

ON THE DEARTH OF GOD IN ARISTOTLE'S SUBSTANCE METAPHYSICS: A PROCESS- RELATIONAL RIPOSTE

EMMANUEL OFUASIA

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY,
OLABISI ONABANJO UNIVERSITY, AGO-IWOYE,
OGUN, NIGERIA.

OFUASIA.EMMA@GMAIL.COM

ABSTRACT: God, the Prime Mover in Aristotle's substance metaphysics, is burdened with five famous and irreversible rejoinders. Firstly, it could be argued contra Aristotle, that there could be an infinite chain of regress regarding the Prime Mover. Secondly, the Husserlian theory of intentionality may be deployed against Aristotle's impression of God who engages in the act (or shall I say art?), of "thinking upon thinking" without any content/object of thought. The third demurrer concerns the inability of Aristotle's God to explain the origin of matter. Implied here is that God as so construed knows nothing about matter but only form. The fourth grouse shows that despite criticizing Plato, Aristotle could not explain the place of universals while the last objection reveals the scepticism of Aristotle regarding the *real* place or position of the divine in the cosmos. After a terse assessment, this study finds these objections valid and recommends a re-thinking of the notion of God away from the Aristotelian metaphysics of substance. The essay thereby proposes God as holds in process-relational Metaphysics, which is not fraught with the difficulties encountered in Aristotle's Substance framework.

KEYWORDS: Aristotle, Substance Metaphysics, God, Whitehead, Process-Relational Philosophy.

Introduction

In this essay, I marshal five objections against Aristotle's theology. I will argue, using the method of critical analysis and interpretation to patent that whereas these rejoinders are correct, it is pertinent to graduate from substance theology to process theology. To attain this coup, this study has five parts, the first being this introduction. In the second rift, I expose Aristotle's theology. The third part of this study unveils the five popular objections that burden Aristotle's theology. In the fourth part God, in Process-Relational Metaphysics (Process Theology) is assessed vis-à-vis the objections present in the Substance Theology of Aristotle. The fifth segment concludes this study.

Aristotle's Theology: An Exposition.

Ferguson highlights that "Aristotle uses the term theology for the study of objects which are separate and immutable..."¹ Hence, I shall lay emphasis on things that are separate and immutable in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. I shall therefore, dutifully expose step by step how Aristotle builds his system up to the place and purpose of God, beginning with the connotation and categories of substance.

For Aristotle, "the subject of our inquiry is substance; for the principles and the causes we are seeking are those of substances."² He proceeds to divide substance into three: sensible and perishable (e.g. plants and animals); sensible and eternal (Aristotle has in mind the Heavenly bodies), and immutable.³ In his own words, Aristotle corroborates that:

"There are three kinds of substance – one that is sensible (of which one subdivision is eternal and another is perishable; the latter is recognized by all men and includes e.g. plants and animals), of which we must grasp the elements whether one or many; and another that is immovable, and this certain thinkers assert to be capable of existing apart, some dividing into two, others identifying the Forms and the objects of mathematics, and others positing, of these two, only the objects of mathematics".⁴

In this discourse, I shall engage the third kind of substance – the immutable. This third substance is eternal and an unmovable substance. Aristotle, in this connection harps that:

"Since there were three kinds of substance, two of them physical and one unmovable, regarding the latter, we must assert that it is necessary that there should be an eternal substance. For substances are the first of existing things, and if they are all destructible, all things are destructible. But, it

¹Ferguson, J. (1972). *Aristotle*. New York: Twayne Publishers Inc. p.122.

²Aristotle, (1973). "Metaphysics" in R. McKeon, *Introduction to Aristotle* transl. W.D. Ross, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. p.1069a.

³Ferguson, J. (1972). *Aristotle*. New York: Twayne Publishers Inc. p.122.

