

# Ancient Views of Creation and the Doctrine of Creation *ex Nihilo*

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Joseph Smith—prophet, seer, and revelator; translator of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham; revealer of the Doctrine and Covenants; organizer and founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; temple builder and city founder; mayor, lieutenant-general, and presidential candidate; husband and father—was nothing if not also a restorer of ancient doctrines. Joseph once claimed that many people opposed him because the doctrines he had restored set the teachings of traditional Christianity on their heads.<sup>1</sup> Some of Joseph Smith's unique doctrinal contributions deal with God's and Christ's nature and being, man's origin and destiny, the temple, and the sacred and eternal nature of marriage. To these should be added his powerful rejection of creation *ex nihilo* ("from nothing")—according to which doctrine God alone is eternal and uncreated while matter is not—and his affirmation of creation from preexisting matter. Abraham 3:24 in the Pearl of Great Price confirms the Latter-day Saint belief in creation from preexisting matter: "And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take *of these materials*, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell." In the King Follett Discourse, Joseph observed:

You ask the learned doctors why they say the world was made out of nothing, and they will answer, "Doesn't the Bible say He *created* the world?" And they infer, from the word create, that it must have been made out of nothing. Now, the word create came from the word *baurau*, which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means ... to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time He had. The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning and can have no end.<sup>2</sup>

Strikingly, recent scholarship has validated the Latter-day Saint rejection of the doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation. Scholars have noted that the doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation developed during the late second century to explain the resurrection of the body in response to Greek philosophy's belief in creation from preexisting matter. In addition, the concept is not clearly stated in the Bible nor is it found in the sacred literature of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia or in the writings of early formative Judaism, which later introduced the doctrine. Indeed, many theologians, as well as philosophers of science, also deny creation *ex nihilo*.

## Creation in the Sacred Literature of the Ancient Near East

### Ancient Egypt

In ancient Egyptian literature, "natural and artificial images of creation exist side by side." In these accounts, creation was said to occur through birth from or fashioning by divine beings, or even by divine speech, but such reports are not described as creation *ex nihilo* "in the sense that the Christian apologists would later develop in the second century."<sup>3</sup>

In Utterance 80 of the Coffin Texts, Shu describes his own birth from Atum:

He has fashioned me with his nose, I have gone forth from his nostrils; I put myself on his neck And he kisses me with my sister Mā'et. He rises daily when he issues from his egg Which the god who went up shining fashioned. (CT 80 I 35–36)<sup>4</sup>

In Papyrus Leiden 350, chapter 200, we learn that:

The sun himself is joined together in his body. He is the elder in Heliopolis. He is called Ta Tenen, Amun who came forth from Nun. His image is the upper part, His other becoming was among the Ogdoad. The prime one before the primeval Nonad, begetter of the sun. He completed himself as Atum, one flesh with him.<sup>5</sup>

The Egyptians did not have a concept of matter as did the later Greeks, but “presented in mythic terms the forces behind the formation of heaven and earth and traced their development in stages: 1) the waters of Nun 2) the ery sun 3) air 4) the earth and heaven.”<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, creation *ex nihilo* is never clearly outlined in ancient Egypt’s mythic literature nor is it likely that it could have been conceived of by the Egyptians.

### Mesopotamia

**“The dogma of a *creatio ex nihilo*,” observes Alexander Heidel, “was not shared by the Babylonians and Assyrians.”<sup>7</sup> Nor was it to be found among the Sumerians. The Sumerian *Praise of the Pickax* provides a view of creation from preexisting matter and through a separation of heaven from the earth:**

The lord brought into being the beginnings splendidly, The lord, whose decisions cannot be changed, Enlil, to make the seed of the kalam (=Sumer) sprout from the earth/the netherworld, To separate heaven from earth he hastened, To separate earth from heaven he hastened. ... He bound the pillar (of Heaven and Earth) in Duranki. He worked with the pickax: the light of the sun came out. He fixed (its) task: the work of hoeing. He fixed the pickax and the basket (to be carried) in the arms.<sup>8</sup>

