

THE ONTOLOGY OF ABSOLUTE NOTHINGNESS

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THE ONTOLOGY OF ABSOLUTE NOTHINGNESS

WHY EXISTING

ABSOLUTE NOTHINGNESS

IS IMPOSSIBLE

A Demonstration of an Internal Contradiction Revised and Expanded Edition

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The Haimesian System

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Central claim Absolute nothingness cannot both be the complete absence of being and obtain as an existent reality, state, fact, or world.

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Abstract

This paper examines whether absolute nothingness could exist or obtain. Absolute nothingness is defined, not as empty space, a physical vacuum, darkness, silence, or a world without ordinary material objects, but as the complete absence of all being: no entities, properties, relations, facts, laws, distinctions, space, time, possibilities, or framework in which anything could be instantiated. The original argument held that the phrase “existing absolute nothingness” is internally inconsistent, because whatever exists is thereby not the complete absence of being. The revised argument preserves that sound conceptual core while distinguishing three theses: no entity can be absolute nothingness; no

state of absolute nothingness can obtain; and no absolutely empty possible world can exist. The first thesis is analytic and decisive. The latter two are stronger and require careful treatment of quantifier logic, empty-domain semantics, possible-world theory, and the distinction between absolute nothingness and a world containing no concrete objects. The paper responds to objections concerning the grammar of “nothing,” the claim that existence is not a predicate, the subtraction argument for an empty world, and the difference between conceiving an absence and reifying Nothing as an object. It concludes that absolute nothingness is not a possible existent or instantiated condition. A defender of

an “empty world” can preserve only a relative or concrete emptiness within a nonempty logical or modal framework. The paper therefore recommends reformulating the traditional question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” so that “nothing” is not treated as a coherent absolute alternative without further analysis. The refined thesis Absolute nothingness is impossible as an existent, an obtaining state, or an instantiated possible world, provided “absolute” excludes every entity and every ontological or modal framework. A merely objectless or matterless world is not absolute nothingness.

- 1. The original insight

The original PhilPapers argument began from a strict definition: absolute nothingness is the complete absence of all being. From that definition it argued that attributing existence to absolute nothingness immediately defeats the definition. If it exists, then at least something exists; if something exists, the condition is not absolute nothingness. Original core argument Premise 1: Absolute nothingness is the complete absence of all being. Premise 2: If something exists, then it is not the complete absence of being. Conclusion: Existing absolute nothingness is impossible.

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This core is valid, but its philosophical value depends on stating exactly what it proves. It decisively rules out an entity called “absolute nothingness” and exposes the contradiction in describing absolute nothingness as something that exists. It does not, without further argument, settle every use of the sentence “there could have been nothing,” because that sentence is often intended as a quantified claim rather than a name for an object.

- 2. Four levels often confused under the word “nothing”

The argument becomes substantially stronger once several different kinds of emptiness are separated. Much apparent disagreement about nothingness results from moving between these levels without notice.

Level

What is absent	What still exists	Practical nothing	Expected or useful contents
The room,	container, air, space, observer, and surrounding world	Physical vacuum	Ordinary particles or matter
Fields, spacetime, laws, energy structure, and physical possibilities	Concrete emptiness	Concrete objects	Perhaps abstract objects, truths, worlds, logical structure, or modal facts
Absolute nothingness	Every being and every framework	Nothing whatsoever - no facts, worlds, possibilities, distinctions, or laws	The present argument concerns only the fourth level. Physics can discuss a vacuum or a universe with no matter without approaching absolute nothingness. Modal metaphysics can discuss a world

with no concrete objects while retaining possible worlds, logical relations, truths, and the metalanguage in which the claim is made. Those are thinner forms of being, but they are still not the total absence of being.

- 3. The revised three-part argument

The most rigorous version separates a modest theorem that is nearly indisputable from two stronger metaphysical consequences. Thesis I - No entity can be absolute nothingness 1. Absolute nothingness is the complete absence of all being. 2. Every entity is a being, or at minimum belongs to what there is. 3. If absolute nothingness were an entity, at least one being would exist. 4. Therefore no entity can be absolute nothingness.