⁴Op. Cit, Aristotle (1973) p.1069a.

is impossible that movement should either have come into being or cease to be (for it must always have existed), or that time should. For there could be not be a before and after it time did not exist.”⁵

Aristotle, as shown above shows the correlation between the idea of motion and time. Movement, motion is eternal and this is true of time as well. Aristotle holds that the only continuous motion is locomotion; the only continuous locomotion is circular. There must therefore be an eternal circular motion. To produce this kind of motion, there must be an eternal substance capable of producing motion (unlike Plato’s Forms), whose very being is actuality and thus immateriality.⁶ Aristotle shows how it is possible for this eternal substance to participate in the business of motion as Pure Actuality without potentiality. Why should we be led to concede that a being, which does not possess motion, could be the cause of motion? Aristotle argues as follows:

“Yet there is a difficulty, for it is thought that everything that acts is able to act, but that not everything that is able to act acts, so that the potency is prior. But if this is so, nothing that is need be; for it is possible for all things to be capable of existing but not yet to exist.”⁷

Excerpted above is the Aristotelian conviction that actuality precedes potentiality despite the temptation of thinking that the converse is the case. Deducing from Leucippus, Anaxagoras and Empedocles, Aristotle informs us that:

“To suppose potency prior to actuality, then, is in a sense right, and in a sense not; and we have specified these senses. That actuality is prior is testified by Anaxagoras (for his ‘reason’ is actuality) and by Empedocles in his doctrine of love and strife, and by those who say that there is always movement, e.g. Leucippus. Therefore chaos or night did not exist for an infinite time, but the same things have always

⁵Ibid, p.1071b.

⁶Op. Cit, Ferguson (1972) p.123.

⁷Op. Cit, Aristotle (1973) p.1071b.

existed (either passing through a cycle of changes or obeying some other law), since actuality is prior to potency.”⁸

What kind of being is the being that Aristotle labels as the “immutable substance”? This being for Aristotle is the Eternal Mover. This Eternal Mover is not in the universe but outside the universe as Aristotle explains in the *Metaphysics*. He expatiates:

“There is then, something, which is always moved with an unceasing motion, which is motion in a circle; and this is plain not in theory but in fact. Therefore, the first heaven must be eternal. There is also something which moves it. And since that which is moved and moves is intermediate, there is something which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance and actuality. And the objects of desire and of thought are the same. For the apparent good is the object of appetite, and the real good is the primary object of rational wish.”⁹

Aristotle also calls this being the Final Cause. It is this idea of final causation that Aristotle adds to the previous schemas of the metaphysics of his predecessors. In this mould, Moore and Bruder amplify:

“It sometimes is difficult to perceive the ancient Greek metaphysicians as all being concerned with the same thing. But Aristotle explained that his predecessors were all concerned with *causation*. Thales, for example, was concerned with the stuff from which all is made: the material cause of things. Empedocles and Anaxagoras were concerned with why there is change, with efficient causation. In his Theory of Forms, Plato considered formal causation. It remained for Aristotle himself, Aristotle thought, to present an adequate explanation of final causation. So Aristotle gave us a handy way of integrating (and remembering) ancient Greek metaphysics.”¹⁰

⁸Ibid, p.1072a.

⁹Ibid, p.1072a.

¹⁰Moore, B.N., Bruder, K. (2011). *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas*. New York: McGraw Hill. p.65.

In fact, for Aristotle, “that a Final Cause may exist among unchangeable entities is shown by the distinction of its meanings. For the Final Cause is (a) some being for whose good an action is done, (b) something at which the action aims; and of these the latter exists among unchangeable entities though the former does not. The Final Cause, then produces, motion as being loved, but all other things move by being moved.”¹¹ Here Aristotle gives his reason why the final cause is the sole cause of motion. He harps that “this Mover is the final cause of the universe; he is also the efficient cause, but only as he is the Final Cause.”¹² The first mover must enjoy bliss. Being immaterial his activity must be intellectual, and the object of his thought must be the best possible. “Therefore it must be of itself that the divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking upon thinking.”¹³ This final cause is God in Aristotle’s framework. In his own words, Aristotle articulates: “we say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continues and eternal belong to God; for this is God.”¹⁴

