# The Principle of Non-Endurance

*The Argument Against "Nothing, Forever"*

Michael Welsh, Independent Researcher
recedingabysscosmology@gmail.com
Date: 13 December 2025
Version: Preprint / Unpublished manuscript

**Abstract**

The perennial question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" draws much of its force from a particular imaginative contrast: that strict absolute nothingness might itself have been the global condition of reality, "nothing, forever." This paper argues that this picture is conceptually incoherent. To address the classical Leibnizian contrast rather than a thin surrogate, I fix Strict Absolute Nothingness (SAN) as a term of art: the absence of any instantiated spacetime, laws, symmetries, entities, relations, modal profile, or representational framework. Weaker 'nothings' (vacuums, empty manifolds, law-only backdrops, modal containers) retain structure and merely relocate the explanatory burden one level up.

I formulate and defend the Principle of Non-Endurance (PNE): endurance, persistence, and temporal obtainment are success predicates with truth-conditions that presuppose an endurance-supporting framework at minimum, a domain of temporal indices, an ordering on that domain, and identity-tracking conditions underwritten by some regularity or invariant. SAN lacks any such framework. Consequently, any attempt to treat SAN as something that 'obtains' across an interval, at a first instant, or 'before time' in a meta-temporal register re-introduces precisely the structure SAN excludes; the familiar drama of an abyss that lasts and then yields to being is a composite built out of incompatible parts.

PNE is diagnostic, not cosmological. It does not explain why anything exists, nor does it deny the coherence of sparsely structured 'empty-world' scenarios; it shows only that the strict 'nothing, forever' contrast-class is not among the genuine options. Once that pseudo-option is removed, the original question is sharpened and reframed: not why being won against an enduring non-being, but why reality instantiates this kind of structural base rather than some other admissible base among the possibilities that remain.

## Reader's map, fast path, and scope

This paper is intentionally narrow. It does not propose a cosmology, a theology, or a substantive theory of modal space; it offers a diagnostic constraint on a familiar picture that quietly drives much of the Leibnizian vertigo: the idea of a global history of strict nothingness, "nothing, forever." The central move is to fix the strict target (SAN), make explicit what endurance talk presupposes, and then show that every attempt to treat SAN as temporally indexed, whether across an interval, at an instant, or "before" time in a meta-temporal register, reintroduces the very structure SAN excludes.

A fast path is available. Readers interested only in the core argument may begin with Section 2, read through Sections 8 and 11, and return to Sections 9–10 only if they want the broader dialectical positioning and the referee-style objection handling. Readers approaching the topic from physics should note that "nothing" in contemporary cosmology often denotes a richly law-governed vacuum

state; those uses are not in view here. The target is the strict contrast case that, if coherent, would make the classical question maximally pressing.

## 1. Introduction

The question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" has long been regarded as the most fundamental and disquieting of metaphysical puzzles. In 1714, Leibniz called it "the first question one has the right to ask," a question whose very articulation exposes the limits of reason and the scope of metaphysical explanation. Two centuries later, Heidegger treated it as a privileged aperture through which Being reveals itself, an encounter with the "Nothing" that, as he put it, shadows every affirmation. Parfit, writing in the late twentieth century, still regarded it as the deepest and most unsettling of intellectual challenges.

Despite this lineage, the same question has often been dismissed as confused, merely verbal, or a relic of pre-scientific anxiety. This ambivalence is revealing. The question's apparent profundity turns not on the term "something" but on the term "nothing," and specifically on how radically that "nothing" is conceived. When "nothing" is understood in an ordinary way, for example as a vacant drawer or an unoccupied region of space, the question feels trivial. But when pushed to its limit, when "nothing" is imagined as the total absence of any world, any structure, any possibility, the question regains the peculiar vertigo that has long accompanied it.

This extreme conception animates the classical problem. The thought that "there might have been nothing" is typically not the thought of a sparsely populated universe, or a world with only abstracta or necessary truths, or an empty spacetime. It is the thought that reality might have had a complete history whose content was simply: nothing, everywhere and at every time. It is this picture, a global history of pure absence, that gives the question its gravitational pull. For if such an austere alternative were genuinely possible, its non-actuality would seem to demand explanation.

