

An Argument for God's Existence from Non-Bruteness

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Abstract

In this article, I present a new argument for God's existence, which I term the *argument from non-bruteness*. The argument rests on the core premise that the fundamental structure of reality cannot be a brute fact and must have an ultimate reason. By focusing on the concept of self-evidence, I first examine the relationship between possible worlds and what I refer to as cognitive perspectives. I then argue that an ultimate explanation for reality's fundamental structure necessitates an absolute perspective—one that fully grasps this explanation—thereby affirming the existence of God as the absolute subject who possesses it. I summarize the argument's core ideas, provide a detailed exposition, and address potential objections.

Key words

Non-bruteness, Self-evidence, Possible worlds, Ultimate explanation, God

1. Introduction

The question of whether God exists has been a central topic in philosophy since its earliest periods. Philosophers have historically developed a wide range of metaphysical arguments for God's existence. Classical approaches—advanced by thinkers such as Aristotle, Anselm, Aquinas, and Leibniz—include cosmological, teleological, ontological, and moral arguments. More recently, contemporary philosophers like Plantinga, Koons, Pruss, and Rasmussen have deployed tools from analytical philosophy—such as formal mereology, modal logic, and possible worlds semantics—to construct arguments for theism rooted in formal rigor and conceptual analysis (Craig & Moreland, 2009; Rutten, 2012). Other examples include the modal-epistemic argument (Rutten, 2014) and the modal symmetry first cause argument (Hamri, 2019). In this article, I also draw upon analytical methods to develop a new argument for God's existence, which I term the *argument from non-bruteness*. The argument is founded on the core premise that the fundamental structure of reality is not a brute fact, meaning it does not exist without a sufficient underlying reason. The argument, thus, adopts the premise that reality's fundamental structure has an ultimate explanation.

The argument is similar in approach to the modal-epistemic argument for God's existence that I developed previously (Rutten, 2014), as it also builds on premises about the relationship between epistemic and modal concepts. However, the argument from non-

bruteness focuses specifically on the epistemic concept of self-evidence, rather than on knowledge more broadly as the modal-epistemic argument does. The modal-epistemic argument, in its simplified form, posits that true propositions are possibly known, whereas the argument I propose in this paper posits that self-evident propositions are possibly conceived of as self-evident. Given that self-evidence entails truth—and on the presumption that knowing a self-evident proposition amounts to conceiving of it as self-evident—the former posit entails the latter, but not vice versa, so that the latter posit is epistemically less demanding than the former.

The argument involves examining the structure of possible worlds, accessibility relations between them, the notion of self-evidence and what I refer to as *perspectives*, or cognitive standpoints within those worlds. Possible worlds represent different ways the world could have been, encompassing all variations of how reality might manifest.

By exploring transworld identity of perspectives and analyzing the conditions under which a proposition can be deemed self-evident, I argue that if there is an ultimate reason for the world's fundamental structure, it follows that God exists. More specifically, the argument first contends that the existence of an ultimate explanation for the fundamental structure of reality necessitates the existence of an absolute perspective—an absolute point of view from which the ultimate explanation of the foundation of reality is cognitively fully comprehended. This, in turn, implies the existence of God as the absolute subject who possesses that absolute perspective. Therefore, if my argument holds, one cannot simultaneously be an atheist and maintain that there is an ultimate reason for the existence of this world. Atheists thus would have to accept that this world's existence is a brute fact.

This would have implications for certain atheistic perspectives that reject the idea that the fundamental structure of reality is a brute fact. In various ways, atheistic philosophers such as Spinoza (under naturalist interpretations), Russell (in his earlier works), and Nagel (2012) affirm that reality's fundamental structure is not a brute fact. Russell's early work reflects a commitment to a rationally intelligible worldview in which fundamental reality is explained through logical and scientific principles. Spinoza's metaphysics presents a single, necessarily existing substance as the foundation of all reality, indicating that the fundamental structure is fully determined and non-brute. Moreover, Nagel emphasizes the importance of an intelligible and unified explanation for existence, opposing bruteness at the base of reality.