So far, I have shown abruptly, the connection among Aristotle’s idea of substance, change, potency, actuality up to the author of change and motion in the material world, God. This idea of God has been taken over by the Christian Church Fathers, as Thomas Aquinas, of all others, deserves adulation, for this feat. Before making a critique of Aristotle in the next section, it would be of immense good if I point out the kind of God implied in Aristotle’s metaphysics and how it differs from the Judeo-Christian’s despite St. Thomas Aquinas attempt to cement the gap. One must be reminded that central to Aristotle’s metaphysics is the question of Being where as in the Judeo-Christian tradition, God became the Ultimate Being, the Unmoved Mover and from then on the history of metaphysics and religion has followed the track of what Heidegger would later call onto-theology, the forgetting of the ontological difference between Being as it is in itself and God.¹⁵ In a related development, Chidozie Okoro harps that “the Being that Heidegger speaks of is not any particular being; it is not this or that being. Unlike Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, by Being, Heidegger does not refer to God who

¹¹Op. Cit, Aristotle (1973). p.1072a.

¹²Op. Cit, Ferguson (1972). p.123.

¹³Op. Cit, Aristotle (1973) p.1074b.

¹⁴Ibid, p.1072b.

¹⁵Heidegger, M. (2002). “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics” in *Identity and Difference*. trans Joan Stambaugh. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p.42.

incidentally is regarded as being of beings. Heidegger is rather talking of a most primordial ground that sustains all other grounds, including God.”¹⁶

First of all, the kind of God Aristotle uncovers is deistic. In other words, Aristotle merely gives an account of God in the way deism construes the divine. For Bernard S. Cayne deism is the “belief in God reached through natural and scientific observation. This rationalistic religion, first prevailed in the 17th and 18th cc. and expounded e.g. by Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau, accepted the idea of God as creator of the universe, but rejected the notion that God might break the laws governing the universe.”¹⁷ On the contrary, Deism, as this essay reveals is as far as Aristotle and over two millennia old. The kind of God implied in Aristotle does not interfere in the affairs of the world. For a deeper appreciation of the thrust of Aristotle’s implication on the idea of God, it would be helpful to highlight some of the attributes of the Judeo-Christian God so as to see whether or not God in Aristotle and God in Christendom are synonymous.

In the words, of Murray and Rea, we might first take note of the fact that theistic traditions almost all agree on the following basic claims about God:

Nothing made God, and God is the source or ground of everything other than God;
God rules all that is not God; and
God is the most perfect being.¹⁸

These three points of agreement correspond to three distinct starting points for developing a richer, more detailed concept of divinity. We can label these three starting points: creation theology, providential theology, and perfect-being theology. According to creation theology God is not made or caused but is rather the cause or maker of everything else. This is closely linked with God’s aseity. “Basing themselves on the book of Genesis, creationists assert that God created the world out of nothing and this took place in six days.”¹⁹ Can we learn anything further about God by

¹⁶Okoro, C. (2011). “Problems of Metaphysical Philosophy” in *African Nebula*, Issue 3. June.

¹⁷Cayne, B.S. (1992). *The New Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language*, New York: Lexicon Publishers. p.253.

¹⁸Murray, M.J., Rea, M.C. (2008). *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.7.

¹⁹Negedu, I. (2014). “Metaphysical Implications of Scientific Naturalism” in M. Asiegbu, J.D., Chukwuokolo (eds.) *Frontiers of Knowledge in Philosophy: Cutting Edge Issues*. Enugu: Jones Communication Publishers. p.246-7.

conceiving of God in this way? Yes. We can learn, first, that God is a being with causal power. If the created universe exhibits signs that its cause was a rational agent, we can learn that God is a being with intelligence or rationality.²⁰

Similarly, from providential theology, we can infer that God is supreme among all existing things because God rules over and superintends those things. If the universe exhibits continuing signs of divine providential activity, either because God must continue to sustain the world in existence or because we have reason to think that God has miraculously intervened in the world, then we might infer even more about the character of God from this sustaining activity or the nature of the purported miracles.²¹ Speaking on the perfect-being theology Murray and Rea highlight that:

“Perfect-being theology plays an important role in all three of the major Western theistic traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Within philosophy, perfect-being theology traces its roots at least as far back as Plato, who identifies God with the supreme reality, which he labels “the Good,” and Aristotle, who characterizes God as “the best substance.” These traditions converged in powerful ways to inform the writing of some of the most important theologians in each tradition: Philo of Alexandria and Maimonides in Judaism, Al-Kindi and Avicenna in Islam, and Augustine, Anselm, and St. Thomas Aquinas in Christianity.”²²