The most significant creation account in Mesopotamian literature is the *Enuma Elish*, a text regularly recited at the Sumerian *zgmuk* or Akkadian *akītu* festival, the most important event in the Mesopotamian religious calendar. This festival constituted “the confluence of every current of religious thought, the expression of every shade of religious feeling” among the ancient Mesopotamian peoples.<sup>9</sup> The festival served to reestablish the proper pattern of nature—with order prevailing over chaos—and to reaffirm the gods, the king, and his subjects in their respective roles in the cosmic order. Traces of the *akītu* festival are found as early as the third millennium B.C. in the yearly rites of the Sumerian city-states of Ur and Erech, but no extensive evidence exists for its celebration until the period of the late Assyrian and Late Babylonian kingdoms (750–612 B.C. and 650–539 B.C., respectively). Among the documents recovered from this late period are priestly commentaries—“order of service” manuals prepared to guide the priest in the proper performance of the lengthy and complex rituals of the festival, which lasted through the first twelve days of Nisan, the first month of the Babylonian calendar. On the fourth of Nisan, in the temple of Marduk (the temple serving as a symbol of the ordered universe in the ancient Near East), the priest was instructed to read the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation story that recounted the creation of the world from sweet and salt waters. The *Enuma Elish* is not simply speculative but seeks to establish Babylon’s god, Marduk, as the chief of the Mesopotamian pantheon and to confirm the preeminence of the temple of Marduk over all other sanctuaries in the ancient world.<sup>10</sup>

According to the *Enuma Elish*, the gods Apsu (sweet-water ocean) and Tiamat (saltwater ocean) grow weary of humans continually making noise and of the lively activity of the gods—Anshar and Kishar, Lahmu and Lahamu, Anu (god of heaven), and Ea (god of the waters, wisdom, and the arts) and Damkina—and decide to take action against them:

They disturbed Tiamat as they surged back and forth, Yea, they troubled the mood of Tiamat By their hilarity in the Abode of Heaven. Apsu could not lessen their clamor And Tiamat was speechless at their (ways).

(Tablet I:22–26)<sup>11</sup>

Apsu is provoked to wrath, but the gods who have chosen Ea as their leader succeed in slaying Apsu and building a palace/temple (Akkadian *ekallu*) over his corpse. Damkina and Ea, having moved into their palace/temple, became parents to Marduk, who turns out to be greater than any of his predecessors:

Ea and Damkina, his wife, dwelled (there) [in the Apsu] splendor. In the chamber of fates, the abode of destinies, A god was engendered, most able and wisest of gods. In the heart of Apsu was Marduk created.

... She who bore him was Damkina, his mother. (Tablet I:78–84)<sup>12</sup>

Roused to anger on account of Marduk's noisy behavior and desiring to avenge Apsu's slaughter, Tiamat commissions Kingu to destroy the other gods. First Anu and then Enki are asked to lead the army of the gods, but both decline. Finally, Marduk is asked and he agrees to do it if he is given power to determine destinies:

They became very languid as their spirits rose. For Marduk, their avenger, they fixed the decrees. They erected for him a princely throne. Facing his fathers, he sat down, presiding. (Tablet III:137–38; IV:1–2)<sup>13</sup>

The gods in council agree to Marduk's demand. So assured, Marduk meets both Kingu and Tiamat in battle, where he defeats and slays them both. Marduk divides the corpse of Tiamat in two and creates the upper and lower parts of the cosmos from the pieces:

Then the lord paused to view her dead body, That he might divide the monster and do artful works. He split her like a shellfish into two parts: Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky, Pulled down the bar and posted guards. (Tablet IV:135–39)<sup>14</sup>

Marduk declares that Babylon is to be the new home for the gods and orders Ea to create man from the blood of the slain Kingu. The gods construct Babylon and a temple for Marduk and honor him with fifty epithets such as Marukka, Namtillaku, Namru, Ziku, and Tuku.<sup>15</sup>

