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CREATION AND THE PROBLEM OF NOTHING: UNPACKING THE LOGIC OF *CREATIO EX NIHILO*

Ovie, Valentine Aghoghophia
Faculty of Philosophy, St Augustine Major Seminary Jos, Nigeria
ovie.valstyle@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-8118-0677

Abstract
This paper addresses one of the most profound metaphysical tensions in classical and Christian thought: the apparent contradiction between the Principle of Sufficient Reason, ex nihilo nihil fit ("nothing comes from nothing") and the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo (creation from nothing). It examines whether the idea that God brought the universe into existence from "nothing" unintentionally reifies a concept that classical metaphysics regards as unintelligible or even incoherent. Drawing from the works of Aquinas, Aristotle, Augustine, and Spinoza, the study evaluates whether divine volition alone suffices as a causal explanation when no substrate precedes creation. Through an analysis of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, the ontological continuity of being, and the logic of causality, the paper shows that "nothing" must be understood not as a cause or entity, but as a negation relative to being. Creatio ex nihilo, properly understood, affirms the uniqueness of divine causality and does not violate rational intelligibility when placed within a coherent metaphysical framework. The result is a defence of the doctrine that neither collapses into absurdity nor abandons the philosophical rigor demanded by classical metaphysics.
Keywords: Creatio ex nihilo, Non-being, Ex nihilo nihil fit, Creation, Being, God

Introduction

The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*—that God brought all things into existence from nothing—is one of the most foundational yet philosophically provocative tenets of Christian theology. It seeks to affirm two essential truths simultaneously: the radical transcendence of God and the total contingency of creation. According to classical theism, God is eternal, uncaused, and self-subsisting; His essence is pure being without admixture or limitation. As such, if God were to create the world out of His own nature, then creation would necessarily share in His eternality and immutability. But created things, as we know them, are finite, temporal, and subject to change. This compels us to reject the idea that the world is fashioned from divine substance.

Yet to suppose that God used some other preexistent material for creation is equally problematic. If that material were not itself created by God, then God would no longer be the sole and absolute source of all that exists. The very notion of divine omnipotence and the total dependence of creation on its Creator would collapse. Therefore, the only way to maintain that God is truly the creator of *all* things—both visible and invisible, both material and immaterial—is to hold that God created the world *ex nihilo*, that is, from nothing. But herein lies the metaphysical crisis. The assertion that being can emerge from non-being appears to violate some of the most basic axioms of reason. The *Principle of Sufficient Reason*, long a cornerstone of metaphysical thought, demands that every existent thing must have a reason or ground for its existence. In the case of

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creation from nothing, however, no such antecedent ground exists in "nothing" itself. The only remaining explanatory principle is divine volition—God willed creation. But is will, even divine will, a sufficient reason when it acts upon no substrate?

The tension deepens with the ancient axiom *ex nihilo nihil fit*—"from nothing, nothing comes." If "nothing" truly means the absence of all being, then how could anything ever arise from it? The transition from absolute non-being to being appears to defy both logic and experience. Furthermore, some metaphysicians argue that "nothing" is not even a coherent concept. To speak of "nothing" is already to speak *of* something, to objectify what, by definition, has no properties, no essence, and no potential. If non-being cannot be thought, then it cannot be known; and if it cannot be known, how can we affirm that creation arose from it? Moreover, if that which cannot be thought cannot be willed, then divine will itself cannot act upon "nothing" as an object. Does the notion of creation ex nihilo unintentionally smuggle being into the concept of nothing?

Equally challenging is the ontological principle of continuity, which posits that change and emergence occur through gradations and not by abrupt ontological ruptures. But creation from nothing implies an absolute discontinuity—a sheer leap from non-being to being. Is such a metaphysical "jump" even coherent? Finally, the law of identity and non-contradiction comes under strain. If something can emerge from absolutely nothing, does this not blur the distinction between being and non-being, thereby inviting contradiction at the very foundation of ontology?