In a similar mould, Thomas Morris opines on the theme of perfect-being being theology that “something is God only if it has the greatest possible array of great-making properties.”²³ For Moore and Bruder:

“Many of these beliefs have to do with *God*: that he exists, that he is good, that he created the universe and is the source of all that is real, that he is a personal deity, that he is a transcendent deity, and so forth. Many have to do with *humans*: that humans were created in the image of God, that

²⁰Op. Cit, Murray and Rea (2008) p.7

²¹Ibid, p.7

²²Ibid, p.7-8

²³Morris, T. (1987). *The Concept of God*. New York: Oxford University Press. p.35

they have free will, that they can have knowledge of God's will, that the human soul is immortal, and so on."²⁴

It is permissible to aver that all of the above do not have any relation to the idea of God according to Aristotle. Aristotle gives a "picture of the Unmoved Mover as the eternal unmoving cause of motion, pure actuality containing no matter, and living in blissful contemplation, transcendent and without knowledge of the world he moves, and Aristotle applies to the Mover the name God."²⁵

Now Aristotle's God is not in any real sense a Creator; he is certainly not providence; he has no real awareness of evil, no interest in the world, no love for man; and it remains one of the paradoxes of history that the immeasurably subtle medieval scholastics found it possible to identify this *dieu fainéant* with the ever working Father proclaimed by Jesus, whose very name is Love, and who is there, caring, if even a sparrow falls to the ground. Aristotle's God rather points forward precisely to the gods of Epicurus, who borrowed his theology from Aristotle without acknowledgement, and later to the Deists of the seventeenth and eighteenth century.²⁶

That Aristotle's knowledge of God has no affinity with the one revealed at least, in the Judeo-Christian is well corroborated by Moore and Bruder in the following words: "Pure actuality is the unchanged changer or unmoved mover or, in short, god. It should be noted that the pure actuality that Aristotle equated with god is not God, the personal deity of the Jewish or Christian religions."²⁷ More so, upon the 'discovery' of Aristotle in the High Middle Ages, St. Bonaventura had thought it necessary to reject Aristotle for contradicting the Platonic and Augustinian foundation of the Christian Church. Moore and Bruder continue that:

"Aquinas had access to translations of Aristotle's works that were directly from the Greek (not Latin translations of Arab translations), and his knowledge of Aristotle was considerable and profound. In a manner similar to that in which Augustine had mixed Platonic philosophy with Christianity, Aquinas blended Christianity with the philosophy of Aristotle, in effect grafting the principles and

²⁴Op. Cit, Moore and Bruder (2011) p.97

²⁵Op. Cit, Ferguson (1972) p.124

²⁶Ibid, p.124.

²⁷Op. Cit, Moore and Bruder (2011) p. 65.

distinctions of the Greek philosopher to Christian revealed truth. The result was a complete Christian philosophy, with a theory of knowledge, a metaphysics, ethical and political philosophies, and a philosophy of law.”²⁸

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that Aristotle’s God is not the kind of God St. Thomas Aquinas has in mind. Neither does it possess any sort of affinity with the notion of God as represented in the revealed holy books. A critical assessment of the Aristotelian notion of God is therefore worthy of contemplation.

A Critical Exposition of Aristotle’s Theology

In this section, I shall focus mainly on the five objections that nullify the veracity of Aristotle’s Theology. The most common objection to Aristotle’s notion of God as the author of change and motion without itself being Unmoved is from the apologists of *infinite regress*. One cannot overlook this argument due to the fact that there is a possibility that even the Pure Actuality, Unmoved Mover, God for Aristotle can still possess a higher explanation for his being. In other words, there is no conclusive evidence that God, as explained in this regard may not have a higher cause. Though Aristotle invites us to assume that an *infinite regress* is absurd, this assumption is far from novel. The place of God in his metaphysics is very central, and Aristotle not only builds his entire system on it, but also places God as the substructure of his entire framework. It must however be categorically stated that “in the first place, God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification.”²⁹

Another objection is derived from the one regarding God as engaged in self-contemplation. Phenomenology has given a better reason to refute Aristotle’s claim of a God engaged in “thinking upon thinking” (Aristotle, 1973:1074b). Phenomenology “is best understood as a radical anti-traditional style of philosophizing, which emphasizes the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner that it appears...to the experience.”³⁰ Edmund Husserl, the foremost phenomenologist has informs that thinking must have content since thinking implies consciousness. Central to Husserl’s idea of intentionality is

²⁸Ibid, p.87.

