



# A Theological Appraisal of the Notion of Divine Aseity

Elisha Oyedele Olabamiji

Department of Religion, Bowen University Iwo, Osun State Nigeria  
Theology and Philosophy Department, Nigerian Baptist  
Theological Seminary Ogbomoso, Nigeria  
[oyeelisha@gmail.com](mailto:oyeelisha@gmail.com)  
ORCID no 0000-0002-3134-8750

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## Abstract

There are times when a shadow could be a reflection of reality. The existence of man denotes that the Supreme Being creates humankind and from the writer's perspective, over the years, the logical questions centre on the existence of God. Verifiably, man's existence is traceable to the biological evidence at birth, and the question is who is God and how does He come into being? The thrust of the paper is to discuss the rationale behind a Christian's faith in God, attempting to answer the question of the self-existence of God from philosophical and theological perspectives as a means of authenticating the doctrine of God concerning biblical justifications on the self-existence of God. The sovereignty of God is understood to mean that He is independent. The paper argues and alludes that the Word aseity comes from the Latin phrase *a se*, meaning 'from' or 'by himself'. Aseity is arguably the most fundamental divine characteristic of God; the Church fathers acknowledged the role of philosophy in the doing of theology; this is established by discussing the interplay of philosophy and theology, with many considering that philosophy is significant to the theological appraisal of aseity. Philosophical arguments on the existence of God revolve around four major arguments, including the ontological arguments, cosmological arguments, teleological arguments and moral arguments. Theological assessment of the notion of divine aseity from a Christian perspective in the African context is traceable to the Africans' knowledge of God and the existence of God. This paper concludes that God is the most powerful being; it is only in God's existence that all things are meaningful and explainable; the paper also admits that God is self-sufficient and self-existent because He exists from nothing but His power and wisdom are eternal. Admittedly there are notable arguments for God's existence, including cosmological and ontological arguments. The sovereignty of God is understood to mean that He is independent, meaning that He depends on no one to survive. The fact that man can conceive the idea of God is in itself a unique proof that substantiates man's conviction about the divine aseity of God, and objectively, the concept of the doctrine God depicts that God's attribute has been defined as the core of a theological system of God.

**Keywords:** God, aseity, notion, appraisal, arguments.

## Introduction

At times a shadow could be a reflection of reality. The existence of man denotes that humankind is created by the Supreme Being; from the writer's perspective, over the years, the logical questions centres on the existence of God. Verifiably, man's existence is traceable to the biological evidence at birth, and the question is who is God and how does He come into being? The thrust of the paper is to discuss the rationale behind the Christian faith in God, attempting to answer the question of the self-existence of God from philosophical and



theological perspectives as a means of authenticating the doctrine of God concerning biblical justifications on the self-existence of God.

The sovereignty of God is understood to mean that he is independent. Beilby (2004) argues that there is universal acceptance that God is independent, self-existent, and entirely self-sufficient. He does anything outside himself to exist, be satisfied or be self-actualised. Exodus 3:14 states "I am who I am, or I will be what I will; this also depends on one's preferred Bible translation. It is argued that God's existence and character are determined by him alone. James (2004: 647-648) The Word aseity comes from the Latin phrase *a se*, meaning from or by himself. Aseity is arguably the most fundamental divine characteristic of God. Craig exposit further that the self-existence of God is known as aseity. It comes from Latin word *A-se* meaning God is self-existence (Craig,2021).

W.A. Brown in his rejection of what he termed to be the classical approach, admits that the perception begins with abstract notions of God's absoluteness from which he derived such metaphysical qualities as aseity, eternity and immutability contrary to the liberal theologians who began with the personality and character of God as loving. The attributes are descriptive of God not as He is in Himself, but of the Father's relationship with his people (Lewis & Demarest,1996: 179). Attributes of God depict His personality as He relates with a man based on his volition, such as love and care for the creatures; aseity is an argument on the self-existence of God.

### **Philosophical View on Divine Aseity**

The Church fathers well acknowledge the role of philosophy in the doing of theology, the crux of this segment is to discuss the interplay of philosophy and theology and to conclude with a notion that philosophy is significant to the theological appraisal of aseity. According to Anthony Thiselton (2015:8) referring to the church father Clement of Alexandria (150 – c 215), he claims that even if philosophy were useless, it is yet helpful in a different sense; the scholar infers that good philosophy can be a preparatory training for faith. Davies and Evans (1998) refer to St. Anselm Canterbury (c. 1033-1109) who asked if God in fact exists and can one hope to know anything about God's nature? Philosophy is the pursuit of clarity about ourselves, our world, and our place in it for the sake of practical life; on the other hand, the theology that discusses the deity and the creature about deity such a discipline is called natural or philosophical theology in which divine things are considered not as the theme of the science but as values of the subject. Douglas Farrow (2008:2) reasons that human reasoning centres on the first cause and effect of the infinite and the finite, of eternity and time, the idea and phenomenon rather than of the self-determination of God for man in the person of Jesus Christ, philosophy and theology sought for consistency and coherence between their respective attempts to speak of God (Douglas; 2015: 2). He also asserts that the divine self-existence of God is also revealed to humanity in the being of Jesus Christ, that is, the knowledge of God in the personhood of Christ.

