the conclusion Aquinas arrived at, namely, this is what everyone knows as God, if the regress issue were approached differently. We will return to these critical issues but for now what is important is to remark the correlation between the regress issue and the postulation of a first cause and their place in the architectonic of the proofs. This is evident from the two proofs we have seen. But it is no less evident from third proof, that is, the proof from Possibility and necessity to which we now turn our attention.

2. 3. Proof from Necessary versus Possible Being

Like the first and second proofs from motion and efficient cause respectively the point of departure of the third proof is a statement of observation in respect of nature namely, that there are possible beings as contradistinguished from necessary being. The proof turns on the notion of possible and necessary beings and the distinction between them. So, it is important to understand what these terms mean if we are to grasp the point of the proof from possible versus necessary being.

The distinction between necessary being and possible being is not original to Aquinas but was well established before Aquinas, going back to the classical tradition of Greek philosophy. The distinction is presupposed in Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle in respect of their various accounts of the nature of ultimate reality.²⁹ The distinction also occurs in Augustine and Anselm. The distinction is particularly prominent in the second form of Anselm's ontological argument where it also plays a key role in Anselm's argument for the existence of God - a similar role it plays in Aquinas.³⁰

In Aquinas however the distinction functions in an empiricist context since Aquinas begins his investigation by observing that there are possible beings in nature. As in previous proofs the statement of fact regarding the existence in nature of possible beings serves to set up the argument for the existence of God but this will be pursued via an interrogation of the fact of possible being.

²⁸ See Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Medieval Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), pp. 338-389

²⁹ Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Ancient Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), p. 20; Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Medieval Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), pp. 158-9

³⁰ Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Medieval Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), pp. 158-9

On Aquinas' account a possible being is a contingent being, a being which need not exist. In other words it may or it may not exist. Its contingency implies that it has not always existed and certainly will not always exist. It begins to exist in time and will cease to exist in time, so that it does not possess existence with necessity. If it does exist it owes its existence to something other than itself and could not be said to possess existence on its own account.³¹

On the contrary, a necessary being is a being that owes its existence to itself and not to another being. In other words a necessary being is the cause of its own existence, so that it is inconceivable that it comes into being or ceases to be. A necessary being always existed and will always exist.

In focusing attention on this distinction and particularly on the fact that there are possible beings in nature, Aquinas' purpose is to argue that interrogation of their being suggest that there must a necessary being, since, if by virtue of their contingency, they owe their existence to another, they could not possibly be their own cause. Yet, if, in fact, what we have were merely possible beings which depend on others for their existence we could not really account for the coming into being of anything in the final analysis. In other words to have a possible being, it seems inevitable that there must be a necessary being to whom possible beings owe their existence.³²

We may argue that some possible beings owe their existence to another and to this extent we can account for their coming into being. Yet unless such beings possess existence by their very nature we are bound to be caught up in an infinite regress of causes.

We cannot fail to notice the similarity between the proof from possible being and two earlier proofs as commentators have noted. The similarity is evident in respect of the structure of the proofs. But the similarity is no less evident in respect of the logic that undergirds the argument, first, in its build up; and, secondly, in its consummation. Like the previous proofs the crucial premise, as always, is the point that we cannot have an infinite regress of causes if we are to explain anything, whether the fact of motion in the universe or the fact of efficient causality, or, in the current context, the fact of possible beings.³³

If we are to account for these phenomena the regress has to be arrested by postulating a first cause. To successfully account for the fact of possible being in this context the regress of causes have to be arrested by postulating a necessary being which, as Aquinas says, owes its existence to itself by necessity instead of deriving it from another. Thus it emerges once again that there is a correlation between the issue of regress of causes and the necessity of postulating a necessary being that ultimately accounts for the fact that there are possible beings in nature. The point, in the end, is that there cannot be infinity of merely possible beings, who, depend for their existence on something else. Therefore there must be some being, who, exists by its own necessity and is not dependent on anything but who can impart existence on everything else.