²⁹Whitehead, A.N. (1978). *Process and Reality*. Griffin and Sherburne (eds.) New York: The Free Press. p.343

³⁰Moran, D. (2004). *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London: Routledge. p.4

consciousness. Following Franz Brentano, Husserl demarcates the intentional acts of consciousness from the intentional object of consciousness, both of which are deep-seated in the content of consciousness. This means that thinking, as an intentional act must have a corresponding intentional object outside oneself. Apply this to the Aristotelian thinking God and the problem is not too difficult to grasp.

The third objection arises from the affinity between form and matter on the one hand as well as that of actuality and potentiality on the other hand. Form is a particular kind of actuality, and matter a particular kind of potentiality. Aristotle believed that his distinction between actuality and potentiality offered an alternative to the sharp dichotomy of being vs. non-being on which the Parmenidean rejection of change had been based. Since matter underlay and survived all change whether substantial or accidental, there was no question of being coming from non-being, or anything coming from nothing. However, it was a consequence of Aristotle's account that matter could not have had a beginning. In the later centuries, this set a problem for Christian Aristotelians who believed in the creation of the material world out of nothing.³¹ This objection is valid because if God is Pure Actuality and immaterial, having nothing to do with material realities, it needs to be asked where matter came from. In other words, it could be read that God is not the originator of matter but form.

The fourth objection against Aristotle is that despite labelling Plato's system as empty metaphors and claiming that movement arises because of attraction towards the divine, Aristotle is flawed for also failing to rectify what later became the age-long debate on universals and particulars. Plato had claimed that the Forms are universals, a fact that Aristotle accepted as well. However, while Aristotle is willing to condemn Plato on the grounds that universals do not exist apart from particulars, he is less helpful in telling us exactly what universals are. In a related development, Moore and Bruder opine that:

“Aristotle is fairly convincing when he tells us what is wrong with Plato's Theory of Forms, but he is less helpful in explaining just what universals are. The apparent failure of Aristotle (and Plato and their contemporaries) to produce a satisfactory theory of universals and their relationship to

³¹Kenny, A. (2006). *An Illustrated Brief History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. p.83

particulars resulted in an obsession with the problem through many centuries.”³²

The fifth objection questions the real place of God for Aristotle. “Aristotle does not here state where he is to be found: elsewhere he varies between placing him on the outside of the universe (Phys. 267b6) and declaring that he is not in space at all (Cael. 279a18).”³³ Where really is this God since Aristotle appears not to be consistent with its position as revealed in other publications?

It is obvious the idea of God as the Prime Mover from an Aristotelian metaphysics of substance is inadequate. This essay recommends a shift away from the metaphysics of substance to process metaphysics and the notion of God therein. Let us take a brief look at God in process philosophy, and how the latter overcomes the hurdles present in the metaphysics of substance.

God in Process-Relational Metaphysics

Most process philosophers argue that the history of Western philosophy has given undue importance to substance over process, being over becoming, especially among those philosophical systems where movement, change, and transformation are nothing but attributes, effects, or derivatives of what is permanent or changeless. To a certain degree, substance metaphysics owes its success to the mode of thinking that cultivates such a mentality, i.e. in ancient times perfection was synonymous to changelessness.³⁴ This notion of perfection and its synonymy with changelessness served as the backdrop for monotheistic theologies.

Though most are wont to hold that process metaphysics derives from the thoughts of Alfred North Whitehead *alone*, a perusal of philosophy in the ancient periods reveals that “process-relational thinking has a long history stretching back at least to the Buddha and the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus in the sixth century BCE.”³⁵ The revival of the metaphysics in the 20th century is indisputably credited to Alfred North Whitehead who harps that the goal of philosophy is “...the endeavour to frame a

³²Op. Cit, Moore and Bruder (2011), p. 69.