This paper argues that the image of "nothing, forever" is incoherent. That "nothing, forever" presupposes that absolute nothingness itself could endure, that it could persist across a temporal manifold indefinitely in the way an empty but still structured universe might. Yet, when we consider that the predicates of endurance, persistence, or temporal obtainment are not free-floating. They presuppose structural background, including laws, symmetries, organisational principles, identity conditions, or at least a temporal framework within which the notion of "the same state at different times" can be applied. If absolute nothingness is defined strictly as the absence of any such structure, then the idea of it "lasting" or "obtaining forever" collapses. To make this precise, I formulate the Principle of Non-Endurance (PNE): a condition entirely devoid of law, symmetry, or structural constraint cannot meaningfully be said to endure, persist, or obtain across a temporal interval. PNE is a conceptual rather than an empirical thesis. It does not uncover new facts about origins but clarifies the conditions under which our concepts can be coherently applied at their limit. The remainder proceeds as follows. I fix the strict target conception (SAN), analyse the structural presuppositions of endurance-talk, formulate the Principle of Non-Endurance, and then test the main escape routes—instant, meta-time, and atemporal/modal reformulations—before closing with objections, positioning, and a constraint-style upshot.

**2. Absolute Nothingness: Why So Strict?**

The metaphysical weight of the grand question depends entirely on how radically we construe the notion of "nothing." We are not concerned with sparse or moderately deflated scenarios such as an empty cosmos governed by laws, an uninhabited region within a Lewisian modal space, or a universe populated solely by abstracta or necessary truths. Such conceptions are philosophically interesting in their own right, but they do not reach the limit-case that has animated the classical question since Leibniz: the contrast between a world structured in some way and the possibility of *no world at all*.

Before arguing against "nothing, forever," I fix the target. Weakened candidates for "nothing", an empty spacetime, a quantum vacuum, a bare manifold, or a law-only/modal framework, do not answer the classical question. They merely relocate it, because each still instantiates structure and therefore reopens the same contrast one level up ("why that residual structure rather than none?"). If the aim is the strict Leibnizian contrast, strictness is compulsory: the relevant baseline is Strict Absolute Nothingness (SAN), not a thin substitute.

This generates a regress pressure that is dialectically decisive. Either we allow the explanatory burden to climb indefinitely, why spacetime? why the laws? why the modal profile? why the logic underwriting 'possible'? or we permit a stopping-point. But any stopping-point that retains structure is already a stopping-point in being, not in non-being, and so it cannot count as the 'nothing' that animates the original question. Strictness is therefore compulsory if the project is to address the classical problem rather than replace it. SAN is the only candidate baseline that, in principle, halts the regress by leaving nothing further to subtract. That is precisely why SAN must be the starting point for any serious 'why anything?' dialectic, and why thinner substitutes cannot do the intended philosophical work.

The conception of absolute nothingness required for this discussion is maximally strict. It is the total absence of any instantiated structure whatsoever. It is not just the absence of matter, but the absence of the stage on which matter could be absent: no spacetime manifold, no metric, no fields, no laws, no symmetries, and no modal structure. Absolute nothingness is therefore not an empty domain within a background scheme. It is the absence of any background scheme.

Definition (SAN). By Strict Absolute Nothingness ("SAN") I mean: no concreta and no abstracta; no spacetime or temporal order; no laws, symmetries, or nomological regularities; no modal constraints that delimit a space of worlds; no domain of quantification; and no representational or evaluative framework "in which" a condition could be said to obtain. SAN is therefore not a thin physical state or a limit-case of dilution within an existing theory; it is a limit-concept marking the absence of any structure whatsoever.

Usage note. From this point onward I treat 'SAN' as a term of art. I will not repeatedly re-list everything SAN excludes. Later reminders that SAN is not a vacuum, an empty spacetime, or a modal framework are intended only as pointers back to this fixed target. This is designed to prevent the most common failure mode in the literature: dialectical drift, in which 'nothing' quietly relaxes into 'something very small' precisely when the argument becomes difficult.