## Creation in the Sacred Writings of Ancient Israel, Formative Judaism, and Christianity

### Ancient Israel and Formative Judaism

The late Professor Roland K. Harrison once noted that, although the notion of creation *ex nihilo* was “too abstract for the [Hebrew] mind to entertain” and was not so stated in the first chapter of Genesis, “it is certainly implicit in the narrative.”<sup>16</sup> The genial professor's observations notwithstanding, I find no clear evidence from the Old Testament of such a belief in ancient Israel. While traditional Christian biblical scholars have generally understood the meaning of the Hebrew verb *bārā'* to imply creation from nothing, Shalom Paul asserts that “the verb *br'* used in the very first sentence of the creation story does not imply, as most traditional commentators believed, *creatio ex nihilo* but a concept that ... denotes, as it does throughout the Bible, a divine activity effortlessly effected.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the very phrasing of the first verses of Genesis argues against the idea of creation *ex nihilo*. If the first clause in Genesis, *bērēšīt bārā'*, is understood as an adverbial phrase, the notion of creation from nothing implied in Genesis 1:1–3 disappears: “When God set about to create heaven and earth—the world being then a formless waste, with darkness over the seas and only an awesome wind sweeping over the water—God said, ‘Let there be light.’”<sup>18</sup> After an extensive discussion of these verses and against his own orthodox Jewish background, which accepts the doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation, Ephraim A. Speiser feels obliged to observe in an indirect way: “To be sure the present interpretation precludes the view that the creation accounts in Genesis say nothing about coexistent matter,” which amounts to a roundabout denial of *ex nihilo* creation.<sup>19</sup> Even a modern Catholic

theologian can no longer assert that “the first Genesis account expressly teaches that God created all things out of nothing. The notion of ‘nothing’ was unimaginable to the unphilosophical author.”<sup>20</sup> Job 38:3–11 NIV gives an important building analogy that supports the idea of creation from preexisting matter:

Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, “This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt”?

This passage in Job argues against creation *ex nihilo* and in favor of creation from matter—from sea and cloud. It uses the analogy of building—marking the dimensions, stretching a measuring line, setting footings, laying the cornerstones—and reveals an ambivalence toward the sea and a concern that the waters be controlled, concepts that are also found in texts from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Jewish texts in the Second Temple period also lack straightforward references to the doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation. An apparent reference to this teaching appears in the text of 2 Maccabees 7:28: “I ask you, son, look to heaven and earth and, seeing all things in them, be aware that God made them from non-being, and the race of men began in this manner.”<sup>21</sup> But in the phrase *God made them from non-being*, this non-being “does not express absolute non-existence, only the prior non-existence of the heavens and earth. They were made to exist after not existing.”<sup>22</sup> In Wisdom of Solomon 11:17, the author speaks of God’s “all-powerful hand which created the world out of formless matter (*amorfos hyle*).”<sup>23</sup> In his commentary on the Wisdom of Solomon, Joseph Reider asserts that the phrase *amorfos hyle* “is entirely foreign to Jewish thought and conception.”<sup>24</sup> Despite Reider’s claim that the Jews believed in creation out of nothing, while the Greeks believed in creation out of formless matter which was eternal, this was not, strictly speaking, true, since according to Jonathan Goldstein, “no known pre-rabbinic Jewish text can be proved to assert the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.”<sup>25</sup> The Jewish scholar David Winston, in his study of this verse in the Wisdom of Solomon, comes to much the same conclusion: an unambiguous teaching of creation from nothing is missing in Second Temple Jewish literature, but “even in rabbinic literature such a doctrine appeared at best only in a polemical context, and ... the more common view was probably the doctrine of creation out of primordial matter.”<sup>26</sup>

The earliest reference to *ex nihilo* creation was expressed by Rabban Gamaliel II (first and second centuries A.D.) in a debate with a “certain” Greek philosopher:

A certain philosopher asked R. Gamaliel, saying to him: “Your God was indeed a great artist, but surely He found good materials which assisted Him?” “What are they?” said he to him. “*Tohu, bohu*, darkness, water, wind (*ruah*), and the deep,” replied he. “Woe to that man,” [R. Gamaliel] exclaimed.<sup>27</sup>

This relatively early evidence of creation from nothing may easily be viewed as Gamaliel’s heated, polemical response to this philosopher, who followed the Greek philosophical tradition in believing in creation from preexisting matter. But even as late as the third century, Rabbi Yohanan maintained that God created the world by taking two coils (Hebrew *paqî’ôt*) of fire and snow (that is, preexisting material) and joining them together.<sup>28</sup>