³³Op. Cit, Ferguson (1972), p.123.

³⁴Masong, K.C. (2013). “Becoming-Religion: Re-/thinking Religion with A.N. Whitehead and Keiji Nishitani”, in *Buddhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* 17 (2), p. 14.

³⁵Mesle, C.R. (2008). *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead*. Pennsylvania, Templeton: Foundation Press. p.4.

coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted.”³⁶ This implies that the sole aim of philosophy is to interpret or understand our experiences. He continues that “the elucidation of immediate experience is the sole justification for any thought.”³⁷ Let us acquaint with the idea of God in process metaphysics.

In many metaphysical systems, usually God is put outside the system. Whitehead however, insists, “God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification.”³⁸ It is evident then, that for Whitehead, in seeking to understand God, one must use the same principles that are used to understand everything else. He may exemplify the principles in a unique way, but he must not be an exception to them, otherwise the system would have two parts, leaving a dichotomy. This underlines the necessity for coherence. In his own words, Whitehead submits that:

“What further can be known about God must be sought in the region of particular experiences, and therefore rests on an empirical basis. In respect to the interpretation of these experiences, mankind have differed profoundly. He has been named respectively, Jehovah, Allah, Brahma, Father in Heaven, Order of Heaven, First Cause, Supreme Being, Chance. Each name corresponds to a system of thought derived from the experiences of those who have used it.”³⁹

Whitehead attacks earlier metaphysical and philosophical systems of scholars like Rene Descartes, David Hume, Gottfried Leibniz and a host of others on the ground that they failed to give a picture of experience that is coherent and logical (rational demand) on the one hand and on the other hand, applicable and adequate (empirical demand).⁴⁰ In the same vein, Joseph Omoregbe informs that for Whitehead, “...Western Philosophy

³⁶Op. Cit, Whitehead (1978) p.3.

³⁷Ibid, p.4.

³⁸Ibid, p.343.

³⁹Whitehead, A.N. (1948). *Science and the Modern World*. New York: Pelican Mentor Books. p.170.

⁴⁰Wood, F.J. (1986). *Whiteheadian Thought as a Basis for Philosophy of Religion*. (USA: University of America Inc.; Mesle, C.R. (2008). *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead*. Pennsylvania, Templeton: Foundation Press.

has been nothing other than series of footnotes on Plato...”⁴¹ Whitehead raised dust regarding deduction. In his own words: “philosophy has been haunted by the unfortunate notion that its method is dogmatically to indicate premises which are severally clear, distinct, and certain; and to erect upon those premises a deductive system of thoughts.”⁴² This idea is especially striking if we recall that Descartes for instance, was seeking to make philosophy have a method like mathematics and geometry. Robert Mesle corroborates this assertion when he avers that:

“If you were to look at the works of early modern philosophers like Descartes, Benedictus de Spinoza, or Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, you would easily see how much they hungered for the certainty achieved by mathematics. They modelled their systems on mathematics, beginning with definitions and axioms and building on them as if they were perfectly clear, self-evident principles beyond all possible doubt. They hoped that if, like mathematics, they started with absolutely certain truths and carefully checked each step of the argument, they could build a whole system of knowledge that would itself be certain.”⁴³

It is not surprising therefore, that such an incoherent and illogical method of philosophising inspired Hume’s Fork and the call for the total elimination of metaphysics in the early 20th century. Meanwhile, in process metaphysics, everything is in a state of flux, a state of continuous change, a state of perishing and being transformed into other modes of existence. This is what happens to all categories of being from inanimate beings to man and even God himself, who is part of the organic system.⁴⁴ Whitehead calls all existents in the universe actual entities or occasions. From the cell in the minutest of life forms to the most complex, Whitehead labels actual entities. This is his ‘ontological principles’. He articulates thus: “actual entities are the only reasons; so that to search for a reason is to search for one or more actual entities.”⁴⁵

⁴¹Omeregbe, J.I. (2011). *Metaphysics Without Tears: A Systematic and Historical Study*. Lagos: JOJA Research and Publishers Limited. p.212.