Absolute nothingness is not a point in a state space, for there is no state space. It is not a member of a realm of possible worlds, for there is no such realm. It is not even an empty domain, because no domain exists. In brief, absolute nothingness is the complete absence of structure in every sense: no spacetime, no entities, no relations, no modal or logical space, no topological, geometric, or algebraic frameworks, and no temporal direction such as past, present, or future. It is the limit-concept marking the vanishing point of any world in which nothing exists and nothing is even *possible*.

This conception is deliberately austere, far more so than most contemporary debates about "empty worlds." Van Inwagen, Lowe, Baldwin, Effingham, and others have examined whether a possible world might have an empty domain, but their inquiries presuppose a functioning modal framework in which such worlds can be represented. Likewise, physicists such as Krauss call the quantum vacuum "nothing," even though it retains the full architecture of quantum field theory: Hilbert spaces, operators, symmetries, and laws. Theologians debate whether a world containing only God or only necessary abstracta could count as "nothing." Across these discussions, some structural background is always left in place.

These inquiries are entirely legitimate but do not confront the radical conception that drives the deepest formulation of the question "Why anything?". As soon as any background is granted, whether modal, logical, mathematical, ontological, or physical, the grand question simply relocates. It becomes: why this structure rather than some other? The pressure of the classical question arises only when we attempt to push all such structure away, imagining not an empty universe but no universe at all, not an empty manifold but the absence of manifolds altogether.

There are two immediate concerns about this strict definition. First, it may appear to encode incoherence from the outset. If absolute nothingness excludes the very frameworks within which our concepts operate, does the definition not simply stipulate its unintelligibility?

Second, if we subtract even logic and modality from the object-level conception, the modal question "Could there have been nothing?" appears to lose its footing. How can we meaningfully apply modal operators to a condition defined precisely as the absence of any modal structure?

Both worries dissolve once we distinguish meta-level discourse from object-level description. At the meta-level we continue to use logic, mathematics, and modality as tools for analysing a hypothetical situation in which none of these tools have any object-level instantiation. We are not claiming that meta-level reasoning collapses or becomes self-undermining. Rather, we are claiming that the hypothetical situation we are trying to describe would instantiate none of the frameworks that, within our representational practices, make persistence, identity, or possibility meaningful.

Meta/object-level licence. Throughout, I use ordinary logic and, where needed, modal vocabulary at the meta-level to test the coherence of hypotheses about SAN. This does not attribute logical laws, modal facts, or semantic structures to SAN itself. The question is whether certain descriptions are jointly satisfiable, not whether SAN contains a realm of propositions or a modal space. Keeping this separation explicit prevents the common slide from "we can speak about SAN" to "SAN must include the apparatus that makes our speaking possible."

This distinction is essential. It permits us to speak meaningfully about absolute nothingness without treating it as a "state" located within a modal or representational space. Absolute nothingness is not one member of a domain of possibilities; it is the boundary at which the domain itself vanishes. It therefore functions as a limit concept, marking the point where our representational apparatus encounters the very absence of the structures that give it application.

The tension that arises when we set this strict conception alongside the familiar imaginative image of "nothing, forever" is precisely what the Principle of Non-Endurance is intended to expose. The strict notion allows the question to be formulated sharply, and PNE will show that the picture normally attached to this definition cannot survive reflection.

### 3. Endurance and Its Structural Presuppositions

Before applying PNE to absolute nothingness, we should thoroughly examine the concept of endurance itself. Endurance, whether of an object, a state, or a condition, is never a brute, unexplained feature. It is always underwritten by structure.

We can see the dependence of endurance on underlying structure even in the most familiar physical cases.

A set of keys remains on the table only because gravitational and electromagnetic forces conspire, under Newtonian dynamics, to keep them at rest. The charge stored in a phone battery does not simply dissipate; protons and electrons are stabilised by conservation laws and selection rules that forbid the relevant decay channels. An ice cube persists in solid form because temperature, intermolecular forces, and lattice structure jointly maintain the integrity of its crystalline arrangement; remove that stabilising structure by raising the temperature sufficiently, and the solid phase vanishes. Even the apparently trivial case of an object remaining qualitatively unchanged from one moment to the next presupposes a substantial backdrop: a temporal framework that orders instants, identity conditions that allow "the same object" to be tracked across them, and dynamical regularities that make such tracking coherent.