Paul Copan, in an energetic but ultimately failed effort to defend the notion of *ex nihilo* creation, marshals a number of verses in the New Testament that seem to support the doctrine. He presents an entire litany of passages from the Epistles of Paul and the Revelation of John: “from him ... are all things” (Romans 11:36 NIV, NRSV); “through [Christ] are all things” (1 Corinthians 8:6 NRSV); “God who created all things” (Ephesians 3:9 NRSV); “by him all things were created” (Colossians 1:16 NIV); God is “the Alpha and the Omega” (Revelation 1:8 NRSV); and “you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Revelation 4:11 NRSV).<sup>29</sup> These verses, intended to support the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, instead could be used to support the view that God existed prior to the formation of the world and was its creator or organizer, to indicate that God is sovereign over the world, and (strikingly for Latter-day Saints) to suggest that Christ was the God of the Old Testament. These verses further imply that resurrection can be effected by God without resort to creation from nothing.

But Copan’s primary focus is on Hebrews 11:3, which states, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (Greek *eis to mē ek phainomenōn to blepomenon gegonenai*) (NIV).<sup>30</sup> But this passage may be interpreted in two ways, neither of which supports the notion of creation *ex nihilo*. The first denies that the cosmos originated from anything observable but does not affirm creation from nothing.<sup>31</sup> This may be a response to Philo’s view of the visible universe (Greek *phainomenon*). According to another interpretation, the second part of this verse can also be rendered “so that the visible came about from the unmanifest.” This not only resonated with the Platonist view because the matter from which the world was created “lacked all qualities,”<sup>32</sup> but also squared with rabbinic notions, which consistently affirmed belief in creation from unformed preexisting matter.

Second Peter 3:5 reflects ancient traditions of the Near East: “But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and with water” (NIV). This verse from 2 Peter reveals a continuity with the ancient traditions of Mesopotamia of creation from waters.

### Early Christianity

Toward the end of the second century A.D., as if out of the blue, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* appeared. It was a position taken by the Christian apologists Tatian and Theophilus in the latter part of the second century and developed by many ecclesiastical writers thereafter, from Irenaeus to Augustine. The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* can best be understood as an effort to defend the Christians’ belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead, a notion that was inconceivable to Greek thought.<sup>33</sup> In Greek thought, matter was perpetually subject to change and could not become part of an eternal body. Humans had either to submit to the necessity of their own corruption or to try to escape from matter as immaterial souls. For Platonists, a hope of bodily resurrection was not only a deluded expectation of the impossible, but was also wrong-headed in that it sought to retain the body, the least inviting aspect of the human condition.<sup>34</sup>

Tatian, a native of Syria, was born of pagan parents. After much wandering and seeking, he became a Christian in Rome, believing that Christianity was “the only true philosophy.”<sup>35</sup> While in Rome, Tatian frequented the school of Justin Martyr. However, despite their close personal and professional connections, their lives and writings reveal stark differences. While Justin attempted to find correspondences between Christianity and Greek philosophy and regularly walked about clothed in a philosopher’s garb,<sup>36</sup> Tatian harshly rejected Greek thought. In his *Address to the Greeks (Oratio ad Graecos)*, Tatian underscores the basic premise of the doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation—that only God is eternal, while matter is not: “Our God does not have an origin in time: he alone is without beginning, while he himself is the beginning of all.”<sup>37</sup> Tatian develops this thought by observing that “neither is matter without cause as is God, nor is it equal in power to God because it is without cause. It was generated and it was not generated by anyone else. ... Therefore, we believe that there will be a resurrection of bodies after the consummation of everything.”<sup>38</sup> And on the subject of the resurrection, Tatian observes that God would completely restore the individual’s body to its original state.<sup>39</sup>

Theophilus of Antioch was born of pagan parents near the Euphrates in Syria and received a Greek education. He became a convert to Christianity as an adult, after serious study and reflection: “Do not be skeptical but believe; for I myself also used to disbelieve that this (the resurrection of the dead) would take place; but now, having taken these things into consideration, I believe.”<sup>40</sup>