⁴²Op. Cit, Whitehead (1978) p.8.

⁴³Op. Cit, Mesle (1978) p. 16.

⁴⁴Op. Cit, Omeregbe (2011) p. 213.

⁴⁵Op. Cit, Whitehead (1978) p.18.

Actual occasions are not ‘things’ in the substance sense of traditional metaphysics that we are used to. They are “drops of existence, complex and interdependent.”⁴⁶ In this sense, Whitehead comes close to William James. He is however, quick to note that actual entities differ among themselves in gradations of importance. In his words:

“They differ among themselves: God is an actual entity, and so is the trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. But, though there are gradations of importance, and diversities of function, yet in the principles which actuality exemplifies all are on the same level.”⁴⁷

From the above, it becomes very clear that God is a necessary part of the universe unlike the Aristotelian God that bears no relation to the universe. God affects and is affected by the world. “God is not *before* all creation but *with* all creation.”⁴⁸ The notion of relational power is underscored here, unlike the unilateral power that pervades substance metaphysics. Every actual occasion (including God) is di-polar in structure. They have physical and mental poles. God as a higher actual occasion has two natures: the primordial and consequent natures. In the former, God envisages all eternal objects and their eventual actualization. The latter nature consists of the reaction of the world on it (God). In his own words, Whitehead maintains that “the consequent nature of God is his judgment on the world. He saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life.”⁴⁹ The former corresponds to the mental pole while the latter corresponds to the physical pole. The implication here is that God is an active participant in the world contra Aristotle. In its primordial nature, God is infinite potentiality and the fullness of conceptual feelings but without physical feelings. Hence, God lacks the fullness of actuality. In its primordial nature, God is the object of desire, while in its consequent nature, an expression of the reaction of the world on it. Clearly, Whitehead’s idea of God has affinity neither to the Judeo-Christian and Islamic ideas of the divine which is strictly monotheistic nor has it any relation to the deistic God of Aristotle. His idea might be defined as pantheism. “This is the view that God includes the world in his being (since he is affected by every event within it) and at the same that he is more

⁴⁶Ibid, p.18.

⁴⁷Ibid, p.18.

⁴⁸Ibid, p.521.

⁴⁹Ibid, p.525.

than the events in the world (God has his own unique aims and actions).”⁵⁰ This implies that the world and God are forever locked in a continuous interaction. The fact that the world and God are interactive means “it is true to say that God creates the world, as that the world creates God.”⁵¹

Upon a perusal of the flaws cited earlier on Aristotle’s idea of God, we glean that God from a process philosophy is spared. There is no place for the apologist of *infinite regress* because motion is just an actual occasion as are the cells that make up a human being. The idea of the void is pure myth to process relational scholars. Everything is a composition of actual entities. What appears empty is not the case. Searching for voidness where there is no such is what Whitehead calls the “Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness.”⁵² This is the fallacy of taking the abstract entities of science (such as material particles) and mistaking them for what is most concrete and real.⁵³ All things are inter-related and interconnected. The second objection against Aristotle’s idea of God does not hold water here either. God in process metaphysics is panentheistic. Charles Hartshorne, a foremost Whiteheadian confirms this panentheistic perspective.⁵⁴ Given that “God is actively engaged in the world and the world also affects it,”⁵⁵ there is no reason to debunk a panentheistic perspective in this mould. In other words, God in this outlook is not engaged in self-thoughts. The third objection against Aristotle does not hold in process thought as well. The idea that matter is uncreated as implied in the metaphysics of substance is a parochial perspective about reality. What substance metaphysics demarcates as matter and form, process metaphysics account as actual occasions possessing physical and mental poles. The fourth objection is centred on the place of universals and particulars. For Whiteheadians, this demarcation of this worldly from the other worldly is not existent. As actual entities, there are no ‘formal’ actual entities which this particular actual entity participates in. Everything is constantly undergoing perishing and transformation into various modes of existence. Regarding the fifth rebuttal, it is

⁵⁰Lawhead, W.F. (2002). *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*. Stamford: Wordsworth Thmoas Learning. p.495.

⁵¹Op. Cit, Whitehead (1978) p.28.