In this study, we shall not abandon the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, nor shall we diminish its theological necessity. Rather, we aim to probe its deepest philosophical tensions one after the other and offer a robust account that upholds the integrity of the doctrine while addressing its apparent contradictions. By reexamining classical metaphysical principles in light of divine transcendence, we hope to clarify how the mystery of creation from nothing may yet be intelligible within a coherent framework of reason and faith.

1. The Principle of Sufficient Reason

The Concept

The Principle of Sufficient Reason is the idea that *everything is—at least in principle—intelligible*. Nothing exists without a reason why it is so and not otherwise. This principle undergirds much of early modern rationalist thought, and it finds one of its most rigorous, if not always overt, formulations in the metaphysics of Benedict de Spinoza. Though Spinoza does not enunciate the PSR in a systematic proposition within his *Ethics*, he nonetheless articulates it with forceful clarity when he writes, "For each thing there must be assigned a cause, or reason (*causa seu ratio*), both for its existence and for its nonexistence" (*Ethics* I, prop. 11, dem. 2). Here, the causal and the rational are not simply adjacent domains—they are conceptually entangled. For Spinoza, causation is not merely the succession of events but a deeply conceptual relation. That is, for any entities *x* and *y*, *x* causes *y* if and only if the concept of *y* is somehow contained in or deducible from the concept of *x* (cf. *Ethics* I, ax. 4; I, prop. 6, cor. 2). As commentators such as Della Rocca (2008) and Lin (2017) have argued, this implies that causal facts, for Spinoza, are in essence conceptual

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facts. The world unfolds according to a logical intelligibility wherein effects are understood only through the grasp of their causes.

This conceptual embedding of causation has explanatory import. Spinoza himself affirms that "effects are conceived or understood through their causes" (*Ethics* I, def. 3), which means that to know an effect truly is to trace its line of necessity back to the determining idea or nature from which it issues. A cause, in this framework, does not merely precede the effect temporally; it renders the effect necessary, thinkable, and inevitable. In Spinoza's precise formulation: "From a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow" (*Ethics* I, ax. 3). Causation is, therefore, both the condition of existence and the condition of intelligibility. The consequences of this view are radical and far-reaching. Spinoza draws them out unflinchingly: "In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way" (*Ethics* I, prop. 29). In other words, contingency—so often appealed to in metaphysical accounts of freedom or divine choice—dissolves entirely under the weight of divine necessity. God, for Spinoza, is the sole substance (*Ethics* I, prop. 14), exists necessarily (*Ethics* I, prop. 7, dem.), and is the cause of all things (*Ethics* I, props. 25–26; prop. 28, dem.). If all things proceed from the divine essence, and if causation is necessitating, then all things exist by necessity and nothing could be otherwise.

Thus, for Spinoza, the Principle of Sufficient Reason is not an abstract metaphysical heuristic—it is a rigorous metaphysical law. Everything that exists does so not by accident, nor by arbitrary divine fiat, but by necessity rooted in conceptual coherence and divine causality. This challenges not only any account of radical contingency but also any doctrine, such as *creatio ex nihilo*, that postulates an ontological leap from nothingness to being without a continuous conceptual chain of causation. For Spinoza, such a leap would be unintelligible. Nothing can come from nothing, because the very notion of a "causeless effect" violates both conceptual intelligibility and metaphysical necessity. Therefore, any adequate account of creation must, in Spinozistic terms, make the link between cause and effect not merely temporal but rational and essential.

The Challenge

Given Spinoza's commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason and his identification of causation with conceptual intelligibility, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*—that God created all things out of nothing—is rendered, from his standpoint, not merely problematic but outright incoherent. For Spinoza, everything that exists must be logically entailed by a prior cause whose concept necessarily includes the concept of its effect. There is no room in his ontology for effects that emerge *ex abrupto*, from a void that possesses no reality, no intelligibility, and no causal efficacy. To say that the universe was created "from nothing" is, for Spinoza, to postulate an effect (the world) without a determinate cause that contains its conceptual rationale. But such a claim violates his axiom that "from a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow" (Paraphrased *Ethics* I, ax. 3). In the case of *creatio ex nihilo*, "nothing" is not a cause at all—it is the denial of any cause. It has no nature, no properties, no explanatory power. Thus, to say that the world arises

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from nothing is to sever the conceptual link between cause and effect, and thereby to negate the very conditions of intelligibility.