Often, theism is assumed to entail the existence of an ultimate reason for this world. My new argument for theism from non-bruteness, if dialectically successful, conversely demonstrates that the existence of such a reason, together with a specific modal interpretation of the epistemic concept of self-evidence, entails the existence of God.

Throughout history, various cosmological arguments for God's existence have been proposed, premised on versions of Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason (Craig & Moreland, 2009; Rutten, 2012). According to this principle everything that exists has a sufficient reason for its existence. These cosmological arguments typically conclude that the sufficient reason for the existence of the world is God. The argument from non-bruteness does not fall into this category. First, it is not premised on any version of the principle of sufficient reason. The argument assumes an ultimate reason for the world's fundamental structure, but it does not claim that there is a sufficient reason for everything that exists. Second, the argument does not infer God as the ultimate reason for the world's fundamental structure. Since God, if God exists, is part of reality's fundamental structure, the ultimate reason for this structure is also the ultimate reason for God's existence. Whether this ultimate reason is or is not God is a further question that the argument from non-bruteness does not address. Instead, the argument infers the existence of a self-subsistent, necessarily existing being who occupies an absolute perspective and recognizes the ultimate reason for this world's existence as the absolutely self-evident reason for its existence. Such a being is reasonably referred to as God, even if it were to turn out that this being is not itself the ultimate self-evident reason for this world's existence.

In the next section, I present an abridged version of the argument to outline its core ideas and provide an accessible introduction to its dialectical structure. This will allow readers to gain an understanding of the 'mechanics' of the argument. In the third section, I present a comprehensive and refined exposition of the argument, and in the fourth section, I defend the argument against several objections. Finally, the fifth section concludes the paper.

2. The abridged argument

The argument for God's existence from non-bruteness is grounded in the core premise that the fact of *this* world's existence—with its particular fundamental structure—is not a brute fact. This means there is an ultimate reason for the existence of this world—a reason that halts any further why-questions and thereby serves as a regress-of-explanation ender.

An ultimate reason not only stops regress by halting any further why questions, but does so in a way that is intelligible from the standpoint of reason itself. Rather than being arbitrary or lacking rational endorsement, an ultimate reason is constitutive of reason and thus exhibits immediate normative intelligibility or intrinsic rational authority. It is not merely that no further why questions can be asked because there is no further reason to give; rather, asking such questions is pointless because of the immediate clarity of the ultimate reason itself. An ultimate reason is not just a stopping point, but one whose very nature makes further inquiry senseless from within the standpoint of reason itself. It follows that the ultimate reason is self-evident.

Moreover, if the ultimate reason were not self-evident, it would depend on a fact grounded in a brute fundamental state of affairs. Since this state of affairs is part of the world's fundamental structure, it would render that structure itself brute—contradicting the core premise of the argument. Furthermore, if the ultimate reason were not self-evident, the fundamental structure of the world would have a brute reason, which would imply that it is itself a brute fact—again contradicting the core premise. The ultimate reason must, therefore, indeed be self-evident.

More specifically, it must be self-evident *in an absolute sense*, or *absolutely* self-evident. In other words, it must be self-evident in every possible world from an unlimited perspective within that world. Indeed, something absolutely self-evident must be self-evident *in all possible worlds*, as it remains self-evident regardless of which possible world is actual. Furthermore, anything absolutely self-evident must be self-evident in each possible world *from an unlimited perspective*—a perspective that is not partial or conditional, often referred to as an Archimedean point of view. For example, our human perspective in the actual world is typically not unlimited, as it is bound by our specific cognitive faculties. Even if we recognize certain propositions as self-evident from the actual world's human viewpoint, we cannot claim that this recognition is absolute. Our human perspective is always conditional and partial.

