

Creation, Views of. Three basic views seek to explain the origin of the universe. Theists (see [THEISM](#)) hold that all things were created *ex nihilo*, “from nothing.” Pantheists (see [PANTHEISM](#)) believe the material universe arose *ex Deo*, “out of God,” an aspect of an impersonal God’s being, rather than the work of a cognizant being who acts outside of himself. Materialism (see [MATERIALISM](#)) affirms creation *ex materia* (out of preexisting material).

Materialists, including atheists (see [ATHEISM](#)) and dualists (see [DUALISM](#)), think that origins do not involve creation at all, if *creation* is defined as the executed work of a being. For comparison, however, materialism and [pantheism](#) can be joined under the rubric of creation. Materialistic origin can be called *Creation ex materia*, “from matter.”

Creation ex Materia. A materialistic (or dualistic) view of existing things usually asserts that matter (or physical energy) is eternal. Matter always has been, and for that matter, always will be. As the physicist claims in the first law of thermodynamics, “energy can neither be created nor destroyed.”

There are two basic subdivisions in the “creation-out-of-matter” view: those that involve a God and those that do not.

God Created Out of Preexisting Matter. Many ancient Greeks (dualists) believed in creation by God out of some previously existing, eternal “lump of clay” (see [Plato](#), 27f.). That is, both God and the “stuff” of the material universe (cosmos) were always there. “Creation” is the eternal process by which God has been continually giving shape to the stuff of the universe.

[Plato](#) called matter the *formless* (or chaos). God was the *Former* (or *Demiurgos*). Using an eternal world of *forms* (ideas), God gave shape or structure to the formless mass of

matter. The Former (God), by means of the forms (ideas which flowed from the form), formed the formless (matter) into the formed (cosmos). In Greek terms, the *Demiurgos*, by means of the *eidōs* (Ideas), which flowed from the *agathos* (good), formed *chaos* into a *cosmos*. Elements of platonic dualism can be disassembled easily:

Matter is eternal. The basic stuff of the universe has always been. There never was a time when the elements of the physical universe did not exist.

“Creation” means formation, not origination. “Creation” does not mean bringing something into existence. Rather, it means formation. God organizes matter that is.

The “Creator” is a Former, not a Producer. So *Creator* does not mean *Originator*, but *Builder*. God is an Architect of the material universe, not the Source of all things.

God is not sovereign over all things. Such a God is not in ultimate control, for there is something eternal besides God. Eternal matter stands in dualistic tension with God, and he cannot do anything about it. He can shape matter within certain parameters. Just as there are limits on what can be made out of paper (it is good for making kites but not space ships), so the very nature of matter is a handicap. Both the existence and nature of matter place limits on God.

There Was No God to Do the Creating. A second view is generally called [atheism](#), although many agnostics (see [AGNOSTICISM](#)) hold nearly the same worldview. An atheist says there is no God; an agnostic claims not to know whether there is a God. But neither believes it necessary to posit God in order to explain the universe. Matter is simply there. The universe is ultimately all that exists. Even mind came from matter.

The strict materialist responds to the question of where the universe came from with the question: Where did God

come from? The materialist's worldview makes the question nonsensical, because the universe fills much of the conceptual place normally reserved for the Creator (see [CAUSALITY, PRINCIPLE OF](#)).

That creation came out of matter has been held by thinkers since the ancient atomists (see [ATOMISM](#)). [Karl Marx](#) (1818–1883) was the modern philosopher who sought to carry materialism to its ultimate conclusion in socialism (Marx, 298). A century later, astronomer Carl Sagan popularized the view on television and in popular books. Much of the Western world heard Sagan's creed: "*The Cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be*" (Sagan, 4). Humanity is simply stardust pondering stars. Human beings created God. As Marx put it, mind did not create matter; matter created mind (Marx, 231).