Moreover, Spinoza's metaphysics asserts that "in nature there is nothing contingent" (*Ethics* I, prop. 29). Everything that exists follows necessarily from the essence of God, "from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way." But *creatio ex nihilo*, as traditionally understood, implies a kind of contingency. It suggests that God could have created or not created, or could have created something different than what is. The world, in such a view, is not the necessary unfolding of divine essence but the result of a divine will unconstrained by prior rationale. Yet Spinoza rejects this voluntarist conception of God. For him, God's essence is not separate from God's action; to understand God is to understand that His nature necessarily expresses itself in infinite modes and attributes. *Creatio ex nihilo* also posits a radical ontological rupture—a metaphysical leap from absolute non-being to being. But Spinoza's ontology admits no such leap. The continuity of being is essential. There is only one substance—God—and everything that is, is a mode of that substance. There is no ontological vacuum into which divine fiat inserts creation. In sum, for Spinoza, the logic of *creatio ex nihilo* is not simply flawed—it is fundamentally unintelligible. It violates the Principle of Sufficient Reason by positing effects without intelligible causes, undermines the necessity of divine action by suggesting contingency in creation, and disrupts the ontological coherence of being by invoking an impossible transition from non-being to being. Within his metaphysical framework, creation is not a temporal act out of nothing but an eternal unfolding from the necessary nature of God. Thus, for Spinoza, *creatio ex nihilo* is not only unnecessary but metaphysically inadmissible.

The Resolution

In attempting to resolve the apparent tension between the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) and the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), it is essential to first grasp how Augustine conceptualized the term "nothing." According to Augustine, "nothing" does not refer to an absolute void in a simplistic or purely negative sense. Rather, he provides a layered and nuanced account. In his book *A Refutation of the Manichees* (Bk. 1, 7.11–12), Augustine draws from the imagery of Genesis 1:1–2, where the earth is described as "formless and void," covered in darkness, and where "the Spirit of God was moving over the waters." He interprets "nothing" as that which is without form, shape, or visibility—an abyss, water, and earth that are yet without distinct subjectivity or actuality. From this, Augustine appears to distinguish between two forms of "nothing." First, there is **absolute nothing**, a state of complete non-being. Second, there is **prime matter**, a metaphysical principle that, while not possessing form or determinacy, is still a kind of potential being—it is not a substance, yet it is the substratum from which formable reality emerges. The language Augustine employs in describing "nothing" seems to refer primarily to this second category: prime matter. While prime matter is not pure nothingness, it is derived—by divine act—from absolute nothing. Thus, in Augustine's metaphysical framework, even prime matter is a created entity, and its existence is contingent upon the creative will of God.

In *Confessions* XII.7, Augustine articulates a hierarchy of being, noting that God is being itself (*esse ipsum*), whereas created beings occupy varying degrees of participation in being. Some

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creatures are closer to fullness of existence—God, while others are nearer to non-being. God, as the fullness of being (*ipsum esse subsistens*), causes all beings to exist by participation. This Augustinian notion is echoed and further developed by Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* I, q.44, a.1, where he writes that "whatever is found in anything by participation must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially, as iron becomes ignited by fire." Thus, just as fire imparts heat to iron, so too God, who is being itself, imparts existence to all things. Aquinas extends this analogy to affirm that just as there is a single whiteness in which many white things participate, so too there is one existence—God—in which all things that exist share. However, unlike God, creatures are not immutable; corporeal beings, in particular, come into being and pass away. This coming-into-being is a participation in divine existence, whereas their ceasing-to-be signifies a departure from it. Therefore, the tendency of created things to corrupt and fall away from being implies a certain metaphysical participation in non-being. Corruption and mortality are not grounded in God, but in the limited and finite nature of creatures—their proximity to non-being.