Now, something can only be self-evident from a certain perspective if it is possible for a conscious being with that perspective to conceive of it as self-evident. For the self-evident refers to an epistemic attitude toward itself. Self-evidence, like meaning, is fundamentally relational. Meaning is relational because if something cannot be understood—if there is no possible world in which it is comprehended—it holds no meaning. Without the possibility of understanding something, it remains devoid of semantic significance. In a similar vein, if a proposition is self-evident, it is possible to conceive of it as such. There exists a possible world in which it is grasped by some conscious being as self-evident. If a proposition cannot be recognized as self-evident—if there is no possible world in which it is grasped as self-evident—then it is not self-evident. Being possibly conceived of as self-evident, therefore, belongs to the very nature of being self-evident.

More specifically, something can only be absolutely self-evident if it is possible for a conscious being to recognize it as such. However, a being that conceives of something as absolutely self-evident must have an absolute perspective on reality and thus occupy the position of the absolute. Therefore, there exists a possible world in which a conscious being possesses such absolute perspective on reality and occupies this position. Since this absolute being is wholly independent and hence not contingent upon or caused by anything else, it exists in all possible worlds, including the actual world. Thus, there exists in the actual world

an unconditioned or self-sufficient conscious being that occupies the position of the absolute, takes an absolute perspective on reality, knows the ultimate reason for the existence of this world, and grasps that this reason is absolutely self-evident. This absolute being can properly be called ‘God’; therefore, it follows that God exists.

The argument’s core premise—that there is an ultimate reason for the existence of this world—is a reasonable one, as are the other aforementioned premises. Moreover, I take the argument to be logically valid, and while it is logically possible for individually warranted premises not to yield a warranted conclusion due to insufficient warrant for their conjunction, there is no reason to think this applies in the present case. Accordingly, it is reasonable to accept the argument’s conclusion—namely, that God exists.

In any case, the argument shows that, without God, there is no ultimate reason for this world’s existence. This outcome poses a significant challenge for atheists who maintain that such an ultimate reason exists.

3. The refined argument

I now proceed with a comprehensive exposition of the argument from non-bruteness for God’s existence. As mentioned, the argument deploys possible worlds. A possible world is a complete and consistent way the world is, or could have been. Each possible world w has a fundamental ontological or metaphysical structure, denoted by $S(w)$, and different possible worlds can share the same fundamental structure. I define accessibility between possible worlds. Possible world w_1 is accessible from possible world w_2 if and only if every state of affairs in w_1 can be accessed from w_2 . A state of affairs in w_1 can be accessed from w_2 if it is conceivable that, given the conditions in w_2 , the state of affairs in w_1 could obtain. I assume that accessibility is a symmetric relation, meaning that if possible world w_1 is accessible from possible world w_2 , then w_2 is equally accessible from w_1 . Furthermore, I denote the fact that possible world w_1 is accessible from possible world w_2 as $A(w_1, w_2)$. Every possible world is, by definition, accessible from itself: $A(w, w)$ holds true for all possible worlds w .

Perspectives, as introduced in the previous section, refer to the points of view or standpoints from which a possible world can be experienced or understood from within. They encode cognitive capabilities and epistemic positions. Each possible world permits or accommodates one or more viewpoints or perspectives. Let M be a function that maps each possible world to the set of perspectives accommodated by that world. A possible world w accommodating a perspective P does not necessitate the existence of an individual in w adopting P . Moreover, the same perspective can figure or appear in multiple possible worlds, requiring a notion of identity for perspectives across possible worlds. I presuppose the existence of a suitable notion of transworld identity for perspectives. Therefore, some essential feature or set of

features of perspectives allows the same perspective to exist across different possible worlds. Traditionally, transworld identity addresses the question of whether an entity or structure in one possible world is identical to one in another. Transworld identity of perspectives is closely related to that of entities and structures. As stated in the previous section, in any possible world, a perspective in that world is either unlimited or limited. An unlimited perspective in a possible world is a wholly unrestricted, all-encompassing viewpoint that allows for a complete understanding of each and every aspect of that world. The human perspective in the actual world, as noted previously, is reasonably a limited perspective.