Philosophy contributes immensely to the understanding of God's knowledge as it demonstrates those truths that are a preamble of faith and that have a necessary place in the science of faith; it gives a more precise notion about the truths of faith; philosophy also assists those who speak against the faith either by showing that their declarations are false or by showing that they are not necessarily true. It is fair to say that the love of wisdom *Philosophia* is the love of God or of the way to the good, and the argument is that wisdom helps us on the way or even the way of happiness, and thus any attempt to isolate philosophy from theology is termed to be self-defeating (Douglas, 2015:2) Knowledge is a means to an end (Kolawole,2012: 17). It implies that philosophy or love of wisdom is an essential parameter to understand God, the self-existence of God known as divine aseity. It is argued that antiquity and modernity coincide in seeking space under the name of philosophy, and Nilo (1997:252) states that to possess knowledge about the universe and the creator of the universe comes to play a significant role.



Philosophical arguments on the existence of God revolve around four major arguments, and these include ontological arguments, cosmological arguments, teleological arguments and moral arguments (Evans, 1985:45-68). Ontological arguments show that God's very concept or idea implies His reality. If a person can consider God, then he or she ought to be able to understand that God must exist. The proponent of this argument is St. Anselm, but in contemporary times or versions focused on the concept of necessary existence, the paper discusses the concept of necessary existence under theological appraisal of the notion of the divine aseity.

Cosmological arguments attempt to infer the existence of God from the existence of the cosmos or universe. It is also referred to as 'first cause' arguments because they attempt to infer that God must be the universe's first or ultimate cause (Evans & Manis, 1985:45-68). Evans and Manis submit that the teleological argument is also a cosmological one as it begins with the cosmos' existence. Most essentially, it begins with the character of the universe, an orderly universe; the teleological argument is also known to be an argument from design; it emanated from classical Greece. It is presented early in medieval times as the fifth of Aquinas's five-ways of proving God's existence; teleological arguments argue that there must be an intelligent designer (Evan & Manis, 2019:17).

The root of moral arguments is traceable to the philosophical domain in Plato's communication that the source of all reality and truth must be the form of the good and the religiously to the biblical teaching that moral obligations must remain in terms of their connection to God's requirements of us. The non-philosophers embrace these particular arguments more than any other form as it regards the voice of conscience as being the voice of God (Evans & Manis, 2019:17).

To corroborate the paper's survey on the view of philosophy on the divine aseity of God, Burr (1976) presented seven main points in his response to the question of does God exist? He admits this, by an unwavering mathematical law, and we can prove that our universe was designed and executed by a great engineering intelligence. Secondly, the resourcefulness of life to achieve its determination is a manifestation of all-pervading intelligence. Burr also infers that animal wisdom speaks irresistibly of a good Creator who infused instinct into otherwise helpless little creatures. Another point is that man has something more than animal instinct that is the power of reason; as human beings, we are who we are simply because we have received a spark of universal intelligence (Burr, 1996: 90-93).

The fifth point in Burr's response to the question of whether God exists is that providing for all living is exposed in phenomena, which we know nowadays, such as the wonders of genes. The sixth point is by the economy of nature; we are confronted with realising that only infinite knowledge could have foreseen and prepared nature with such astute or intelligent husbandry; his seventh point is the fact that man can conceive the idea of God is in itself a unique proof (Burr, 1996:90-93). Burr alluded that the conception of God rises from a divine faculty of man, the faculty we call imagination, meaning that the ability of man to conceive the idea of God is delightfully endowed by divine aseity, God who is self-existence. Interestingly, Burr closes his arguments on spiritual perception "indeed as man's perfected imagination becomes a spiritual reality, he may discern in all the pieces of indication of design and purpose the great truth that heaven is wherever and whatever that God is everywhere and in everything but nowhere so close as in our hearts" (Burr, 1996: 90-93). God's instinct in man enables humanity to think and decide. This special endowment and ability to reason about God shows that God is self-existing, and He depends on nothing to survive.