This metaphysical gradient, from nothing to being and from being back to nothing, reveals a structured order. There is a logical procession: first, from **absolute nothing**, to **prime matter**, which, although not pure nothing, is also not yet a subject with form. From this prime matter, God fashions the manifold forms of creation. In this view, the creative act does not violate the Principle of Sufficient Reason, since the act of creation has its sufficient reason in the will and power of God, not in "nothing" itself. "Nothing" is not a productive cause; rather, it signifies the absence of being and thus the potential for corruption or dissolution. In this light, nothingness is not the efficient cause of creation but rather the terminus a quo and the potential end toward which corruptible things tend. One might illustrate this metaphysical schema with a graduated scale. Imagine a scale ranging from 0 to 100, where **0** represents absolute non-being and **100** represents the fullness of being. In this analogy, prime matter would be situated near the 0 end, having the lowest degree of actuality without being entirely non-existent. Angelic beings, by contrast, would occupy a position close to the 100 mark, existing with greater fullness, incorruptibility, and proximity to God. Corporeal beings, like humans and animals, fall somewhere in between, depending on their capacity to participate in being. The proximity of any creature to either end of this metaphysical spectrum determines the measure of its participation in being or non-being.

Therefore, when creatures corrupt or decay, they move back toward the "nothing" from which they were drawn—not as a regression into pure non-being, but as a loss of participation in being. Thus, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* should not be construed as asserting that "nothing" causes creation. Rather, it affirms that the cause of creation is God, and what is created is a movement from non-being into being by divine will. The "nothing" from which the world is made is not an agent, but a metaphysical condition preceding God's act of bringing things into existence. This account upholds the Principle of Sufficient Reason by assigning the sufficient cause of creation to God alone, while affirming that corruptibility and finitude in creatures signify their relative distance from the fullness of being. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, when properly understood through the metaphysical insights of Augustine and Aquinas, does not contradict the principle of sufficient reason but rather deepens our understanding of causality, participation, and the structure of being.

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2. **Ex Nihilo Nihil Fit (Nothing comes from Nothing)**

The Concept

The assertion that "nothing comes from nothing" underpins much of metaphysical thought. While often invoked as a truism, its justification involves deep ontological commitments. The thinkers explored here—Parmenides, Aristotle, Lucretius, Aquinas, and Voltaire—each defend this maxim within their own philosophical systems. Despite varying metaphysical frameworks, they converge on the impossibility of ontological emergence from absolute non-being. Parmenides provides the earliest rigorous articulation of the principle. In his poem *On Nature*, he insists that "what is, is" and "what is not, is not" (Parmenides, *On Nature*, frag. 6; Kirk et al.). He argues that thinking and speaking are only possible of what is: "It needs must be that what can be thought and spoken of is; for it is possible for it to be, and it is not possible for what is nothing to be" (ibid.). For Parmenides, the notion of becoming from non-being is incoherent. Non-being cannot generate being because non-being has no ontological status—it simply is not. This foundational stance rules out spontaneous generation from nothing and undergirds the permanence of being.

Aristotle adopts and formalizes Parmenides' insight in his *Physics*, stating: "Everything that comes to be comes to be from something, and not from nothing." (*Physics* I.5, 187a32–b1). For Aristotle, the coming-to-be of a thing requires a substrate and efficient cause; there is no uncaused emergence. This view grounds Aristotle's four-causal explanatory framework. Substantial change presupposes potentiality in matter. Even divine causation in Aristotelian thought (the Unmoved Mover) presupposes the eternality of motion and matter. Aristotle's rejection of creation from nothing aligns with the naturalistic coherence of his metaphysics.

In *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius gives the Epicurean version of the principle: "Nothing ever springs into being from nothing by divine power" (*De Rerum Natura* I.149–150). He continues, "nothing can be created out of nothing" (ibid., I.156–157). This forms the basis of his empirical materialism. Lucretius argues that if things could come from nothing, any and all things could arise at any time. The stability and regularity of nature would be undermined. Thus, the order of the cosmos depends on the lawlike behaviour of matter and causality, which presupposes pre-existing substances and not spontaneous generation from non-being.