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Conclusion: “Absolute nothingness exists” is internally contradictory when

“absolute nothingness” is used as the name of an entity. Thesis II - No state of absolute nothingness can obtain 5. If a state obtains, there is at least an obtaining state, fact, condition, or truth that it obtains. 6. Absolute nothingness excludes every state, fact, condition, truth, and relation. 7. Therefore no obtaining state can be absolute nothingness. Conclusion: Absolute

nothingness cannot be an instantiated condition of reality. This thesis is stronger because some philosophers deny that an obtaining state must be an entity. The argument therefore does not rest on one preferred ontology of facts. Instead, it presents a dilemma: if the obtaining condition counts as anything at all, the condition is not absolute

nothingness; if it counts as nothing, then there is no condition available to obtain. Thesis III - No absolutely empty possible world can exist 8. A possible world, world-state, maximal possibility, or modal representation is something within a theory of possibility. 9. Absolute nothingness excludes worlds, states, possibilities, modal truths, and representational frameworks.

- 10. Therefore an “absolutely empty possible world” is either not absolute or not a possible world.

Conclusion: Metaphysical nihilism can coherently propose a world without

concrete objects, but not absolute nothingness as defined here.

- 4. The logical form of “nothing”

A major danger is grammatical reification. In ordinary language, “nothing” can occupy the position normally occupied by a noun. This can tempt us to imagine a peculiar object named Nothing. Rudolf Carnap used this feature of language to criticize metaphysical sentences that treat “nothing” as a thing capable of acting or possessing properties. Quantifier reading “Nothing is outside” ordinarily means: There does not exist anything that is outside. It does not mean: There exists an object named Nothing, and that object is outside. This distinction improves rather than destroys the present argument. The paper should not infer a contradiction merely because the word “nothing” appears as a grammatical subject. Instead, it

should ask what the quantified claim excludes. If “there is nothing” means only that no concrete objects exist, an empty-world thesis may remain coherent. If it means that there are no entities, facts, properties, relations, truths, laws, worlds, or possibilities whatsoever, then there is no remaining state or framework that could instantiate the claim.

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- 5. Principal objections and replies

Objection 1: The argument is merely definitional The statement “absolute nothingness cannot exist” may seem equivalent to saying “the complete absence of being cannot be a being.” That is true by definition, so the argument may appear trivial. Reply. The first thesis is analytic, and the paper should admit this openly. Analytic results can still be important when a philosophical problem depends on an unnoticed contradiction. The larger contribution is to distinguish the analytic claim from the stronger thesis that absolute nothingness cannot obtain as a state or world, and to show why common substitutes - vacuum, empty space, or a world without concrete objects - are not absolute nothingness.

Objection 2: Existence is not an ordinary predicate Since Kant and later logic, philosophers have often denied that existence is a property added to the concept of a thing. If existence is not a predicate, perhaps the contradiction disappears. Reply. The argument does not require existence to be an ordinary property such as color or size. It requires only existential commitment: if there is an entity, fact, state, world, or instantiated condition, reality is not absolutely empty. The reasoning can therefore be expressed through quantification rather than by treating existence as a first-order predicate. Objection 3: An empty logical domain is coherent

Some logical systems permit an empty domain in which no objects satisfy the quantifiers. This seems to model a situation containing nothing. Reply. An empty model is still a model described by a syntax, semantics, domain specification, and metatheory. It can represent the absence of objects within that structure, but the structure itself is not absolute nothingness. Logic may consistently describe objectlessness without demonstrating that all being, truth, structure, and possibility are absent. Objection 4: The subtraction argument reaches an empty world Thomas Baldwin and Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra defend versions of a subtraction argument: begin with a possible world containing finitely many concrete objects, remove them one by one, and arrive at a world containing no concrete objects. Reply. This is the strongest modern counterposition, but its target is metaphysical nihilism understood as the possibility that no concrete objects exist. Even if the subtraction succeeds, an empty world, modal facts, logical relations, and the truth that the world is empty remain available in the theoretical description. The result is concrete emptiness, not absolute nothingness. The Haimesian argument therefore does not refute every subtraction argument; it limits what its conclusion can legitimately be called.