In what follows we turn our attention to the two remaining proofs of Aquinas in respect of the existence of God. I mean the proof from degree of values and the proof from governance of the world. We will consider both proofs in succession. But it is noteworthy that both proofs are usually contrasted with the three earlier proofs despite the point of convergence between them in respect of exemplifying the *a posteriori* procedure. While the three proofs are said to be cosmological arguments strictly speaking, the proof from degree of values in the world is said to be a teleological argument or to put it differently a design argument for the existence of God. On the other hand the proof from the governance of the world is said to be a moral argument for the existence of God.

The larger significance of this divergent classification is that whereas the first three proofs dubbed as cosmological arguments strictly speaking confronts us with a portrait of a impersonal God, the fourth and fifth proofs dubbed as teleological and moral arguments confronts us with a portrait of a personal God. In this wise, as some commentators argue, the first three arguments are not that original to Aquinas as they are clearly present in Aristotle.³⁴ On the other hand the fourth and fifth proofs are more original to Aquinas and truly reflect his project of reconciling Greek philosophy with Christian faith so far as the Christian God is a personal God rather than an impersonal God.³⁵

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Cf. W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy: The Medieval Mind*, Second Edition, Chapter 6.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

With these remarks we can now examine the claims of the fourth and fifth proofs one after the other beginning with the fourth, namely, the proof from degrees of perfection

2. 4. Proof from Degrees of Perfection

Like earlier proofs, the proof from degrees of perfection starts with a statement of fact to the effect that there are grades of value in things. In other words things do not embody the same value. Some have more or less value than the others and nothing is as obvious as the fact that we make comparative judgement about things.

Such comparative judgements are part of the furniture of our everyday life, as we engage in social intercourse. We prefer one thing to another of its kind because we judge it to be better than its counterpart; we judge it to possess a greater value than the other. Invariably choices are made on the basis of our comparative judgment about the value of the things in question. Thus in a class of students we will judge some more intelligent than others. Or again one could be judged to be more sociable than the other or more athletic than the other. We could also judge something to be truer; or more noble or hot than another.

While it is beyond question that there are grades of value in things, what is crucial for Aquinas is that whenever we make comparative judgements about things, the presupposition always is that there is something that embodies the characteristic in question in a superlative degree.³⁶ In other words comparative degree always correlates with a superlative degree, so that where we have more or less of a thing we also have the case of a superlative degree of its instantiation. To stick to our previous examples, if we have a situation where some students are more intelligent than the other, we must also have the category of the most intelligent student, just like having some students as better than others also implies that there must be a category of best student. In other words the category of best can hardly be divorced from the category of more or less.

But aside from the fact that comparative degree presupposes superlative degree, superlative degree is the standard in terms of which we measure the value of things. Thus something is better than another thing to the extent that it more closely resembles the best; something is truer, if it is more like truth. We see this exemplified by some teachers when they grade their students. They take the best grade as a measure to grade the rest of the papers, deciding, as it were, what grade it deserves. If it is not better than the one rated highest it is assigned a lower grade and others that are not as good as it is, gets even lower grades, so that, in the end, we end up with a certain hierarchy of grades.

Yet it is not just the case that comparative degree is measured against the superlative, more importantly the claim is that the being of the comparative depends on the superlative, so that without the superlative we cannot speak of the comparative. In affirming the correlation between the comparative and superlative and indeed the dependence of the comparative on the superlative Aquinas is clearly influenced by Plato and Aristotle for the doctrine of degrees in truth and reality is a core aspect of Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics.³⁷ Aristotle essentially follows Plato in his hierarchical conceptualization of the real, except that with Aristotle there is a substantial modification of the category of discourse in attempt to circumvent Plato's metaphysical dualism.³⁸ But beyond this there is little difference between both thinkers in respect of the whole question of hierarchy of reality, truth and values. I suppose this is evident from Aristotle's double characterisation of metaphysics as science of being qua being and the science of the highest substance. This characterization is representative of the hierarchical nature of Aristotle's metaphysics and this hierarchy permeates the whole of Aristotle's system.³⁹