Though Aquinas affirms the possibility of *creatio ex nihilo*, he carefully distinguishes between divine creation and natural causality. In his *De Potentia*, he notes that the maxim *ex nihilo nihil fit* is the common assumption of natural philosophy and that no natural agent can cause something from nothing (Aquinas, *De Potentia*, III.1). For Aquinas, God alone can create *ex nihilo*, but even this act does not violate the principle—because divine causation does not operate within the natural order. Rather, it initiates being and the natural order itself. In the created world, change always requires pre-existing matter, affirming the principle for all finite agents (*ST*. I, q. 45, a. 1).

Voltaire reiterates the principle in *Entretiens de Lucrèce et de Posidonius*: "Rien ne vient de rien, rien ne retourne à rien" (Voltaire, 1877). He invokes it as both a physical and metaphysical truism that supports Enlightenment rationalism. By invoking Lucretius, Voltaire aligns with the empirical worldview that demands explanatory causes. The maxim underscores the necessity of

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intelligibility in nature and critiques mysticism or irrational accounts of creation. Even in his Deist framework, Voltaire holds that effects presuppose causes—nothing begins without antecedent grounds.

The Challenge

At the heart of the contradiction between *ex nihilo nihil fit* and *creatio ex nihilo* lies a fundamental disagreement about the ontological status of "nothing." For the classical philosophers—Parmenides, Aristotle, and Lucretius—"nothing" is not a kind of something, nor even a neutral placeholder awaiting fulfillment. It is the absolute absence of being, utterly void of potency, actuality, or reality. If one accepts this strict definition, then the claim that something can be brought into being from nothing is not merely counterintuitive but logically incoherent. For these philosophers it is unthinkable and unsayable that "what is not" could be. For them, to speak of being arising from non-being is to entangle oneself in contradiction. Any notion of generation or coming-to-be must presuppose some underlying being, for what does not exist cannot act, receive, or change. If something comes into existence, it must come from something else—some prior being. The introduction of being from a state of total non-being is thus a metaphysical absurdity.

Change and causality are intelligible only within the framework of potentiality and actuality. A substance comes to be when a potency is actualized—never from sheer void, which has no potency to actualize. To assert otherwise would dissolve the very conditions for rational explanation. If being could emerge without any prior cause or substrate, the world would become radically unintelligible. It would no longer be governed by logos, but by chaos. For them if *creatio ex nihilo* is true, any kind of thing could spring into being anywhere, without pattern or proportion. The world would be inconsistent, devoid of the regularities upon which knowledge and survival depend. Thus, the maxim *ex nihilo nihil fit* safeguards both logical coherence and the intelligibility of experience. Consequently, *creatio ex nihilo* violates the ontological insight embedded in *ex nihilo nihil fit*: namely, that being cannot emerge from non-being. In affirming creation from absolute nothingness, Christian metaphysics departs from the unified testimony of ancient and early modern reason. It introduces a metaphysical exception that undermines the very intelligibility of coming-to-be and causation. From the standpoint of Parmenides' logic, Aristotle's hylomorphism, and Lucretius's empirical realism, *creatio ex nihilo* is not merely improbable—it is impossible.

The Resolution

The principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit* ("nothing comes from nothing") has long presented a philosophical challenge to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* ("creation out of nothing"). To engage this tension thoughtfully, we must analyze the nature of causal series, both efficient and material, and the metaphysical hierarchy they entail. In the created world, things exist in ordered causal series. Such series typically consist of three parts: a first cause, one or more intermediate causes, and a last effect. This structure applies both to efficient causes (which bring something about) and to material causes (the substratum from which something is made). With respect to **efficient causes**, the last member in the series cannot be the cause of anything preceding it; rather, it is merely an effect. It contributes nothing causally to what came before and hence depends on prior

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causes. The intermediate causes, while themselves effects of what precedes them, act as causes for what follows. Their causal power is derivative and secondary, contingent upon the first cause. No matter how many intermediates exist—one or many—the same structure holds. All are intermediates; none are foundational. Therefore, at the top of the causal chain, there must be a **First Efficient Cause**, which itself is uncaused and imparts causal efficacy to all intermediate and final members of the series.