Endurance, in short, is never primitive; it is a status conferred by structure. Without the relevant physical and conceptual scaffolding, the very idea of something "remaining as it is" cannot get off the ground.

Many philosophical theories of persistence confirm this. Endurantists claim that an object is wholly present at each moment of its existence; perdurantists claim that objects are four-dimensional entities extended through spacetime; stage theorists treat ordinary objects as momentary stages connected by counterpart relations. These theories differ profoundly in ontology but concur on one point: endurance predicates require a temporal ordering and structural conditions for identity across that ordering.

We can now state the dependence explicitly.

(D1): A state $S$ endures over an interval $I$ if and only if:
1. Temporal ordering: there is a temporal ordering $<$ on $I$.
2. Persistence conditions: there are identity or persistence conditions that allow tokens of $S$ at distinct points of $I$ to count as the same state.

3. Background structure: some structural background fixes when these continuation conditions are satisfied.

Call any structure sufficient to underwrite (1)–(3) an endurance-supporting framework.

(D2): Endurance predicates (e.g., "*S* endures," "*S* obtains throughout *I*") are well-defined only relative to an endurance-supporting framework.

The appeal to "structure" here is not an idiosyncratic metaphysical invention. Weyl's classic discussion of symmetry emphasises that the law-like content of a physical theory is encoded in its invariants: what remains fixed under the transformations that leave the theory's equations in place (Weyl 1952). Symmetries are not decorative; they articulate the regularities that make persistence and identity-through-change intelligible. For present purposes the point is minimal: to say that a condition 'remains the same' across times is already to presuppose some invariant or rule of re-identification, and that is precisely the sort of background SAN excludes.

Humeans and non-Humeans disagree about whether laws are primitive or derivative, yet both take endurance to be inseparable from some underlying structure, whether nomological, dispositional, modal, or even merely regular. In every case, endurance presupposes a framework of organisation within which identity across time can be meaningfully applied.

The abyss, by definition, excludes all such structure. It is precisely the scenario in which the conditions required for the intelligibility of endurance disappear altogether, and it is in this context that PNE becomes decisive.

**4. Methodological Clarification**

The role of PNE is diagnostic rather than explanatory. By diagnostic metaphysics I mean the disciplined use of conceptual analysis to identify where familiar metaphysical pictures rely on assumptions that cannot be coherently sustained. A diagnostic principle does not tell us what exists or why it exists. It clarifies which purported possibilities can be meaningfully articulated and which collapse under examination.

This methodological stance is appropriate to the present problem. The imaginative picture of "nothing, forever" has exerted considerable influence in the history of metaphysics, yet the picture gains its force only by tacitly relying on structures that its own definition excludes. PNE does not propose a positive theory of being, nor does it attempt to derive substantive metaphysical necessities. Its task is to reveal a conceptual inconsistency in a well-entrenched way of framing the contrast between being and nothing.

This form of analysis operates within familiar limits. It does not assume that human reason can dictate the structure of reality. It assumes only that certain combinations of concepts cannot be made coherent. When a purported metaphysical alternative generates instability or contradiction rather than intelligibility, the appropriate conclusion is not that reality is paradoxical but that the alternative was never a genuine possibility. The difficulty lies in the proposal, not in the capacity of reason to understand it. The standard is coherence, not imaginability: a possibility need not be picturable, but it must be stable without self-defeat.

Understood in this way, PNE works by identifying the structural presuppositions of endurance and showing that they cannot be satisfied under the strict definition of absolute nothingness. If the conditions required for the coherent application of endurance predicates are removed, then the description of a state as "obtaining throughout all time" becomes unintelligible. The failure is conceptual, not empirical.

Thus the methodological role of PNE is modest but precise. It removes an ill-formed option from the metaphysical landscape. It does not replace it with a positive theory of origins or with claims about what must exist. It simply redraws the boundaries of coherent metaphysical discourse, allowing inquiry to proceed without reliance on a picture that, upon inspection, cannot be sustained.