In appropriating this hierarchical features of Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics, the intent of Aquinas is to put it at the service of the Christian faith, in this specific context it serves to offer a rational demonstration of the existence of God, for, on Aquinas' estimation, it is not just that the comparative presupposes the superlative, a more crucial consideration from his standpoint is that the superlative is the cause of the comparative. In other words, if there were no superlative degree of goodness, truth and being, the existence of any lesser degree would be inexplicable.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ See W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy: The Medieval Mind*, Second Edition, Chapter 6.

³⁸ Cf. William F. Lawhead, *Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, Second Edition, pp. 174-175

³⁹ Cf. Damian Ilodigwe, "Two Senses of Metaphysics in Aristotle: Exploring the Synthesis" in *Bodija Journal*, 2015: pp. 20-38

Consequently the fact that there is a lower degree points to the existence of the maximum degree, so that if we start with the lower we are led to the maximum as its cause. When we extrapolate the point and apply it to the problem of the existence of God it means that we cannot account for the lower unless we assume that God is the ground of values and as such the explanation for the value things embody. Thus while we affirm that there is hierarchy of value in things we could not account for this without presupposing the existence of God.

Given that maximum of any genus is the cause of all in that genus, Aquinas concludes that “there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other; and this we call God.”⁴⁰

2. 5. Proof from Governance of the World

Let us turn our attention now in what follows to Aquinas’ fifth proof in respect of the existence of God, namely, proof from the fact of order in the universe otherwise known as the design argument. The argument is predicated on the premise that can observe certain order in the universe. In others words, the universe is teleologically constituted. Things do not just happen haphazardly but according to certain purpose inherent in them. Things and events have purpose and their activity is regulated by their inherent purpose.

On Aquinas’ view it is not only the constituents of the universe that is purpose- driven in respect of their activity but the universe as a whole. He takes this phenomenon of the purposive nature of the universe as an indication that the universe is the work of some intelligence. The order in the universe means that the universe was created by God.

Thus unless we presuppose that there is a designer we cannot understand the design which the universe is. The logic invariably is that if there is a design there must be a designer as there is no design without a designer. Given that there is order in the universe, there must be a designer and that is what we know as God. The fifth proof from the governance of the world like all the rest of the proofs begins with a statement of empirical observation about the universe and on the basis of cause and effect analysis it then explains the observed fact as the effect of God’s causal activity. Thus apart from the empiricist cast of the argument, the causal analysis that derives the conclusion from the premise is another feature they share in common, so that even though the fourth and fifth argument are respectively called moral and teleological arguments in contradistinction from the first three which are called cosmological arguments strictly speaking, all the proofs broadly speaking are causal arguments.

The fifth one particularly exploits the causal link between design and designer in establishing the existence of God. A similar cause-effect move is evident in the proof from grades of value in things and is no less the case in respect of the first three proofs: proof from motion, proof from efficient causality and proof from possibility versus necessity. All of the proofs are exercise in natural theology so far as Aquinas’ purpose is to offer a rational demonstration of the existence of God as far as reason can allow. To what extent can Aquinas be said to have accomplished his purpose? Can we really say the arguments are successful in establishing the existence of God?

3. Criticisms of Aquinas’ Cosmological Arguments for the Existence of God

Several commentators have noted that as commendable as Aquinas’ efforts are, the proofs are not successful, if Aquinas’ purpose was to offer a rational demonstration for the existence of God. In criticizing the proofs, the focus of attention is on the structure of the argument, particularly the issue of regress of causes that emerges within Aquinas’ explanatory scheme, the moment he attempts to offer a causal explanation for the observed features of the universe that drives each of the proof. The problem is not with the empirical fact with which each of the proofs begins. Nor is the problem with Aquinas’ commitment to the thesis that nothing can be its own cause but must be caused by another. For the most part commentators sympathize with these theses which Aquinas derived from Aristotle.