This analysis also applies to **material causes**, though in a different order. Just as an infinite regress of efficient causes is metaphysically incoherent—requiring a first to explain motion or change—so too an infinite regress in material causes is untenable. In the ontological order of becoming, material being cannot simply exist in an infinite chain without origin. For any becoming, there must be a prior state of potentiality. In metaphysical terms, being does not precede becoming; rather, becoming precedes being. But what precedes becoming? The only conceivable antecedent is **non-being**—not as a productive cause, but as a metaphysical condition of absence. Thus, in the material order, the series logically proceeds from non-being (absence), to becoming (potentiality, or prime matter), and finally to being (actual existence). This sequence can be illustrated through an epistemological analogy: knowledge begins with ignorance (non-being), proceeds through the process of learning (becoming), and results in a state of being learned (being).

Similarly, if God is the **First Efficient Cause**, it follows that He causes non-being to become becoming (prime matter), and from this becoming, He brings about all forms of being. Here, God does not create from nothing as though "nothing" were a substance or cause. Rather, God, as the uncaused cause, brings forth being from a state of metaphysical absence—without presupposing any prior matter. This process respects the logic of *ex nihilo nihil fit*, for "nothing" does not cause being. God causes being, initiating the causal series by moving from non-being to becoming, and from becoming to being. Hence, rather than contradicting the principle that nothing comes from nothing, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* aligns with it, once the metaphysical structure of causal series is properly understood. Nothingness is not the efficient cause; God is. Non-being simply marks the absence from which becoming begins, and through God's power, is ordered toward being.

Visual Representation
Efficient Cause Series: God (First Cause) → Intermediate Cause(s) → Final Effect (End Cause)
Material Cause Series: Non-being → Becoming (Prime Matter) → Being (Formed Substance)
Integration: God (Efficient Cause) → Causes Becoming from Non-being (Material Series Begins) → Forms Being from Becoming → Created Substance (Final Effect). Thus, *creatio ex nihilo* is not a violation of *ex nihilo nihil fit*, but rather its most complete expression—once God is recognized as the First Cause who orders all things from absence to actuality.

3. The Impossibility of Absolute Non-Being

The Concept

Parmenides is one of the earliest and most explicit voices on this issue. He asserts, "What is, is; and what is not, is not" (Parmenides, frag. B2). He concludes that non-being cannot be thought or

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spoken of: "You could not know what is not—that is impossible—nor utter it" (Parmenides, frag. B2, trans. Kirk & Raven). For Parmenides, thought and being are the same: "For thinking and being are one and the same" (ibid.). Thus, speaking or thinking about "nothing" is, strictly speaking, nonsensical. Plato follows this line of thought but introduces a subtler notion. In the *Sophist*, he redefines "not-being" not as absolute nothingness but as difference or otherness. He argues that not-being is just the negation of being in a specific sense, not a metaphysical nothing (Plato, *Sophist* 257b–d). In the *Timaeus*, Plato presents the Demiurge as imposing form on a chaotic, pre-existent substrate rather than creating ex nihilo (Plato, *Timaeus* 30a–b). Aristotle further develops this metaphysical caution. He argues in *Physics* I.8 and *Metaphysics* IV.2 that something cannot come from nothing and that non-being can only be spoken of as a negation or absence of being. For Aristotle, all generation requires a subject, and being arises from potential being, not from sheer non-existence (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1003b10–20).