Granting the eternal existence of matter and motion, the atheist explains everything else by the doctrines of *natural evolution* (see [EVOLUTION, COSMIC](#)) and *natural laws*. Natural evolution (see [EVOLUTION, BIOLOGICAL](#)) works by the interaction of *matter, plus time, plus chance*. Even the complexities of human life can be explained by the purely natural laws of the physical universe. Given enough time, monkeys at a typewriter can produce the works of Shakespeare. No intelligent Creator is necessary.

The Tenets of Creation ex Materia. Nontheism's concept of origins can be summarized under four points:

Matter Is Eternal. As noted above, the central premise of materialism is that matter has always been. Or, as one atheist put it, if matter came to be, it came into existence *from nothing and by nothing* (Kenny, 147). The material universe is a self-sustaining and self-generating closed system. Isaac Asimov speculated that there was an equal chance that nothing would come from nothing or that something would

come from nothing. As luck would have it, something emerged (Asimov, 148). So either matter is eternal or else it came from nothing spontaneously without a cause.

The original materialists, atomists (see [ATOMISM](#)), believed matter to be a mass of innumerable indestructible pellets of reality called atoms. With the splitting of the real atom and emergence of Albert Einstein's theory of $E = MC^2$ (Energy equals mass times the speed of light squared), materialists now speak of the indestructibility of energy (the first law of thermodynamics). Energy does not pass out of existence; it simply takes on new forms. Even at death, all the elements of our being are reabsorbed by the environment and reused by other things. So the process goes on.

No Creator Is Necessary. Strict materialism demands the premise of atheism or nontheism. There is no God, or at least there is no need for a God. The world explains itself. As *The Humanist Manifesto II* put it, "As non-theists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity" (Kurtz, 16).

Humans Are Not Immortal. Another implication is that there is no immortal (see [IMMORTALITY](#)) soul or spiritual aspect to human beings. *The Humanist Manifesto I* rejected "the traditional [dualism](#) of mind and body... Modern science discredits such historic concepts as the 'ghost in the machine' and the 'separable soul'" (ibid., 8, 16–17). The strict materialist does not believe in spirit or mind at all. There is no mind, only a chemical reaction in the brain. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) defined matter:

The world (I mean not the earth only, that denominates the lovers of it "worldly men," but the *universe*, that is, the whole mass of all things that are) is corporeal, that is to say, body; and hath the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length, breadth, and depth: also

every part of body is likewise body, and hath the like dimensions; and consequently every part of the universe is body, and that which is not body is no part of the universe: and because the universe is all, that which is no part of it is nothing, and consequently nowhere. [Hobbes, 269]

Less stringent materialists admit the existence of a soul but deny that it can exist independently of matter. For them the soul is to the body what the image in the mirror is to the one looking at it. When the body dies, so does the soul. When matter disintegrates, the mind is also destroyed.

Humans Are Not Unique. Among those holding creation out of matter there are differences regarding the nature of human beings. Most accord a special status to humans, as the highest point in the evolutionary process. However, virtually all agree that humans differ only in degree, not in kind, from lower forms of life. Human beings are simply the highest and latest animal form on the evolutionary ladder. They have more highly developed abilities than primates. Certainly humans are not unique *over* the rest of the animal kingdom, even if they are the highest *in* it.

An Evaluation of Creation ex Materia. For a critique of dualism, see [FINITE GODISM](#). The atheist position is critiqued under [ATHEISM](#). Further, the evidence for [theism](#) is evidence against an eternal universe (see [COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT](#); [KALAM COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT](#); [THEISM](#)). Contemporary science has provided powerful arguments against the eternity of matter from the big bang cosmology (see also [EVOLUTION, COSMOLOGICAL](#)).

Creation, ex Deo. While atheists and dualists believes in creation *ex materia*, [pantheism](#) holds to creation *ex deo*, out of god. All pantheists fall into one of two categories: abso-

lute and nonabsolute [pantheism](#).

Absolute [Pantheism](#). An absolute pantheist claims that only mind (or spirit) exists. What we call “matter” is an illusion, like a dream or mirage. It appears to exist, but it really does not. This view was defended by two classical representatives, Parmenides from the West (a Greek) and Shankara from the East (a Hindu).