3. 1.The Five Ways and the Question of Infinite Regress Of Causes

The problem with Aquinas’ proofs, commentators point out, has to do with how Aquinas manages the phenomenon of regress at the heart of the whole argumentation. As we have seen in respect of the regress of causes, Aquinas’ assumption was that it was not reasonable to allow the regress to continue ad infinitude, so that the need to overcome the regress necessitates the postulation of a first cause, which itself is uncaused.

⁴⁰ See Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Medieval Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), p. 339

The assumption that the regress cannot continue and the postulation of first cause it consequently necessitates thus become the high point of Aquinas' argument. As we have noted, if Aquinas' assumption is correct, the postulation of the first cause seems warranted and it also means that the entire argument acquires certain validity. But suppose the assumption is wrong the picture is sure to look different, for, in the first place, it means that the postulation of first cause is unwarranted and to this extent Aquinas' conclusion that God is the first cause can hardly be sustained.

Indeed this is the line of argument some critics maintain. Essentially the point is there is no contradiction in the notion of an infinite regress of causes, meaning effectively there is nothing logically inconsistent in the thesis that the universe has no beginning, so that it will require the service of a first cause to account for its beginning.

On this reading, therefore, the postulation of a first cause to arrest the regress and so account for the observed feature of the universe is superfluous. If the postulation of first cause is unwarranted, it means the whole of Aquinas's argument disintegrates, given that the argument is driven by the correlation that is assumed to exist between God as the cause of the universe and the observed feature of the universe as an effect of its causal activity. On the reading that views as unwarranted the postulation of a first cause, it means that God is not needed to explain the reality of the universe, since we cannot rule out the possibility that the universe has always existed, so that it is not in need of a cause, or again, if it has a beginning in time this could be explained in some other way such as through the big bang theory rather than in terms of God as the causal origin of the universe.

This alternative reading has been canvassed by many modern scientists in contemporary times. It is easy to see that it derives its appeal from the counter assumption that it is not unreasonable to have an infinite regress. Once this counter assumption is put in place Aquinas can hardly make the move he makes. Yet aside from the issue of the regress and whether or not it is appropriate to arrest it, commentators maintain Aquinas' derivation of the conclusion as per God's existence is arbitrary. They point out there seems to be a long way from the thesis as to the existence of a first cause that is the cause of itself and the thesis concerning the existence of God. Is God merely the first cause, so that to establish the necessity of a first cause tantamount to the establishment of the existence of God?

3.2. The Five Ways And The Question Of The Alleged Gap In Deducing The Existence Of God From The Necessity Of A First Cause

Commentators point out that even if we grant that it is reasonable to arrest the regress and the need to postulate a first cause is warranted this does not by it-self prove the existence of God. They allege, therefore, that there is a certain gap in the reasoning that takes us from the necessity of postulating a first cause to Aquinas' declaration that this is what we know as God. The necessity of postulating a first cause can be rationalized but unless there is an absolute identity between the first cause and what Aquinas refers to as God, it is hard to see that he has established the existence God as a truth that follows from rational evidence. To add to the complexity of issues at stake commentators note that people understand by God different meaning depending on their cultural background. In effect it means that even if we grant that there is a correlation between the idea of a first cause and the idea of God it is difficult for the neutral observer to know which God Aquinas has in mind. If it means the Christian God the suggestion invites further skepticism for the Christian God is a personal God rather than the impersonal metaphysical God associated with Aristotle's metaphysics and indeed the whole of Greek thought.