Kant maintains that "nothing" is a logical negation. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he categorizes "nothing" as a non-concept, a mere boundary of thought rather than a real object (Kant, CPR, A292/B348). Hegel famously begins his *Science of Logic* by identifying pure being with pure nothing: "Pure Being and pure Nothing are the same" (Hegel, *Science of Logic*, I.1). However, this is a dialectical abstraction meant to show how thought moves to becoming. He does not posit absolute nothingness as a reality. Heidegger, in his lecture "What is Metaphysics?", challenges metaphysics to think the nothing, yet concludes that "the nothing itself nihilates" (Heidegger, 1929). He insists that the nothing is not a being and cannot be objectified. It only manifests in moods such as anxiety, when all beings recede.

The Challenge

From this historical arc, it becomes clear that "nothing" is consistently treated not as a being or entity but as a conceptual absence. When philosophers say that absolute non-being cannot be thought, they imply that all cognition presupposes being. Consequently, saying that God created the world from "nothing" (in the strict sense) would require treating "nothing" as a kind of quasi-substance, which contradicts the metaphysical tradition. Moreover, if non-being cannot be thought, it cannot be known, and thus cannot be willed. Therefore, creatio ex nihilo appears to contradict this metaphysical framework.

The concept of absolute non-being presents a profound metaphysical challenge, insofar as it is deemed unintelligible—incapable of being conceived, represented, or meaningfully referred to. If “nothing” is understood in its literal sense as no-thing—that is, the total absence of being—then to employ it in a statement such as “God created the world from nothing” is to inadvertently reify what, by definition, cannot exist. The very act of referring to “nothing” appears to confer upon it a kind of ontological status, thereby undermining its intended meaning. This paradox raises a fundamental question: does the language of “nothing” already presuppose a kind of being, however minimal or conceptual? If non-being is truly unintelligible and cannot be the object of thought, then it follows that it cannot be known. But if it cannot be known, then how can one coherently claim to know that God created the world ex nihilo? Moreover, in classical metaphysical terms, the will is directed toward that which can be intellectually apprehended. That which cannot be

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thought cannot be willed. Consequently, if non-being—understood as absolute nothingness—cannot be thought, then it likewise cannot be willed. Aquinas affirms also that the will follows the intellect; if the intellect cannot apprehend non-being, then even divine will cannot be directed toward it. Therefore, if divine creation is an act of will, and the object of that will is "nothing," one is faced with the problem of how God can will to create from what is inherently unwilled and unknowable.

The Resolution

The challenge posed by the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing) stems from metaphysical concerns about the nature of "nothing." This challenge is often broken into three interrelated problems: the unintelligibility of absolute non-being, the epistemic difficulty of knowing non-being, and the question of whether non-being can be the object of divine volition. This paper addresses each of these issues by drawing on the insights of major philosophers such as Aquinas, Aristotle, and Augustine.

I. The Unintelligibility of Absolute Non-Being

The first objection states that absolute non-being is unintelligible—it cannot be thought, represented, or referred to. If "nothing" is literally no-thing, then using it in a sentence such as "God created the world from nothing" risks reifying what cannot exist. This suggests that any discussion of "nothing" presumes it has some form of being. Thomas Aquinas addresses this issue by clarifying that opposites are known through each other: "One opposite is known through the other, as darkness is known through light, and what evil is known from the nature of good" (*Summa Theologiae* I, q.48, a.1, co.). Similarly, in *De Potentia Dei* (q.3, a.1), Aquinas insists that we do not say that nothing is a cause, but that the created thing is made without any pre-existing subject. Thus, non-being is not treated as a real substratum but as a negation understood through contrast with being. In this context, when we say "God created the world from nothing," the phrase "from nothing" (*ex nihilo*) should not be construed as a positive claim about a substance or entity called "nothing." Rather, it is a negative proposition that indicates the absence of pre-existing material. "Nothing" is not a cause; it is a way of stating that no matter existed prior to the creative act. This kind of creation is unique: it is not a transformation but the origination of being itself. God, as the First Cause, does not act upon "nothing" as if it were a subject; He brings forth being without precondition.

