

be at least as much [reality] in the efficient and total cause as there is in the effect of that same cause,” which Descartes bases his premise that everything must have a cause on. This assumption, called by some the “great chain of being” principle, is an artifact from the ancient philosopher Plotinus, and was presupposed as a fundamental tenet in almost all Neoplatonic scholastic thought. It clearly pervades Descartes’ proofs, as will be evident from scanning the arguments below.

Descartes’ Three Proofs of God’s Existence

Cosmological-ontological argument (COA)

1. Everything must have a cause.
2. The fact that my idea of God represents an infinitely perfect being must have a cause which is infinitely perfect. (Ass.)
3. I am not infinitely perfect.

C0. Therefore, I could not have an idea representing an infinitely perfect being if there were no such being outside of me.

4. I have an idea of God which represents him as an infinitely perfect being.
5. I could not have such an idea, if there were no infinitely perfect being outside of me. (**C0**)

C1. Therefore, an infinitely perfect being, i.e., God, exists outside of me.

Conservation of existence argument (CEA)

6. I exist as something which has an idea of God. (Ass.)
7. Everything that exists has a cause which brought it into existence and preserves its existence. (1)
8. If I could preserve my own existence from this moment to the next, to an infinite duration, I would know that I can. (Ass.)
9. I don’t know that I can.
10. Therefore, I am not the cause of my own existence and preservation.
11. Any being which is the cause of my existence and which preserves me must be the cause of my idea of God.
12. The only thing which is capable of causing and preserving me, a thing which has an idea of God, is God.

C2. Therefore, God exists.

Existence is a perfection argument (EPA)

13. My conception of God is the conception of a being that possesses all perfections.
14. Existence is a perfection.
15. Therefore, I cannot conceive of God as not existing.

C3. Therefore, God exists.

The keen reader will see that Descartes’ proof of God’s existence essentially models the form of his proof of his own existence. I have an idea of myself; therefore, I exist. For God, it is: I have an idea of God; therefore, he exists. Both rely on a variation on the idea that there must be a subject in which a predicate inheres. So, as self-ascribing the predicate “is thinking” requires a subject that actually manifests that attribute, analogously, the idea GOD requires a subject that