⁵²Op. Cit, Whitehead (1948) p.51.

⁵³Op. Cit, Lawhead (2002) p. 490.

⁵⁴Hartshorne, C. (1941). *Man’s Vision of the World and the Logic of Theism*. New York: Harper & Row.

⁵⁵Griffin, D.R. (2010). “Process Theology” in Taliaferro, C., Draper, P., Quinn, P.L., (eds.) *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

obvious that Whiteheadians do not tinker on where God actually resides. The whole activity of every actual entity reacts back on God. Hence God is always close by. “In this sense, God is the great companion – the fellow-sufferer who understands.”⁵⁶

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that substance metaphysics has birthed a parochial and lopsided explanation of phenomena. It cannot account for obvious realities such as the relation between God and man; panpsychism; panexperientialism; psycho-kinesis etc all of which process metaphysics handles competently. The inability to take these phenomena seriously is one of the reasons metaphysics was considered as a candidate of intellectual elimination by the Vienna Circle.

Conclusion

The occupation of this essay has been on the notion of God, as expressed in the *Metaphysics* of the great ancient Greek scholar – Aristotle. It is shown here that Aristotle’s idea of the divine is not in any way similar to the Judeo-Christian God who created and sustains the universe. This assertion was not entertained by the church fathers, especially St. Thomas Aquinas who interpreted Aristotle to promulgate some Christian doctrines.

Having investigated some of the popular objections against the Aristotelian God, this essay submits that there is a crucial need to review monotheistic notions of God away from the metaphysics of substance of Aristotle upon which these monotheism her bricks. Process metaphysics as briefly outlined here adequately copes with these objections in a coherent and logical manner. Briefly, process-relational metaphysics also portrays a richer, fuller and rewarding idea of God for humankind.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aristotle, (1973). “Metaphysics” in R. McKeon, *Introduction to Aristotle* trans W.D. Ross, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Cayne, B.S. (1992). *The New Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language*, New York: Lexicon Publishers.
- Ferguson, J. (1972). *Aristotle*. New York: Twayne Publishers Inc.
- Griffin, D.R. (2010). “Process Theology” in Taliaferro, C., Draper, P., Quinn, P.L., (eds.) *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

⁵⁶Op. Cit, Whitehead (1978) p.351.

- Hartshorne, C. (1941). *Man's Vision of the World and the Logic of Theism*. New York: Harper & Row
- Heidegger, M. (2002). "The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics" in *Identity and Difference*. Transl. Joan Stambaugh. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kenny, A. (2006). *An Illustrated Brief History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Lawhead, W.F. (2002). *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*. Stamford: Wordsworth Thomas Learning.
- Masong, K.C. (2013). "Becoming-Religion: Re-/thinking Religion with A.N. Whitehead and Keiji Nishitani", in *Buddhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* 17 (2).
- Mesle, C.R. (2008). *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead*. Pennsylvania, Templeton: Foundation Press.
- Moore, B.N., Bruder, K. (2011). *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Moran, D. (2004). *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London: Routledge.
- Morris, T. (1987). *The Concept of God*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Murray, M.J., Rea, M.C. (2008). *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Negedu, I. (2014). "Metaphysical Implications of Scientific Naturalism" in M. Asiegbu, J.D., Chukwuokolo (eds.) *Frontiers of Knowledge in Philosophy: Cutting Edge Issues*. Enugu: Jones Communication Publishers.
- Okoro, C. (2011). "Problems of Metaphysical Philosophy" in *African Nebula*, Issue 3. June.
- Omogbe, J.I. (2011). *Metaphysics Without Tears: A Systematic and Historical Study*. Lagos: JOJA Research and Publishers Limited.
- Omogbe, J.I. (1999). *A Simplified History of Western Philosophy Vol. 1*. Lagos: JOJA Educational and Research Publishers.
- Whitehead, A.N. (1948). *Science and the Modern World*. New York: Pelican Mentor Books.
- Whitehead, A.N. (1978). *Process and Reality*. Griffin and Sherburne (eds.) New York: The Free Press.
- Wood, F.J. (1986). *Whiteheadian Thought as a Basis for Philosophy of Religion*. (USA: University of America Inc.