## A Theological Appraisal of the Notion of Divine Aseity

The main focus of the paper is to discuss the theological appraisal of the notion of divine aseity, and the paper has established the philosophical ideology and thoughts on the existence of God with arguments that surround the perception. Aseity is a word derived from the Latin *a se* "from oneself". Aseity is a divine attribute that refers to God's self-existence; in other words,



God is not dependent upon anything else for existence but has existed without any external or prior cause (Grenz, 1999). Nyamiti argues that the Christian faith has something to learn from the understanding of God found in African religion; in the same vein, the African also has much to study from the Christian faith about how it purifies and completes his benefits about God; he admits further that the Christian has something to learn from the traditional African; not in the sense of doctrines, but in the sense of new insights and new ways of understanding God (Paratt, 2001: 57).

Theological assessment of the notion of divine aseity from a Christian perspective in the African context is traceable to the Africans' knowledge of God and the existence of God; Nyamiti's argument is a pointer to the fact that Africans have the pre-knowledge of God and the Christian faith can make use of that as a premise of deepening theological thought on the aseity of God. Enyinnaya (2022) exposit that the church doctrine has continued to generate interest among scholars since the early history of Christian theology, becoming the interest that has been facilitated by the fact that this doctrine touches on several other doctrines, such as the doctrine of God. The evidence for the belief in God is based upon the written records contained in the Bible, plus God's acts throughout the history of the world.

McCain submits that Christians should never forget that our belief in God depends on faith McCain (2000:69). Aben acknowledges Paul Tillich's view as he admits that Tillich characterises Christian theology as essentially talking about God to meet the church's needs. The needs of the church are knowledge of the truth about God and a correct presentation of Christian truth for the sake of the salvation of souls in every generation. To him, African Christian theology centres on talking about God's African affairs in the religious realm (Tersur, 2013:3). Thus, divine aseity and the notion of the divine existence of God requires adequate knowledge of God's truth. Leftow (2012) asserts that modal ontology comprises basically of God and certain intellectual proceedings. The difficulty with this thinking is that, given the ontological commitment, quantification over divine powers this necessitates one to look ontologically to the existence of superior powers (Craig, 2021).

God's aseity should be understood as His self-sufficiency or self-existence. The self-sufficiency of God imparts to us that God has life in Himself. He does not depend on anyone or anything, and this exclusively differentiates Him from His creation. In Genesis 1:1 we read, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Consequently prior to creation God existed and He has always existed. He has no beginning or end (Psalm 90:2). The Bible reveals the truth about God that no person could have imagined. The Bible reveals that God is one being (Deuteronomy 6:4) and that there is no other God except him (Isaiah 45:5). Wilbur O'Donovan (1996:43) argues that the Bible reveals the adequate truth about the human notion of divine aseity which is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ meaning that Jesus reveals God to humanity. The Roman Catholic Catechism asserts that it pleases God in His goodness and wisdom to reveal Himself and make the mystery of His will knowable to all. His will was that man should access the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and consequently humans become sharers in the divine nature (Ephesians 1:9; 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Hamburu, (2019: 167) says that Christian theology affirms that salvation is manifested in and through and constituted based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Within the Christian tradition, the distinctively Christian understanding of what salvation is can only be realised based on Jesus Christ; Christians confess and proclaim that Jesus is *Kyrios* the Lord or sovereign, the true God is revealed in Jesus Christ (Hamburu, 2019: 167).

The theological appraisal of the notion of divine aseity establishes the plan of God for the creation, and the created being, and God has a definite plan for history. The Bible contains a rich teachings regarding the divine plan; the Hebrew word *Yatsar* which is perhaps the essential Hebrew term that appears in (Psalms 139:16, Isaiah 22:1, 37:26, 46:11), carries the idea of purpose and prior determination. Another Hebrew word is *Ya'ats*, as it is used by Isaiah (14:24, 25, 27) (Erickson, 2009: 371- 374) and relates to God, in his self-existence, the nature of His divine plan, and it signifies that His decisions contained therein are free on God's part,



as no one advised Him on what to do or to be done. God's plan is efficacious or effective (Isaiah 14:24, 27); the plan of God relates to his actions rather than nature (Erickson, 2009: 377-380) It is in the notion of divine aseity that man understands his being. Therefore, man has to decide about his being, so far as he must choose among his possibilities (Macquarie, 1977: 107). God is the critical Word of all religion and all theology because He relates to humankind (Maquarie, 1977:107). The absoluteness of God's relationship with man is clearer through God's acts in the church, which is in Christ Jesus. Adequate recognition of Jesus as Messiah and God's mighty acts establishes the integral relation of the church to her Lord. (Horton, 2006:186). We see God residing among His people through the incarnation of Christ (John 1:14). God who is eternal and also self-sufficient and needing of no-one and nothing, came to us and lived among His people. Brown (1991) argues that classical Western theism is correct that God's timeless omniscience is in essence well-matched with human free will, and thus it becomes illogical to embrace the notion that God can in any way be undisputable as well as omniscient.