If Aquinas says broadly that this is what we know as God, two points are essential to keep in mind. Obviously we cannot rule out the influence of Aristotle on his thought.⁴¹ He drew extensively from Aristotle, as we have noted earlier, but he was also conscious of the need to appropriate Aristotle from the standpoint of the exigencies of the Christian faith.⁴² In other words his point was to synthesise Aristotle with Christianity, so that wherever he saw anything in Aristotle that could help the synthesis he swiftly adopted it. Such was the case with Aristotle's unmoved mover.⁴³ But the personal character of the God of Christianity invites suspicion as to whether Aquinas' appropriation of Aristotle here does justice to the concept of Christian God if it is nothing more than a first cause that causally explains certain features of the universe and indeed the universe as whole.

⁴¹ See Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, "Editor's Introduction" *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 1-11

⁴² Brooke Noel Moore and Kenneth Brudder, *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas* (London: Mayfield, 1990), p. 65

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Thus even if we leave aside the issue of regress of causes and maintain that Aquinas was right to arrest the regress by postulating a first cause, it is doubtful whether the proofs really establish the existence of a Christian God, or whether what we have here is no more than a transposition of Aristotle's metaphysics unto the Christian concept of God.⁴⁴ What is clear is that Aquinas offers us more ambiguities than certainties, a scenario which has invited the distinction between God of Christianity and God of the philosophers? Which one do the proofs establish? Is it the God of Christian revelation or the God of philosophers?

In addressing the above issues it is important to state that Aquinas' purpose in presenting the five proofs was to offer a rational demonstration of God's existence. While he was fully aware of the ambiguities involved in such enterprise he was nonetheless convinced that God can be known by Natural reason. Indeed as he states explicitly in the *Summa*, Our natural knowledge begins from sense. Hence our natural knowledge can go as far as it can be led by sensible things. But our intellect cannot be led by sense so far as to see the essence of God; because sensible creatures are effects of God which do not equal the power of God, their cause. Hence from the knowledge of sensible things the whole power of God cannot be known; nor therefore can His essence be seen. But because they are his effects His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God whether he exists; and to know of him what must necessarily belong to Him as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by him.⁴⁵

We should note particularly Aquinas' emphasis on knowledge of God's essence on the one hand and the knowledge of God's existence on the other hand. The crucial point is that as far as natural knowledge can go we can grasp the existence of God, but the matter of his essence is beyond the reach of natural reason.⁴⁶ What it means therefore is that natural knowledge has possibilities as well as limitations as far as the question of God's existence is concerned. Because natural reason has possibilities we cannot deny that natural reason can discover the truth of God's existence without any assistance from faith.⁴⁷ But because natural reason is limited natural reason cannot guarantee us absolute knowledge as far as the nature of God is concerned.⁴⁸

3.3. The Five Ways and Question of Symbiosis between Faith And Reason

Specifically to rely solely on the powers of natural reason alone means we can never know the essence of God. Thus the fact that natural reason has possibilities and limitation explains the ambiguity that bedevils the question of God. Recognizing this ambiguity implies that we always have to keep in mind that faith and reason belong to diverse spheres even though they cannot be set in dualistic opposition as there is essential continuity between them despite their irreducible difference.⁴⁹ Aquinas definitely recognizes this as should be evident from the above passage. That he recognizes the symbiosis between faith and reason or between philosophy and theology in respect of the question of God and how to investigate it explains his ambivalent attitude towards the power of reason as far as the discourse on God is concerned. While he will not deny that by natural reason we can know God he also want to maintain that no matter how far we push the possibilities of natural reason its limits are patent.⁵⁰ We need take into account this double emphasis in Aquinas' attitude to natural reason in order to place his five proofs in the proper context.

The implication immediately is that while Aquinas intends the proofs as a rational demonstration of God's existence, he is too aware of their limits hence he says they are ways strictly speaking and not merely arguments.⁵¹ This point is of no mean significance for it indicates immediately that while Aquinas pursues the discourse from the standpoint of faith he is nonetheless aware of the claim of faith especially as far as the background of the entire discourse is concerned.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ See Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Medieval Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), p. 339

⁴⁶ Cf. Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Elements of Philosophy: An Introduction*, Third Edition, p. 376

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Cf. William F. Lawhead, *Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, Second Edition, pp. 172-174

⁵⁰ See Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Medieval Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), p. 339

⁵¹ Ibid.