II. The Knowability of Non-Being

The second objection argues that if non-being cannot be taught or thought, then it cannot be known. And if it cannot be known, how can we know that God created the world from nothing? To this, Aristotle offers an important distinction. In *Metaphysics* (Book Γ, ch. 2–3), he explains that non-being is not understood as a substance but in contrast to being. As darkness is the absence of light, non-being is the absence of being. Its intelligibility is derivative, based on the principle of negation. Therefore, we understand *creatio ex nihilo* not by grasping "nothing" as an entity, but by recognizing that God brought the world into existence without any antecedent material cause. We know that God created the world from nothing precisely because we understand what being is and

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what it means for something to not have existed before. The absence of any pre-existing being logically entails the notion of "nothing" as a relative, not absolute, term.

III. The Willing of Non-Being

The final objection asserts: that which can be thought is that which can be willed. If non-being cannot be thought, then it cannot be willed. So how can God will to create "from nothing" if "nothing" cannot be the object of volition? Aristotle provides a framework for resolving this problem. In *Metaphysics* (Book Λ, ch. 7–10), he argues that the object of divine will is the good, and that God acts not by deliberating over non-being, but by being the final cause of actuality. In theological terms, God's will is not directed toward "nothing," but toward the being of creation. He wills the end—the creature—and not a process involving "nothing." Aquinas builds on this: "The will cannot desire what the intellect does not apprehend" (*Summa Theologiae* I–II, q.8, a.1). Since "nothing" cannot be apprehended as a thing, it cannot be willed as such. But God does not will "nothing." He wills the creature into being. The absence of pre-existing matter is not the target of divine will; rather, God wills the existence of beings directly, without needing any substrate. Augustine likewise insists that "nothing" is not a real substratum. In *Confessions* (XII.7), he writes that God created the world ex nihilo, but that this "nothing" is not a thing—it denotes the lack of prior material. Aquinas echoes this when he says that in creation, the creature—not "nothing"—is the recipient of existence through God's will (*Summa Contra Gentiles* II.16). In sum, creation ex nihilo does not imply a contradiction with the principle that non-being cannot be thought, known, or willed. Rather, "nothing" is a conceptual negation that points to the absence of material, not a real entity. God does not think, know, or will "nothing"—He thinks, knows, and wills being into existence.

Conclusion

The doctrine of creatio ex nihilo has long stood as a cornerstone of Christian metaphysics, yet it poses a profound challenge to classical philosophical principles—most notably, the Principle of Sufficient Reason and the axiom ex nihilo nihil fit. This paper has examined the tension between the theological claim that God creates from nothing and the philosophical insistence that being cannot emerge from non-being. Through critical engagement with figures such as Spinoza, Aquinas, Augustine, Aristotle, and Parmenides, the inquiry has shown that the conceptual framework of "nothing" must be approached not as a substantive entity or cause, but as a privative term intelligible only in contrast to being. Far from reifying non-being, the language of "nothing" in *creatio ex nihilo* denotes the absence of pre-existing material, not the presence of a metaphysical substrate. As such, it does not violate the Principle of Sufficient Reason, since the sufficient ground of creation is not "nothing," but the will and power of God, who alone exists necessarily and fully possesses being.

Likewise, the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit* retains its validity within the natural order, where no created agent can bring something from nothing. But once divine causality is situated outside the framework of natural generation and into the realm of ontological origination, the principle no longer functions as an objection but becomes a clarifying lens: only the divine can cause being where no being was, precisely because nothing natural can. Moreover, the paper resolved the

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triadic philosophical problem concerning the unintelligibility, unknowability, and unwilability of non-being. It showed that non-being, though absolutely unintelligible in itself, can be known by negation and can function logically as the point from which God, the First Efficient Cause, wills the emergence of being. God's volition does not act upon "nothing" but directly produces being without a material cause.

In sum, when rightly understood, *creatio ex nihilo* does not contradict any of the principles of classical metaphysics but deepens their implications. It reveals a unique mode of causality—divine causation—that transcends the limits of created being while preserving the intelligibility of existence. Far from undermining reason, the doctrine reaffirms the metaphysical coherence of a world wholly dependent on a God who brings being into existence not through necessity, but through the superabundance of divine freedom.

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