I now turn to the notion of self-evidence. As I've argued, a proposition can only be self-evident if it can possibly be recognized as such. If it's impossible to be conceived of as self-evident, then it cannot be deemed self-evident. Thus, being in principle conceivable as self-evident is integral to the very nature of a self-evident proposition. There must therefore be a reachable possible world in which a self-evident proposition is conceived of as self-evident by some cognitive being. This necessitates the following conceptual analysis of self-evidence.

A proposition p is self-evident in possible world w from perspective P if and only if P is in $M(w)$ and in every possible world w' that is accessible from w (i.e., is such that $A(w', w)$) and sufficiently similar to w (i.e., is such that $M(w')=M(w)$ and $S(w')=S(w)$), an individual adopting perspective P in w' immediately recognizes p as true without the need for further explanation. Moreover, there must be at least one possible world w'' accessible from w (i.e., $A(w'', w)$) and sufficiently similar to w (i.e., $M(w'')=M(w)$ and $S(w'')=S(w)$) in which an individual exists who adopts perspective P in w'' .

The clause requiring that there must be an accessible and sufficiently similar possible world in which the relevant perspective is adopted, prevents a proposition from being self-evident simply because there is no accessible and sufficiently similar possible world in which the perspective in question is adopted. This clause thus avoids a misguided conception of self-evidence. The relation $E(p, w, P)$ denotes that proposition p is self-evident in possible world w from perspective P .

Let S be the fundamental structure of the actual world a . The core premise of the argument asserts that it is not a brute fact that S is the fundamental structure of a ; hence, there must exist an ultimate reason in a for S being the fundamental structure. Let proposition r denote this ultimate reason. Proposition r terminates any regress of explanations for S being the fundamental structure of a . Ultimate reason r excludes any further why-questions regarding S being the fundamental structure of a . As the end to the regress of explanations and the halt to any further why-questions, r must be self-evident—both because, as argued in the abridged version of the argument, it halts inquiry in a way that is immediately rationally authoritative

and renders further questioning senseless from the standpoint of reason itself, and because denying its self-evidence would render the actual world's fundamental structure S brute, thereby contradicting the core premise.

More specifically, there must be an unlimited perspective U in a such that $E(r, a, U)$. Thus, according to the above conceptual analysis of self-evidence, there exists a possible world w_2 , accessible from the actual world a , such that $M(w_2)=M(a)$ and $S(w_2)=S(a)=S$, and such that there exists an individual i in w_2 who possesses perspective U in w_2 and who contemplates r , immediately recognizing r as true without the need for further explanation. This means that individual i recognizes $E(r, w_2, U)$. Individual i thus immediately grasps r as true simply by considering it from U . Now, understanding a reason as being self-evident inherently carries with it the understanding of its implications as a reason. Since i recognizes the self-evidence of r , i fosters a solid understanding of the implications of r , including its role as the reason for S being the fundamental structure of w_2 . Furthermore, as individual i recognizes $E(r, w_2, U)$, i in w_2 recognizes r as the self-evident and therefore ultimate reason in w_2 for structure S being the fundamental structure of w_2 .

Individual i possesses an unlimited and thus wholly independent perspective in w_2 . Consequently, i is uncaused and unconditioned; that is; its existence does not depend on any cause that must be actualized or any condition that must be satisfied for i to exist. Hence, individual i exists solely by virtue of its own nature in w_2 . It follows that individual i exists metaphysically necessarily in w_2 , and therefore—by the definition of necessity within a modal framework with accessibility— i exists in all possible worlds accessible from w_2 .

Given $A(w_2, a)$, the symmetry of the accessibility relation implies $A(a, w_2)$, meaning that the actual world a is accessible from w_2 . Therefore, individual i exists in a and possesses the unlimited perspective U in a . Moreover, individual i recognizes r as self-evident in a and understands r to be the ultimate reason for S being the fundamental structure of a .