I think this point emerges clearly when we consider that in the *Summa* Aquinas is careful to maintain that the truth of God's existence and essence are articles of faith without prejudice to the fact that the question of his existence can be understood from the standpoint of natural reason.⁵² The crucial point is that even as the truth of God existence is amenable to rational conceptualization we always stand on the inheritance of faith, even though this may not filter explicitly into our effort to rationally grasp the truth.⁵³

The point in other words, as Anselm says in his context, is that before we ever come to know God rationally by way of demonstrating his existence his existence is accessible to us by means of faith.⁵⁴ Consequently it emerges that what we know by faith and what we know by natural reason are not opposed although our effort in natural theology is to try to grasp the truth as far as natural reason can allow.⁵⁵

3. 4. The Question of the Possibilities and Limits of Natural Theology

If we take into account this Janus-faced character of natural reason we begin to see why we cannot answer directly whether or not the proofs are successful unless, of course, it is clear which aspect of the matter we speak of, that is, whether it is successful relative to establishing the essence of God, or again, whether it is successful relative to establishing the existence of God. While the two aspects of the matter can be separated from the standpoint of natural theology, Aquinas' intention is not to separate the two considerations since he does not see any conflict between faith and reason but rather harmony.⁵⁶

Thus from the standpoint of the limited goal of natural theology Aquinas will consider the proofs successful so long as they allow us to discover the truth about God's existence through natural reason. But he also thinks that the ensuing knowledge is not complete so far as it does not address the fundamental question of the existence of God, so that if we take them as point of departure in respect of the discourse on God they certainly cannot be the terminus. In a sense therefore the incompleteness that bedevils natural knowledge arguably implies that the proofs are not complete so far as the insight they offer need to be complemented by the truth of revelation accessible only by means of faith.⁵⁷

Consequently the proofs and indeed the whole of natural theology only serve as ancillary to revealed theology without prejudice to the autonomy of natural theology.⁵⁸ Indeed this is so clear from the architectonic of Aquinas' *Summa* for addressing the question of the existence of God through the means of natural theology served as a point of departure for him in addressing the more fundamental question of the essence of God which is the supreme prerogative of revelation. Indeed Aquinas' *Summa* in this context excellently exemplifies his doctrine regarding the symbiotic relation that subsists between faith and reason, theology and philosophy without prejudice to their respective autonomy.⁵⁹

Of course without denying the autonomy of the respective spheres, the point is to properly work out the inter-play that subsists between them, so that while recognizing the continuity between the two spheres we also remain cognizant of the irreducible identity that defines both spheres.⁶⁰ Defining the proper boundary that belongs to each sphere without denying their community was a concern that preoccupied Aquinas throughout his career.⁶¹

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Medieval Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), pp. 158-9

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Cf. Vittorio Possenti, *Philosophy and Revelation*, translated by Emmanuel L. Pararella (London: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2001), pp. 1-21

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Cf. Damian Ilodigwe, "Between the Wisdom of God and the Wisdom of this World: Faith and Reason in the Thought of St Paul" *The Nigerian Journal of Theology* 2015, pp. 70-90

⁶⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter: Fides et Ratio* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media 1998), p. 7

⁶¹ Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufman, *Medieval Philosophy, Philosophic Classics*, 2nd Edition, Volume 1 (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1997), pp. 322-324

Specifically this was a concern beneath his articulation of five proofs so that to capture their full significance will require that we see that they exemplify Aquinas' effort to reconcile faith and reason, Greek philosophy and Christianity.⁶² Once we take this general point into account we understand it is complicated business answering the question whether Aquinas' five proofs are successful or not. Indeed if we return to this question as well as the criticisms of the proofs we considered above it emerges that Aquinas' critics often do not take into account the peculiar nature of his project of reconciling faith and reason and all the ambiguities that bedevil it.⁶³