Parmenides argued that all is one (*see [MONISM](#)*), because to assume more than one thing exists is absurd (Parmenides, 266–83). Two or more things would have to differ from one another. But the only ways to differ are by something (being) or nothing (nonbeing). It is impossible to differ by nothing, since to differ by nothing (or nonbeing) is just another way of saying there is no difference at all. And two things cannot differ by being because being (or existence) is the only thing they have in common. That would mean they differ in the very respect in which they are the same. Hence, it is impossible to have two or more things; there can be only one being. All is one, and one is all. Nothing else really exists.

In the terminology of creation, this means that God exists and the world does not. There is a Creator but no creation. Or at least we can only say there is a creation by reckoning that creation comes out of god the way a dream comes from a mind. The universe is only the nothing else of which god thinks. God is the totality of all reality. And the nonreal about which he thinks and which appears to us is like a zero. It is literally nothing.

Shankara described the relation of the world to God, illusion to reality, by the relation of what appears to be a snake but on closer examination turns out to be a rope (*see Prabhavananda, 55*). When we look at the world, what is there is not reality (Brahman). Rather, it is merely an illu-

sion (*maya*).

Likewise, when a person looks at himself, what appears to be (body) is only an illusory manifestation of what really is (soul). And when one looks into his soul, he discovers that the depth of his soul (Atman) is really the depth of the universe (Brahman). Atman (humanity) is Brahman (God). To think we are not God is part of the illusion or dream from which we must awake. Sooner or later we must all discover that all comes from God, and all is God.

Nonabsolute Pantheism. Other pantheists hold a more flexible and elastic view of reality. While they believe all is one with god, they accept a multiplicity in the unity of God. They believe all is in the one as all radii are in the center of a circle or as all drops merge into one infinite pond. Representatives of this view include the second-century neoplatonic philosopher, [Plotinus](#) (c. 205–270), the modern philosopher, [Benedict Spinoza](#) (1632–1677), and the contemporary Hindu, Radhakrishnan.

According to nonabsolute [pantheism](#), there are many things in the world, but they all spring from the essence of the One (god). The many are in the One, but the One is not in the many. That is, all creatures are part of the Creator. They come from him the way a flower unfolds from a seed or sparks come from a fire. Creatures are simply many drops that splash up from the Infinite pond, only to eventually drop back in and blend with the All. All things come from God, are part of God, and merge back into God. Technically speaking, for the pantheist, there is no creation but only an [emanation](#) of all things from God. The universe was not made out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). nor out of something preexisting (*ex materia*). It was made out of God (*ex deo*).

Significant elements in this pantheistic view of origins can be briefly outlined:

There is no absolute distinction between Creator and creation. Creator and creation are one. They may differ in perspective, as two sides of a saucer, or relationally, as cause to effect. But creator and creation are no more different than the reflection in a pond differs from the swan swimming on it. One is a mirror image of the other, real thing. Even for those who believe the world is real, Creator and creation are simply two sides of the same coin. There is no real difference between them.

The relationship between Creator and creation is eternal. Pantheists believe that God caused the world, but they insist that he has been causing it forever, just as rays shine forever from an eternal sun. The universe is as old as God. Just as one stone could rest forever on another in an eternal world, so the world could be dependent on God forever.

The world is made of the same substance as God. Pantheists believe God and the world are of the same substance. Both are comprised of god-stuff. The creation is part of the Creator. It is one in nature with God. God is water. God is trees. As Marilyn Ferguson put it, when milk is poured into cereal, God is poured into God (Ferguson, 382)! Ultimately there is only one substance, one stuff in the universe, and it is divine. We are all made of it, so we are all God.

Humanity Is God. If all of creation is the emanation of God, then so is mankind. The pop theologian of New Age pantheism, Shirley MacLaine, believes one can say with equal truthfulness, “*I am God*,” or “*I am Christ*,” or “*I am that I am*” (MacLaine, 112). In her television special miniseries, “*Out on a Limb*” (January 1987), she waved to the ocean and proclaimed, “*I am God. I am God!*” Lord Maitreya, believed by many to be the “*Christ*” of the New Age, declared through Benjamin Creme, his press agent, “*My purpose is to show man that he need fear no more, that all of Light and*

truth rests within his heart, that when this simple fact is known man will become God.”