A proposition p is self-evident *in an absolute sense* if and only if, for all possible worlds w , there exists an unlimited perspective P in w such that $E(p, w, P)$. Now, r is self-evident in an absolute sense, as I will demonstrate. If r were not self-evident in an absolute sense, there would exist a possible world w^* in which no unlimited perspective U^* exists such that $E(r, w^*, U^*)$. If the fundamental structure of w^* differs from S , an additional explanation in the actual world a would be necessary for S being the fundamental structure—namely, why w^* is not the actual world, thereby preventing S from being the fundamental structure of the actual world. The need for this further explanation, that r cannot provide, contradicts r 's role in terminating the regress of explanations in a for S being the fundamental structure of the actual world. Alternatively, if the fundamental structure of w^* is S , it follows that, if w^* were

actual, r would not terminate the regress of explanations for S being the fundamental structure of the actual world due to the absence of an unlimited perspective U^* in w^* such that $E(r, w^*, U^*)$. Thus, if w^* were actual, r does not ultimately explain why S is the fundamental structure of the actual world. From this it follows that, again, an additional explanation in a would be necessary—namely why w^* is not the actual world, thereby preventing r from being the ultimate reason for S being the fundamental structure of the actual world. The need for this further explanation, that r once more cannot provide, contradicts r 's role in being an ultimate explanation in a for S being the fundamental structure of the actual world. Therefore, we arrive at a contradiction regardless of whether the fundamental structure of w^* is S or not. It follows that r must be self-evident in an absolute sense, which was to be demonstrated.

Consequently, individual i —being a self-subsistent and necessarily existing individual in the actual world a , who holds a necessarily unlimited or absolute perspective on reality—recognizes r as self-evident in an absolute sense and understands r as the ultimate reason for S being the fundamental structure of the world; that is, as the ultimate reason for this world's existence.

Given considerations of parsimony and the lack of sufficient evidence to the contrary, we may reasonably assume there is only one such individual, making it appropriate to refer to individual i as God. This leads to the conclusion that God exists.

Having presented the refined argument in a step-by-step manner—with clearly defined concepts and detailed explanations of how each step logically follows from the previous one—I conclude this section by listing the additional premises that have been employed alongside the core non-bruteness premise. This provides a concise overview of the foundational modal and conceptual assumptions underpinning the argument from non-bruteness, without restating the detailed deduction. The argument's additional premises are as follows:

1. The accessibility relation between possible worlds is reflexive and symmetric.
2. There exists a well-defined notion of transworld identity for cognitive perspectives, allowing cognitive perspectives to be identified across possible worlds.
3. A proposition is self-evident in a possible world from a given cognitive perspective, only if it is recognized as such by some individual from that perspective in some accessible and sufficiently similar possible world.
4. There exists an unlimited cognitive perspective in the actual world from which the ultimate reason for the fundamental structure of the actual world is self-evident in an absolute sense.
5. Understanding a reason as being self-evident inherently carries with it the understanding of its implications as a reason.

6. An individual who possesses a wholly unconditioned or fully independent perspective in some possible world exists unconditionally—that is, solely by virtue of its own nature—and thus exists necessarily.

7. A unique being who is self-subsistent and necessarily existing, who possesses a necessarily unlimited or absolute perspective on reality, and who recognizes the ultimate reason for the world's fundamental structure as absolutely self-evident, is reasonably referred to as God.

Together with the core premise, these seven premises form the foundation supporting the conclusion of the argument from non-bruteness. In the preceding exposition, I've shown in detail how the conclusion is logically derived step-by-step by employing these premises.