It is not surprising therefore that the assessments are often negative and tend to judge Aquinas from the lens of secular reason which is oblivious of its proper affiliation with faith. Paradoxically it was against this error of abstract reason disconnected from its ontological root that it was the purpose of Aquinas to correct. Unfortunately all too often he is a victim of the prejudices of secular reason.⁶⁴ If we return quickly to the criticisms earlier considered we see that they do not appear as formidable as they are unless we assume that Aquinas operates in terms of the ideal of secular reason that defines its essence by excising itself from the domain of faith.

4. Assessment

If we take into account that for Aquinas faith and reason are partners in progress as far as the discourse on God is concerned we begin to see that while Aquinas' proofs are not complete, they nonetheless confront us with constructive ambiguities that enrich our understanding of the matter so long as we refrain from setting issues in dualistic opposition to each other – a major Achilles heel of secular reason in its hubris and self-apotheosis.⁶⁵

Considering the issue of the so-called regress that emerged within Aquinas' explanatory scheme and whether or not it should be arrested by postulating a first cause, we see immediately that Aquinas' critics have a point in saying that there is nothing that suggests that the regress cannot continue. Of course, we cannot deny that this is a rational option. But arresting the regress is no less a rational option. Both options are rationally viable and it will all depend on one's agenda as far as the option that one embraces is concerned.

If this is the case it means that Aquinas is no less entitled to his option as anyone who thinks otherwise. Aquinas opts to arrest the regress and postulate a first cause that enables him to rationally account for the phenomena. The position without doubt is philosophically sustainable and it is no less sustainable than the position that opts to preserve the regress and deny that we need to recourse to God's existence to account for the phenomena.

Beyond this consideration as we have maintained the picture certainly fits together when we consider Aquinas' understanding of the relationship between faith and reason; for in this context it is undeniable that his choice not to preserve the regress is driven by his Christian background. We cannot begrudge him for this, as in truth, as we have maintained, there is no presupposition less-thinking as each one will act according to his interests in the end. This is no less true of the one who chooses to preserve the regress and so dispense with any recourse to first cause or to God as the causal explanation for the phenomena.

The atheist, no less than the agnostic or again the theist are all standing on the presupposition of faith with respect to the respective possibilities they offer on the discourse on God. Aquinas will be the first to deny that his standpoint is the standpoint of pure reason as that concept is understood in modern and post-modern philosophy.⁶⁶ If his standpoint is not the standpoint of reason, then we can envisage some co-operation between faith and reason in the common enterprise of investigating the truth of God's existence.⁶⁷ In the end we cannot abstract the truth of God's existence from the truth of his essence. Both represent two aspects of the same coin and Aquinas' intent is to do justice to both aspects even though his proofs begin with the question of God's existence. But beginning with it does not mean it is not open to the second aspect except that to engage with this reason has to work with faith. In other words, Aquinas' model is such that reason is open to faith in a way that cannot be said of modern secular reason or its post-modern variation.⁶⁸

⁶² Brooke Noel Moore and Kenneth Brudner, *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas* (London: Mayfield, 1990), p. 65

⁶³ See Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, "Editor's Introduction" *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Cf. Vittorio Possenti, *Philosophy and Revelation*, translated by Emmanuel L. Pararella, pp. 1-21

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter: Fides et Ratio* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media 1998), p. 7

⁶⁸ Cf. Vittorio Possenti, *Philosophy and Revelation*, translated by Emmanuel L. Pararella, pp. 1-21