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Objection 5: The concept of nothingness exists, but nothingness need not We can think and speak about unicorns without unicorns existing. Likewise, the existence of the concept of nothingness does not prove that nothingness is a being. Reply. Correct. The paper must distinguish the concept, word, and proposition from their subject matter. The argument does not claim that thinking of nothingness creates an entity called Nothing. It claims that any alleged instantiation of absolute nothingness defeats itself, because instantiation is already incompatible with total absence. Objection 6: Absolute absence need not itself be a fact A defender may say that if absolutely nothing existed, there would be no further fact that nothing

existed. The absence would not be an additional entity. Reply. This is the most serious objection to Thesis II. The response is a dilemma rather than a simple reification. If the proposed absolute absence is a way reality could be, then it has modal or ontological status as a possible condition; that status is excluded by the definition of absolute nothingness. If it is not a way reality could be, not a condition, not a possibility, and not a fact, then it cannot serve as a genuine alternative to being. The objector may avoid contradiction only by giving up the claim that absolute nothingness is a possible state. Objection 7: The physical vacuum is evidence that something can arise from nothing

Modern cosmology and quantum theory sometimes use “nothing” for a vacuum, a boundary condition, the absence of classical spacetime, or a limiting physical state. Reply. These uses are scientifically meaningful but metaphysically relative. A quantum vacuum involves fields, laws, mathematical structure, probabilities, and a physical framework. A boundaryless cosmological model is still a model. No physical theory that presupposes equations or possibilities begins from absolute nothingness as defined here. Objection 8: The argument proves a necessary being or God If absolute nothingness is impossible, one might infer that a specific necessary being must exist.

Reply. The argument alone does not identify what exists necessarily, whether necessity belongs to an entity, structure, truth, law, totality, or brute fact, or whether theological conclusions follow. It establishes only that absolute nothingness is not an existent or obtaining alternative. Any further cosmological or theological conclusion requires additional premises.

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- 6. The strongest final formulation

The Haimesian Impossibility Theorem

Absolute nothingness cannot exist as an entity, obtain as a state, or be instantiated as a possible world. Any entity, obtaining condition, fact, truth, world, possibility, law, distinction, or framework sufficient to make absolute nothingness real would already be something and would therefore falsify the condition it was meant to realize. What can coherently be empty is always empty relative to a remaining framework; it is not absolutely nothing. A compact formal presentation can be given without treating existence as a predicate:

- 11. Define N as the putative condition in which there are no beings and no ontological or modal framework whatsoever.
- 12. Assume N is instantiated, obtains, or corresponds to a possible world.
- 13. Then there is at least an instantiation, obtaining condition, or world corresponding to N.
- 14. Therefore the putative condition is not devoid of all being or framework.
- 15. Thus N cannot be instantiated, obtain, or correspond to a possible world.

The proof is conditional on the strict definition of absolute nothingness. Its force lies partly in showing that many apparently contrary positions change the subject by retaining a domain, world, law, possibility, truth, or explanatory framework.

- 7. Philosophical consequences

⌘ The phrase “existing absolute nothingness” should be treated as internally inconsistent. ⌘ The sentence “there could have been nothing” must specify whether it means no concrete objects, no physical universe, no contingent beings, or literally no being of any kind. ⌘ The traditional question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” may remain meaningful when “nothing” means no concrete or contingent reality, but it becomes defective if absolute nothingness is assumed to be an ordinary alternative state. ⌘ Physical vacua, empty space, mathematical zero, silence, darkness, and objectless worlds should not be confused with absolute nothingness.

⌘ The impossibility of absolute nothingness does not by itself explain why this universe exists, why its laws are as they are, or why any particular necessary reality exists. ⌘ The argument supports a methodological rule: before asking why something displaced nothing, first determine whether the proposed nothing is coherent and genuinely absolute.

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- 8. Relation to major historical approaches

Parmenides: non-being cannot be thought or spoken Parmenides’ poem presents the path that Being is and Non-Being is not, adding that what is not cannot be known or expressed. The resemblance is direct: both approaches reject non-being as a coherent object of existence. The present argument is narrower. It does not infer that reality is one, changeless, indivisible, or timeless. It isolates only the incompatibility between absolute nothingness and existence or instantiation. Leibniz: why something rather than nothing? Leibniz treats “nothing” as the apparently simpler alternative and invokes the Principle of Sufficient Reason to seek an explanation for why something exists. The refined Haimesian

approach operates one step earlier: it asks whether absolute nothingness is genuinely available as an alternative at all. If not, the explanatory question must be reformulated rather than answered by contrasting being with absolute non-being. Bergson: absolute nought as a pseudo-idea Henri Bergson is the closest major predecessor. In *Creative Evolution* he argues that the annihilation of everything is a self-destructive pseudo-idea: each act of negation or substitution presupposes a

positive background, and extending the operation to the totality is comparable to forming an incoherent figure. Bergson offers greater psychological and phenomenological detail.