Theophilus’s writings reveal his powerful opposition to Greek thought on creation: “Even the human artisan when he receives material from someone, makes whatever he wants from it. The power of God is seen in this, that he made what he wanted from the non-existent” (Greek *ex ouk ontōn*).<sup>41</sup> In contrast to earlier examples (such as 2 Maccabees 7:28), this use of *ex ouk ontōn* does not mean eternity of matter but expresses the notion of creation *ex nihilo*.<sup>42</sup> Theophilus rebuts the Greek concept of creation (possibly Plato in *Timaeus* 28c), according to which both God and matter are uncreated and coeternal, and he vigorously defends the idea of *ex nihilo* creation with the observation that, if both God and matter were uncreated, eternal, and immutable, God’s absolute sovereignty would be compromised.<sup>43</sup>

Irenaeus was perhaps the greatest and most influential Christian writer of the later second century, less because he was an original thinker than because he was a vigorous systematizer and relentless defender of Christianity. Irenaeus was born in Asia Minor, possibly Smyrna, in the middle of the second century. For unknown reasons he was sent from Asia Minor to Gaul, where he became bishop of Lyon (Lugdunum). In his tractate *Against Heresies* (*Adversus haereses*), written in Greek, Irenaeus summarizes the argument for *ex nihilo* creation with the observation: “We will not err in saying this about the substance of matter, that God brought it forth.”<sup>44</sup>

Tertullian, like Augustine a native of North Africa, was the first of the church fathers to write in Latin and the writer to set the theological tone in Western Christianity about *ex nihilo* creation. In his dispute with Hermogenes, Tertullian framed his defense of *ex nihilo* creation in a *reductio ad absurdum* argument: if the good does not derive from matter<sup>45</sup> and since (in Hermogenes’ view) matter is evil and not from God, and since (again, according to Hermogenes’ view) nothing could derive from God’s substance, then the good—and all other things—must derive from nothing at all.

While Tertullian set the tone and provided the conceptual and theological framework for Latin Christianity, Augustine was its “seal”: Augustine’s concepts were definitive for Catholic Christianity for centuries to follow. His views on creation were no exception. But whereas *ex nihilo* creation was introduced as an explanation for the bodily resurrection of the dead, Augustine defended it as a means of arguing against the Manichaean account of creation. In one anti-Manichaean tract, Augustine observed that God must have made the region of light from nothing at all in order to free him from any limitations or corruptibility.<sup>46</sup> Manichaean dualism and belief in creation from preexisting matter undermined God’s omnipotence; an omnipotent God must therefore have created matter from nothing: “They thus believe that the creator of the world is not omnipotent; he could not have made the world unless some nature not created by him, like matter, had not helped him.”<sup>47</sup> Finally, Augustine’s assertion that a supremely good God created all things from nothing undercut the Manichaean claim that a necessary or efficacious principle existed.<sup>48</sup> The Manichaean challenge to Christianity disappeared within decades; however, the impact of Augustine on the subsequent course of Western Christian history was enduring.

## Conclusion

**With Augustine the wheel had turned. Thereafter the path was set for Western Christianity. The doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation received its classic expression in a declaration from the Fourth Lateran Council, which**

stated: “We firmly believe and simply confess that there is only one true God, ... creator of all things invisible and visible, spiritual and corporeal; who by his almighty power at the beginning of time created from nothing (*de nihilo condidit*) both spiritual and corporeal creatures.”<sup>49</sup> It remained thus even through the Reformation until the twentieth century, when a study of the ancient sources revealed a relatively late date for the appearance of the doctrine. However, it is still fiercely maintained by fundamentalist Protestants (who continue to rigorously exclude Latter-day Saints from Christianity because Latter-day Saints affirm a belief in the existence of matter before the creation), whose zeal for the doctrine, one suspects, may often be in inverse proportion to their understanding of it. However, an army of scholars and theologians—both Christian and Jewish<sup>50</sup>—either reject the doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation or are tentative and hesitant about it. Typical of these views is the observation by a philosopher of science, Ian Barbour, who straightforwardly declares that “Creation ‘out of nothing’ is not a biblical concept.”<sup>51</sup> Further, Barbour observes that the Bible actually states that God created the world from preexistent matter:

Genesis portrays the creation of order from chaos, and ... the *ex nihilo* doctrine was formulated later by the church fathers to defend theism against an ultimate dualism or a monistic pantheism. We still need to defend theism against alternative philosophies, but we can do so without reference to an absolute beginning.<sup>52</sup>

Though the doctrine of creation from nothing still has its defenders, these are rearguard actions by theological enthusiasts, members of great theological “yawning” associations, and participants in meetings of societies of Christian philosophy. Latter-day Saints affirm creation, the bodily resurrection of the dead, and the sovereignty of God. Their crucial—and, in modern times, virtually unique—contribution to the conversation is an affirmation of the eternity of the matter out of which the world was formed, a contribution that the ancient sources also make.