An Evaluation of Creation ex Deo. There are several ways to evaluate *ex deo* creation. Since it is part of a pantheistic worldview, the criticisms of [pantheism](#) apply to it. For example, there is a real distinction between the finite and the infinite, the contingent and the necessary, the changing and the unchanging. And since I am not a necessary or unchanging Being, then I must be a contingent being. But a contingent being is one that *can* not be. And such a being actually exists only because it was caused to exist by God where otherwise it would not have existed. In short, it exists out of nothing (*ex nihilo*).

Second, as the kalam cosmological argument shows, the universe is not eternal. Hence, it came to be. But before it existed it was nothing. Or, more properly, there was nothing (except God), and after he created the world there was something (besides God). This is what is meant by *ex nihilo* creation. Therefore, whatever comes into being (as the universe did) does so from nothing, that is, *ex nihilo*.

Creation ex Nihilo. *Ex nihilo* is from the Latin meaning “from or out of nothing.” It is the theistic view of origins that affirms that God brought the universe into existence without using preexisting material. [Theism](#) declares that only God is eternal and that he brought everything else into being without the use of preexisting material and without making the universe out of “pieces” of his own substance. Rather, it was made “from nothing” (*ex nihilo*).

The Coherence of ex Nihilo Creation. Some critics contend *ex nihilo* creation is a meaningless concept. Others claim it is unbiblical, a later philosophical insertion into Christian thinking. The argument that *ex nihilo* creation is incoherent

goes like this:

1. To create “out of” implies preexisting material.
2. But *ex nihilo* creation insists there was no preexisting material.
3. Hence, *ex nihilo* creation is a contradiction in terms.

In response, theists deny the first premise, pointing out that “out of nothing” is simply a positive way to state a negative concept—“not out of something.” That is, God did not create the universe out of any preexisting material. The dictum that “nothing comes from nothing” is not to be understood absolutely. It means that something cannot be caused *by nothing*, not that something cannot come *after nothing*. That is, something can be created from nothing but not by nothing. God brought the universe into existence from nonexistence. *Ex nihilo* simply denotes movement from a state of nothing to a state of something. It does not imply that nothing is a state of existence *out of which* God formed something. Nothing (other than God) is a state of nonexistence that preceded the universe coming into being. When atheists and pantheists use the preposition *ex* they mean “out of” in the sense of a material cause. By *ex* a theist means an efficient cause. Midday comes “from morning,” *after* morning but not literally out of it.

The Logic of ex Nihilo Creation. The basis for *ex nihilo* creation is twofold: First, the only logical alternatives are unacceptable. Second, it is the logical conclusion from the First-Cause argument for God’s existence (see [COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT](#)).

The three possibilities. That *ex deo* and *ex materia* creation are incompatible with [theism](#) has been shown. Hence, *ex*

nihilo creation must be true.

First of all, a theistic God cannot create *ex deo*. Since God is a simple being (see [GOD, NATURE OF](#)), he cannot take a “part” of himself and make the world. Simplicity means without division or parts. Thus, there is no way the created world can be a part of God. Such a view is [pantheism](#), not [theism](#).

Further, a theistic God is a Necessary Being, viz., one that cannot not be. He cannot come into being or cease to be. Creation is a contingent being; creation is a being that is but can not be. So, it is impossible for creation to be a part of God, since it is contingent and he is necessary. In short, a Necessary Being has no extraneous elements of his being out of which to make something. One might say God has no *parts* with which he can *part*. If he could part with them, they would not be necessary. If they are necessary he cannot part with them. So *ex deo* creation is impossible for a theistic God.