The present version contributes compression, explicit logical distinctions, and a direct response to modern empty-world semantics. Heidegger: the nothing disclosed through anxiety Heidegger's "nothing" is not simply an empty domain. It functions phenomenologically in the disclosure of beings as a whole through anxiety. His project therefore differs from an argument about the possibility of total ontological absence. The present paper neither needs nor refutes Heidegger's experiential account; it insists only that any disclosed, operative, or phenomenologically present Nothing is not absolute nothingness in the strict sense. Carnap: grammatical form can manufacture pseudo-problems

Carnap argues that ordinary grammar lets "nothing" appear as a noun and thereby invites pseudo-statements. His logical correction is indispensable to the refined paper: "nothing" should normally be translated into quantifier form. The Haimesian argument then proceeds beyond the linguistic diagnosis by distinguishing relative objectlessness from the impossibility of an absolutely frameworkless state.

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Baldwin and Rodriguez-Pereyra: there might be no concrete objects The subtraction arguments offer the clearest contemporary challenge. Their conclusion is powerful if stated precisely: there may be a possible world containing no concrete objects. The refined paper accommodates that claim as a different thesis. Such a world is still a world within a modal theory and is therefore not absolute nothingness. This distinction prevents both sides from claiming more than their premises establish.

- 9. Assessment of originality and significance

The underlying intuition is not historically unprecedented. Parmenides rejected non-being, Bergson called absolute nought a self-destructive pseudo-idea, and Carnap exposed the grammatical reification of "nothing." The original contribution should therefore not be advertised as the first discovery that nothingness is conceptually unstable. The strongest defensible contribution is the following synthesis: * a strict definition of absolute nothingness that excludes not only matter but facts, worlds, possibilities, and frameworks; * a three-level distinction between an entity, an obtaining state, and a possible world; * a quantifier-based treatment that avoids turning Nothing into an object;

* a direct reconciliation with modern metaphysical nihilism by distinguishing absolute nothingness from the absence of concrete objects; * an explicit limitation on theological and cosmological conclusions; * a compact theorem that preserves the force of the original argument while surviving the most obvious objections. In this revised form, the argument is philosophically worth preserving. Its greatest strengths are clarity, economy, and the ability to diagnose equivocation. Its chief limitation is that Thesis II and Thesis III depend on whether facts, states, possibilities, and worlds are granted ontological status; philosophers who reject all such entities may resist the inference, although they then face

difficulty explaining what it means for absolute nothingness to be a genuine possible alternative.

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- 10. Comparative historical rating

The following scores concern one narrow task: clarifying whether absolute nothingness is coherent or possible. They are not rankings of the philosophers' overall greatness, influence, or complete systems. Because the historical approaches pursue different aims, the comparison is approximate.

Approach

Central contribution Main limitation

Rating

Refined Haimesian argument (2026) Most concise synthesis: strict definition, three theses, logical paraphrase, empty-world distinction, and objection handling. The strongest modal conclusions remain partly framework-dependent; the core insight has historical precedents. 8.9/10

Henri Bergson (1907)

Deep analysis of absolute nought as a self-destructive pseudo-idea and of negation as substitution. Lengthy and psychologically framed; less direct engagement with modern modal semantics. 8.7/10

Rudolf Carnap (1932)

Precise diagnosis of how grammar reifies "nothing" and creates pseudo-statements. A linguistic diagnosis alone does not settle whether an empty reality is metaphysically possible. 8.5/10
Parmenides (5th c. BCE) Foundational claim that non- being cannot be known, spoken, or serve as a path of inquiry. The broader conclusions about unity, changelessness, and becoming exceed the narrow argument. 8.3/10

Baldwin / Rodriguez-Pereyra

(1996-97) Strongest modern construction of a possible world with no concrete objects. Establishes at most concrete emptiness, not the absence of worlds, facts, or modal structure. 8.1/10

G. W. Leibniz (1714)

Made the explanatory contrast between something and nothing central and connected it to sufficient reason. Treats nothing as a genuine alternative and depends on controversial principles for the final explanation. 7.9/10

Martin Heidegger (1929)

Gives nothingness existential and phenomenological depth rather than reducing it to a mere object. Not designed as a logical proof about absolute ontological absence; difficult to compare directly. 7.4/10

FINAL EVALUATION**REFINED HAIMESIAN ARGUMENT: 8.9 / 10**

Judgment: Among the approaches compared, this is the strongest concise analytic case against absolute nothingness. It ranks highest for its strict definition, three-part structure, quantifier analysis, and answer to the empty-world objection. Bergson remains the closest historical predecessor.