### Notes

1. See Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:262, and “Recollections of Oliver B. Huntington,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 4/7 (1893): 321.
2. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 6:308–9, also found in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 350–52.
3. J. Noel Hubler, “*Creatio ex nihilo*: Matter, Creation, and the Body in Classical and Christian Philosophy through Aquinas” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 14–15.
4. Translation from Raymond O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1978), 1:84.
5. Translation from Hubler, “*Creatio ex Nihilo*,” 13–14; cf. transliteration (206) and original text (209).
6. Hubler, “*Creatio ex Nihilo*,” 14.
7. Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 37 n. 73.
8. Cited in Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994), 31.
9. Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 313.
10. See Stephen D. Ricks, “Liturgy and Cosmogony: The Ritual Use of Creation Texts in the Ancient Near East,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 118–19, for a discussion of the Mesopotamian New Year festival.



11. This translation of the *Enuma Elish* is taken from Ephraim A. Speiser, "The Creation Epic," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 61.
12. *Ibid.*, 62.
13. *Ibid.*, 66.
14. *Ibid.*, 67.
15. See *ibid.*, 69–72 (Tablets VI–VII).
16. Roland K. Harrison, "Creation," in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1975), 1:1023.
17. Shalom Paul, "Creation and Cosmogony in the Bible," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 5:1059. Samuel G. F. Brandon, *Creation Legends in the Ancient Near East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963), 150 n. 2, makes a similar observation: "It cannot be inferred from this fact that the Priestly writer conceived of a creation *ex nihilo*, thus anticipating the later Christian formulation of this dogma; as we have seen, in the Priestly account the *tehom* preexists the first divine act of creation"; Wilhelm Foerster, "ktizo," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985); Paul Humbert, "Emploi et portée du verbe bara (créer) dans l'Ancien Testament," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 3 (1947): 401–22; Jutta Körner, "Die Bedeutung der Wurzel bara' im Alten Testament," *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 64/11–12 (1969): 533–40; Manuel Miguens, "BR' and Creation in the Old Testament," *Liber Annus Studii Biblici Franciscani* 24 (1974): 38–69.
18. Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 1:3.
19. *Ibid.*, 13.
20. Robert Butterworth, *The Theology of Creation* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 37.
21. Translation mine. Greek text in Solomon Zeitlin, ed., *The Second Book of Maccabees*, trans. Sidney Tedesche (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 166; see Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 90; Jonathan A. Goldstein, 2 *Maccabees* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 291.
22. Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 90; see Gerhard May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation Out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: Clark, 1996), 6–8; Georg Schuttmayr, "'Schpfung aus dem Nichts' in 2 Makk 7,28?" *Biblische Zeitschrift*, n.s., 17 (1973): 203–22; David Winston, "The Book of Wisdom's Theory of Cosmogony," *History of Religions* 11/2 (1971): 186–87 nn. 4–5.
23. David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979), 233.
24. Joseph Reider, *The Book of Wisdom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 145. Attestations of the phrase *formless matter*, in various permutations, are found in Aristotle, *Physica* 191a, 10; Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 1.328–29; Plato, *Timaeus* 50D; Posidonius F 92.