Further, a theistic God cannot create *ex materia*. For the belief that there is something eternal outside of God is not [theism](#) but [dualism](#). There cannot be another infinite being outside of God, since it is impossible to have two infinite beings. If there are two, they must differ, and two infinite beings cannot differ in their being, since they are the very same kind of being. Two univocal beings cannot differ in their being, since that is the very respect in which they are identical. They could only differ if they were different kinds of beings (see [ONE AND MANY, PROBLEM OF](#)). Hence, there cannot be two infinite beings.

And if there is one infinite and one (or more) finite being(s), then the finite being cannot be an eternal Neces-

sary Being. It cannot be necessary since it is limited by its potentiality, and any being with the potentiality not to be is not a Necessary Being. It cannot be eternal, since what is limited in its being never reaches to eternity. Therefore, it could not have preexisted forever (see [GOD, EVIDENCES FOR](#)).

However, if the universe is not eternal, and if God cannot create out of himself. then he must have created *ex nihilo*, since there is no alternative. For a theist, *ex nihilo* creation is thus proven.

The Argument from the First Cause. The horizontal form of the cosmological argument (see [KALAM COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT](#)) argues that there is a beginning of the material, space-time universe. But if the universe has a beginning, then it has not always existed. This eliminates creation *ex materia* (out of preexisting material), since there was no material before matter came into existence. There was nothing, and then there was matter which was created by God but not from any preexisting matter. In other words, if all finite being came into existence by a First Cause who always existed, then “before” it existed there was nothing other than the eternal First Cause. Hence, all finite being came into existence out of nonexistence. 🍌

Elements of ex Nihilo Creation. *The Absolute Difference between Creator and Creation.* Christian [theism](#) holds that there is a fundamental difference between the Creator and his creation. The following contrasts will focus these differences.

Creator	Creation
Uncreated	Created
Infinite	Finite
Eternal	Temporal

Necessary Contingent
Changeless Changing

God and the world are radically different. One is Maker and the other is made. God is the Cause and the world is the effect. God is unlimited and the world is limited. The Creator is self-existing but creation is entirely dependent on him for its existence.

Some illustrations may help to further clarify the real distinction between Creator and creation. In [pantheism](#), God is to the world what a pond is to the drops of water in it, or what a fire is to the sparks that come from it. But in [theism](#) God is to the world what the painter is to a painting or the playwright is to a play. While the artist is, in some sense, manifest *in* the art, he is also *beyond* it. The painter is not the painting. Its maker is beyond, over, and above it. The Creator of the world causes it to exist and is revealed in it; but God is not the world.

Creation Had a Beginning. Another crucial element of the theistic view of creation from nothing is that the universe (everything except God) had a beginning. [Jesus](#) spoke of his glory with the Father “before the world was” ([John 17:5](#)). Time is not eternal. The space-time universe was brought into existence. The world did not always exist. The world did not begin *in* time. The world was the beginning *of* time. Time was not there *before* creation and then at some moment in time God created the world. Rather, it was not a creation *in* time but a creation *of* time.

This does not mean that there was a time when the universe was not. For there was no time before time began. The only thing “prior” to time was eternity. That is, God exists forever; the universe began to exist. Hence, he is prior to the temporal world ontologically (in reality), but not

chronologically (in time).

To say that creation had a beginning is to point out that it came into being out of nothing. First it did not exist, and then it did. It was not, and then it was. The cause of that coming to be was God.

Illustrating ex Nihilo Creation. There really are no perfect illustrations of *ex nihilo* creation, since it is a unique event that does not occur in our experience. We only experience something coming from something. Nonetheless, there are imperfect but helpful analogies. One is the creation of a new idea, which brings into existence something that did not exist before. We literally conceive it or conjure it up. We create it, as it were, out of nothing. Of course, unlike the physical universe, ideas are not matter. But like God's *ex nihilo* creation, they are brought into existence by a creative intelligence.

Another illustration of *ex nihilo* is an act of free will, by which a free agent initiates an action that did not before exist. Since a free choice (see [FREE WILL](#)) is self-determined, it did not spring from previous conditions. Hence, much like *ex nihilo*, it does not flow from previous states. Rather, a free choice is not determined by anything else; it literally creates the action itself.