Mullins (2020). also argues that the Word exists "a se" if and only if its existence is in no way dependent upon, nor derived from anything ad extra. Regarding the meaning of aseity which connotes self-existence or self-sufficiency, the 17th-century theologian Christopher Blackwood argues that God has all the perfections we find in creatures. He argues further that his possession of this perfection is not dependent upon anything outside of Himself. He does not need anything separate from Himself in order to be perfect; God is the cause and source of all the perfections we find in creation. God depends on nothing but Himself for his sufficiency at all times. Mullin's perception teaches that God is self-sufficient.

The traditional theism in their belief in the existence of God or gods affirms that God is an omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, necessarily existing, perfectly reasonable person; the doctrine of aseity implies that God does not depend on God's creative activity for its existence and the sovereignty argument of God states that God is the perfect possible being and the existence of God must explain morality (Bergman & Brower, 2005).

In as much, it affirms that God is the most potent being; it is only in God's existence that all things are meaningful and explainable. Canale submits that the providential act of God argues that the providence of God is about divine wisdom that is about the way the Christian God relates to the world (Canale, 2001:17). The theological rationale for divine aseity, unity, infinity, immutability and eternity requires that the orthodox Christian ought to maintain a healthy account of divine simplicity (Pawl, 2013:482)The existence of God is necessary for a person's life to be objectively meaningful (Poettcker, 2015; 181) the notion of the aseity of God also implies that in God, humankind has well-being and a fulfilled life.

In Gunton's view, the necessity of the close relatedness of Trinitarian theology and the doctrine of or of the doctrine of God's attribute as the core of a theological system of God (Lee, 2009:14). Craig (2021), in his theological appraisal of the notion of the divine aseity of God establishes biblical passages from Old Testament and New Testament these include (Isaiah 40:17 – 23 & 28, Revelation 4:11, John 1:1-3, Nehemiah 9:6, Hebrews 2:10, Psalms 90:2, Exodus 3:14, I Corinthians 8:5-6, Colossians1:15-17). He submits that the Bible was informed that God is indeed self-existing and if anything disappears God still exists. Aseity means God's exists by His necessity, His nature; according to him, the notion of divine aseity implies that the attributes of God in His self-existence mean that God is eternal, and the necessity of God or God's necessity is clear (Craig, 2021).

God is an essential being because He exists in Himself, and God exists in another possible world, and the world is the free creation of God; the world is the creative work of God, as an expression of His existence (John 3:16), meaning that those who believe in Him will have eternity. Craig (2021) therefore, argues that, if God is self-existing then all infinite being depends upon Him for their self-existing being, creation, preservation and future being. Obviously, if there is no God, there is no universe, and nothing would make God; the notion of the divine aseity of God helps to solve two significant problems.



Firstly, God is not a being, and our understanding helps us to see the fallacy of the thought. Secondly, it teaches that everything depends upon Him. It seems that the question of where God comes from signifies a lack of proper understanding, meaning that the notion of divine aseity implies that the divine God does not come from anywhere and, therefore, is God, and self-existing. The question of where God came from signifies that such a group of people did not understand the nature of God (Craig, 2021). What God promises to do, He will do and also whatever He predicts will take place. When God states, "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please" (Isaiah 46:10), He thus stresses to us His aseity and sovereignty. The notion of divine aseity is a premise upon which the Christian faith is deeply-rooted; it is, therefore, possible for the intellectual mind with the theological lens to trace and discuss God's self-existence to Jesus Christ in His relational concept with humanity.

## Conclusion

The paper has attempted to discuss the impression of the divine aseity of God from both a philosophical and theological viewpoint. The paper admits that God is self-sufficient and self-existing because He exists from nothing but His power and wisdom are eternal. Admittedly there are notable arguments for God's existence, including cosmological and ontological arguments. The sovereignty of God is understood to mean that He is independent, meaning that He depends on no one to survive. The fact that man can conceive the idea of God is in itself a unique proof that substantiates man's conviction about the divine aseity of God and the doctrine of God's attributes has been defined as the core of a theological system of God. The Bible reveals the truth about God that no person could have imagined. The aseity of God is stated in Exodus 3:14 when Moses asks the Lord about His name, God replies, "I AM who I AM." Jesus Christ, as the incarnation of God, shares the aseity of God with the Father. Jesus claimed the name "I AM" for Himself (see John 8:58; 18:6). God is thus perpetually self-existent Being who has always been and always will be. The aseity of God is associated with His complete freedom. God has no needs and is comprehensive in and of Himself and always has been and always will be. God has not created humans because He was lonely or because He needed to fashion something. He is now and always has been whole and autonomous in and of Himself. To this end, the paper established the theological appraisal of the notion of divine aseity with theological and biblical dispositions and it submits and agrees with the notion that God exists by His necessity, in His nature in the personhood of Jesus Christ.

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