25. Jonathan A. Goldstein, "Creation Ex Nihilo: Recantations and Restatements," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38/2 (1987): 187.
26. Winston, "Book of Wisdom's Theory," 186.
27. *Midrash Rabbah* Genesis 1:9, trans. H. Freedman (London: Soncino, 1983), 1:8.
28. *Pirqa de Rabbi Eliezer* 3, discussed in fuller detail by Alexander Altmann, "A Note on the Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 7/3-4 (1956): 196.
29. Paul Copan, "Is Creation Ex Nihilo a Post-biblical Invention? An Examination of Gerhard May's Proposal," *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 17 (1996): 77-93. Copan's essay is an extended review of the English translation of May's *Creatio ex Nihilo*, although, unfortunately, the author strays down other byways.
30. Several others have held that the writer of Hebrews 11:3 believed in creation *ex nihilo*, including F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 281; A. G. Widdess, "A Note on Hebrews XI.3," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 10 (1959): 327-29; Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 312-13, 377-85.
31. William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 332; Arnold Ehrhardt, "Creatio ex Nihilo," *Studia Theologica* 4 (1951-52): 27-33; also found in P. E. Hughes, "The Doctrine of Creation in Hebrew 11:3," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 2 (1972): 64-77. In addition, two Jewish pseudepigraphic works, *2 Enoch* and *Joseph and Asenath*, appear to support the concept of *ex nihilo* creation. According to *2 Enoch* 25:1-2: "I commanded ... [that] visible things should come down from invisible," and *Joseph and Asenath* 12:1: "Lord God of the ages, ... who brought the invisible (things) out into the light," although the word *invisible* most likely refers to previously unformed matter rather than to creation *ex nihilo*.
32. Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 108.
33. Jonathan Goldstein, "The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35/2 (1984): 127-35, was the first to observe a link between the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in formative Judaism and the resurrection. In response to the critique of David Winston, "Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37/1 (1986): 88-91, Goldstein, "Creation Ex Nihilo: Recantations and Restatements," 187-94, reiterated his view that the development of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* was formulated to deal with the problem of resurrection but was at loose ends in explaining it. Goldstein took this position to explain the "two-body paradox," according to which one human could directly or indirectly consume the flesh of another, thereby rendering the resurrection of the other's body impossible. May, *Creatio ex Nihilo*, xii, specified the second century as the time when the doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation first appeared among Christians of that era to assert the sovereignty, omnipotence, unity, and freedom of God and as a response to the gnostic crisis. However, the late second-century apologists were responding to Greek philosophical concerns, not gnostic claims, and God's unity, freedom, and omnipotence were views shared with the Middle Platonists; see Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 103-7.
34. *Ibid.*, 102-3.
35. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Utrecht-Antwerp: Spectrum, 1975), 1:220.

36. Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.59; 2.8; *Cohortatio ad Graecos* 32.
37. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 4, in *Patrologia graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1857–86), 6:813 (hereafter PG).
38. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 5–6, in PG 6:817.
39. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 6, in PG 6:820.
40. Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 1.14, in PG 6:1045.
41. Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 2.4, in PG 6:1055.
42. Hubler, “*Creatio ex Nihilo*,” but contrast with N. Joseph Torchia, *Creatio ex nihilo and the Theology of St. Augustine: The Anti-Manichaean Polemic and Beyond* (New York: Lang, 1999), 11, who hesitatingly suggests that both passages speak favorably of *ex nihilo* creation.
43. Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 2.4, in PG 6:1055; on creation in Theophilus, see Otto Gross, *Weltentstehungslehre des Theophilus von Antiochia* (Jena, Germany: Pohle, 1895).
44. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 2.28.7, in PG 7:1:809.
45. Tertullian, *Adversus Hermogenem* 15.1–2, in *Patrologia latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1844–64), 2:234–35 (hereafter PL).
46. Augustine, *Contra epistulam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti* 24.26, in PL 42:190–91.
47. Augustine, *De fide et Symbolo* 2.2, in PL 40:182.
48. N. Joseph Torchia, “The Implications of the Doctrine of *Creatio ex nihilo* in St. Augustine’s Theology,” in *Studia Patristica: Papers Presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford, 1995*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 33:270. See also Augustine, *Contra Faustum manichaeum* 21.5, in PL 42:391–92; *De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 2.4, 6, in PL 32:1102–3, 1105–7.
49. “Constitutions,” Fourth Lateran Council, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 1:230.
50. The various Jewish scholars cited in this essay—Goldstein, Paul, and Winston—reject on historical grounds the concept of *ex nihilo* creation. In addition, others, including Barry S. Kogan, “Judaism and Scientific Cosmology: Redesigning the Design Argument,” in *Creation and the End of Days: Judaism and Scientific Cosmology*, ed. Norbert Samuelson (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1986), 97–156, and Norbert Samuelson, *Judaism and the Doctrine of Creation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), also reject the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.
51. Ian Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 384.
52. Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 144.