It is the same inter-penetration of faith and reason we see when we examine the alleged gap between Aquinas' postulation of first cause and his submission that this is what we know as God. If we operate on the model of secular reason the alleged gap is vicious and will destroy Aquinas' argument if stretched to the logical conclusion. Unless we take into account the Christian background of Aquinas' writing and the fact that faith is inter-fused with reason we will not allow that such correlation is effective. Is it the Christian God or the metaphysical God of Aristotle that is established? From the standpoint of pure secular reason the tendency is to deny that it is the Christian God and the denial will carry some weight. Yet the moment we consider Aquinas' marriage of faith and reason, a different picture emerges. It is not Christian God qua Christian God nor it is Aristotle's metaphysical God qua metaphysical God. It is both though intermixed. The point of mixture is the crucible of faith, for while Aquinas baptizes, Aristotle, so that the metaphysical God is not opposed to the Christian God, Aquinas also underlines the limitation of the metaphysical God so that it does not approximate the Christian God.

But in not approximating the Christian God it nonetheless offers resources to achieve such approximation for building on what it guarantees, as faith leads us to understand not only that God exists, but we also understand God as he exists in his essence. In this way while the metaphysical God of Aristotle is not the Christian God it becomes a sort of *preparatio evangelica* just in the manner that the whole of Greek philosophy and its inheritance becomes a *preparatio evangelica* for the whole of Christianity.

In this way there is a close affinity between Aquinas and medieval thinkers such as Anselm and Augustine as far as the discourse on God is concerned.⁶⁹ Similarly there is a close affinity between Aquinas and Paul as should be evident from Paul's Areopagus speech, perhaps the earliest known form of natural theology especially in attempt to reconcile faith and reason. So if the background of Aquinas' writings is taken into account as well as his project of reconciling faith and reason, philosophy and theology, we discover that the foregoing criticisms are not as devastating as they appears at first sight.

Indeed Aquinas' attempt to reconcile faith and reason appears to anticipate and answer these criticisms so that we can think the criticisms are devastating if we ignore the larger context of Aquinas' engagement with the problem of God. It is obviously difficult to classify Aquinas and this is all down to the ambiguities that bedevil his engagement with the discourse of God. Some critics often complain that Aquinas is not a real philosopher but a philosopher that mixes philosophy with theology. The criticism may have a point but we miss the overall point, if we fail to see that the matter cannot be adjudicated in terms of any one unilateral standard regarding what philosophy is and is not.⁷⁰

There is no doubt that Aquinas does not fit into the mould of the modern philosopher or postmodern philosopher who implicitly or explicitly operate on the model of secular reason.⁷¹ For this reason he may not appeal to modern or postmodern philosophy. Yet arguably Aquinas anticipates one of the fundamental issues that have bedevilled Western philosophy since the inception of modern philosophy, namely, the crisis of reason and the crisis of faith and value, all stemming from a bad metaphysics of reason.⁷²

5. Conclusion

In this context Aquinas has something to contribute in overcoming the poverty of modernity and post-modernity and recuperating a basic sense of intrinsic value and transcendence as other. At first sight the complaint that Aquinas is a theologian and philosopher may appear to sell. But on closer observation and particularly from the standpoint of the crisis of modernity, combining both titles may, in fact, be of greater credit to him than disservice in determining the contemporary relevance of Aquinas. His insistence on the marriage of faith and reason, theology and philosophy is an emphasis that is badly needed in a postmodern world that has seemingly lost its soul in mere representations without any anchor in reality qua reality. Aristotle certainly has a point in saying that metaphysics in science of substance as well as science of God.⁷³ In following Aristotle Aquinas reminds modernity in its descent into new barbarism to look beyond mere appearance in order to secure its salvation.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Cf. Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Elements of Philosophy: An Introduction*, Third Edition, p. 376

⁷⁰ Cf. Vittorio Possenti, *Philosophy and Revelation*, translated by Emmanuel L. Pararella, pp. 1-21.

⁷¹ Cf. Lawrence CoHoone, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, 2013, pp. 1-4

⁷² Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter: Fides et Ratio* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media 1998), p. 7

⁷³ Cf. Damian Ilodigwe, "Two Senses of Metaphysics in Aristotle: Exploring the Sythesis" in *Bodija Journal*, 2015: pp. 20-38

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*