The core premise of the argument is the non-bruteness premise. One might wish to reject this premise, that is, to deny that there must be some ultimate explanation for why the world has the fundamental structure it has. Yet, the argument from non-bruteness demonstrates that, to the extent it is plausible that such an ultimate explanation exists, it is equally plausible that God exists. What the argument thus shows is that if there is such an ultimate explanation, then theism is true. Hence, the argument effectively rules out non-theistic ultimate explanations for the world's fundamental structure. If my argument is dialectically successful, the atheist would have to maintain that there is no ultimate explanation for why the world has the fundamental structure it has, which for many reason-oriented atheists may not be a desirable position to hold.

4. Objections

In what follows, I consider three objections to the argument from non-bruteness. The first objection is that it is unwarranted to posit an ultimate reason for reality's fundamental structure. Why couldn't this structure simply be a brute fact without an ultimate explanation? I would respond that the argument is premised on the intuition that the fundamental structure of this world is intelligible. To reject the idea of an ultimate reason for reality's fundamental structure is to imply that it is arbitrary or unintelligible, which undercuts the coherence of any worldview that seeks to understand why the world has this structure rather than another.

One might worry, however, that God—being part of reality's fundamental structure—is intelligible but lacks an ultimate reason. Yet on many theistic accounts, God is understood to exist by virtue of God's own nature and is thereby self-explanatory. On these accounts, there is an internal explanation for God's existence—namely, God's own nature. Taking such accounts into consideration as well, it is reasonable to hold that there is an explanation for God's existence—whether internal or external to God.

Moreover, as mentioned above, the argument poses an epistemic constraint for atheism. Since, as the argument shows, an ultimate explanation for the world's fundamental structure points to theism, one would have to accept that there is no ultimate explanation for the world's fundamental structure. The argument from non-bruteness thus illustrates that atheism cannot provide an ultimate explanation for the fundamental structure of reality.

Another objection is that the notion of an absolute perspective that fully comprehends the ultimate reason for the existence of this world is incoherent, since any cognitive perspective is inherently limited by its particular viewpoint. However, the argument distinguishes between limited perspectives and an absolute cognitive grasp, which is not bounded by contextual or subjective limitations. An absolute perspective here refers to a mode of comprehension that fully apprehends all relevant aspects of reality and does not depend on a particular limited point of view. This distinction is conceptually coherent and doesn't result in a contradiction.

A third objection is that the concept of self-evidence does not imply the possible existence of a being that recognizes it as self-evident. For self-evidence might be an abstract property that does not rely on a possible individual who conceives of it as self-evident. Yet, as I've argued, the argument departs from the phenomenological principle that the notion of self-evidence, like the concept of meaning, is inherently relational and thus each instance of self-evidence requires possible recognition thereof to hold epistemic significance. Thus, a proposition can only be self-evident from a certain perspective if there is a possible being who conceives of it as self-evident from that perspective. This is not unreasonable. As a relational concept, self-evidence is modally grounded in the possibility to conceive of it. This is essential to ensure its phenomenological coherence. What's impossibly recognized as self-evident, isn't self-evident. That said, while my argument adopts a phenomenologically grounded, relational view of self-evidence—holding that self-evidence, like meaning, is inherently tied to possible recognition thereof—this is not the sole possible view but rather a substantive and defensible position for the argument's development.

5. Closing remarks

In this paper, I've proposed a new argument for God's existence based on the premise that there is an ultimate reason for this world's existence. I argue that this reason necessitates the existence of a being that grasps this reason as self-evident from an absolute perspective and is therefore reasonably referred to as God. Unlike traditional cosmological arguments based on the principle of sufficient reason, my argument does not claim that every fact must have an explanation; rather, it only posits that reality's fundamental structure is not a brute fact.

The argument challenges atheists who posit an ultimate reason for reality. For if successful, the argument demonstrates that an ultimate explanation of reality entails theism. Proposed

argument provides a contribution to the philosophical debate on God's existence, implying that an ultimate reason for this world's existence leads to the conclusion that an absolute, self-subsistent being who grasps this ultimate reason exists and is properly called 'God.'

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