Support for ex Nihilo Creation. One of the oldest extra-biblical recorded statements on creation known to archaeologists, over 4,000 years old, makes a clear statement on *ex nihilo* creation: "Lord of heaven and earth: the earth was not, you created it, the light of day was not, you created it, the morning light you had not [yet] made exist" (*Ebla Archives*, 259). Creation from nothing is clearly expressed outside the Bible in [2 Maccabees 7:28](#). It says, "Look at the heavens and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things

that existed.”

While the Hebrew word for “creation,” *bara*, does not necessarily mean to create from nothing (cf. [Ps. 104:30](#)), nevertheless, in certain contexts it can mean only that. [Genesis 1:1](#) declares: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Given the context that this is speaking about the original creation, *ex nihilo* seems to be implied here. Likewise, when God commanded: “Let there be light,” there was light ([Gen. 1:3](#)), *ex nihilo* creation is involved. For light literally, and apparently instantaneously, came to be where previously it was not.

[Psalm 148:5](#) declares: “Let them [angels] praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created.”

Jesus affirmed: “And now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began” ([John 17:5](#)). This phrase is repeated in [1 Corinthians 2:7](#) and [2 Timothy 1:9](#). Obviously, if the world had a beginning, then it did not always exist. It literally came into existence out of nonexistence. In this sense, every New Testament passage that speaks of the “beginning” of the universe assumes *ex nihilo* creation (cf. [Matt. 19:4](#); [Mark 13:19](#)). [Romans 4:17](#) asserts *ex nihilo* creation in very clear and simple terms: “God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.” In [Colossians 1:16](#) the apostle Paul added, “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.” This eliminates the view that the visible universe is simply made out of invisible matter, since even the invisible created realm was brought into existence.

In the Apocalypse John expressed the same thought, declaring, “for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being” ([Rev. 4:11](#)).

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible declares the doc-

trine of God's creation of everything else that exists, other than himself, out of nothing.

Criticism of Ex Nihilo Creation. There are several important implications of creation *ex nihilo*. Most of them arise out of misunderstandings of the view.

It Does Not Imply Time before Time. It is objected that the view implies that there was time before time began, since it holds that time had a beginning and yet God existed before (a temporal term) time began. This objection is answered by the theist by pointing out that *before* is not used here as a temporal term, but to indicate ontological priority. Time did not exist before time, but God did. There was no time before time, but there was eternity. For the universe, nonbeing came "before" being in a logical sense, not a chronological one. The Creator is "before all time" only by a priority of nature, not of time. God did not create in time; he executed the creation of time.

It Does Not Imply Nothing Made Something. Sometimes *ex nihilo* creation is criticized as though it affirmed that nothing made something. It is clearly absurd to assert that nonbeing produced being (see [CAUSALITY, PRINCIPLE OF](#)). For in order to create there must be an existing cause, but nonexistence does not exist. Hence, nothing cannot create something. Only something (or someone) can cause something. Nothing causes nothing.

In contrast to nothing producing something, *ex nihilo* creation affirms that Someone (God) made something from nothing. This is in accord with the fundamental law of causality which demands that everything that comes to be is caused. Nothing cannot bring something into existence, but Someone (God) can bring something other than himself into existence, where prior to that it did not exist. So, for [theism](#), creation from nothing does not mean creation by

nothing.

It Does Not Imply “Nothing” Is Something. When the theist declares that God created “out of nothing,” he does not mean that “nothing” was some invisible, immaterial something that God used to make the material universe. Nothing *means* absolutely nothing. That is, God, and utterly nothing else, existed. God created the universe, and then alone did something else exist.

Conclusion. *Ex nihilo* creation is both biblically grounded and philosophically coherent. It is an essential truth of Christian theism which clearly distinguishes it from other worldviews, such as pantheism (*ex deo*) and atheism (*ex materia*). Objections to *ex nihilo* creation do not stand in the face of careful scrutiny.