A further benefit of stating the project diagnostically is that it makes the burden of proof transparent. I do not need to show that SAN is impossible in every sense, nor that there must be a universe. The narrower task is to show that a certain picture, a temporally indexed condition of pure absence, cannot be coherently specified without reintroducing the very structural resources it denies. The relevant failure mode is therefore smuggling: an account which appears to describe SAN, but which tacitly relies on (i) an ordering, (ii) a domain of parameters, and (iii) a rule linking descriptions to those parameters.

This also fixes what I mean by "structure" in what follows. The notion is deliberately minimal. I count as structural any apparatus that makes "obtains-at", "earlier/later", "same again", or "possible vs impossible" well-defined. That includes, at a minimum, temporal indices and their ordering; identity or continuation conditions; and any nomological or modal constraints that determine which transitions, assignments, or worlds are admissible. Different metaphysical theories disagree about what grounds these facts (laws vs dispositions; Humean mosaics vs governing necessities; modal realism vs ersatzism). PNE is neutral on those disputes. It requires only that some such apparatus be in place for endurance or worldhood to be intelligible at all.

## 5. The Principle of Non-Endurance

The Principle of Non-Endurance (PNE) can now be stated succinctly. A condition wholly devoid of laws, symmetries, or structural constraints cannot coherently be said to endure, persist, or obtain across time. Therefore, absolute nothingness (as defined in Section 2) cannot be treated as a temporally extended condition or as a global temporal history of reality. PNE is not a metaphysical conjecture but a conceptual constraint. It does not claim that "enduring nothingness" is impossible in some modal sense; it asserts that the very combination of concepts involved is incoherent.

The target is the familiar and rhetorically powerful image of "nothing, forever." We imagine a complete story of reality in which, at every time and everywhere, nothing exists, no events occur, no laws obtain, and this featureless condition persists without change. The alternative story, of course, is one in which a structured universe exists.

But the first story is not about absolute nothingness. The phrases "at all times," "everywhere," and "persists unchanged" each presuppose a temporal manifold, an ordering relation, and identity conditions across that manifold. An empty spacetime is still a spacetime. A lawless universe is still a universe with a manifold of points.

Once we take seriously the strict definition of absolute nothingness, the predicate "obtains forever" cannot apply. To speak of a state lasting is to presuppose exactly the structures that absolute nothingness excludes. PNE simply exposes the inconsistency.

PNE therefore rules out only the temporalised picture of strict absolute nothingness. It is consistent with sparsely structured 'empty-world' scenarios (as worlds, not as 'nothing'), with worlds that contain necessary frameworks and no contingent beings, and with the view that SAN is not itself a member of any modal space. It targets one misleading picture: a global temporal history of pure absence.

The Principle of Non-Endurance therefore excludes any picture in which Absolute Nothingness persists or endures across a temporal interval. A thinner possibility remains: that absolute nothingness might obtain not over a duration but *at a single instant*. The next section examines this alternative and shows that it fails for the same structural reasons.

### 6. Instants and the Impossibility of a Time of Nothingness

The Principle of Non-Endurance (PNE) rules out the idea that absolute nothingness can endure across any temporal interval. Predicates such as "remains," "lasts," or "continues" require a background of temporal ordering, persistence conditions, and structural relations of the kind described in (D1) and (D2). Absolute Nothingness is defined as the absence of all such structure, so it cannot support any kind of temporal endurance.

A more cautious proposal attempts to avoid this conclusion. Even if nothingness cannot persist over an interval such as $I = [t_1, t_2]$, one might suggest that it could nevertheless obtain at a single instant. This section shows that the punctual variant fails for the same reasons that undermine the interval version. To locate absolute nothingness at an instant, one must employ the grammar of temporal predication. That grammar already presupposes structural resources that Absolute Nothingness, by definition, lacks.

To see this, consider what an instant is. Both philosophy and physics treat an instant as a structural point within a temporal ordering, not as an independent metaphysical atom. Aristotle described the present, or "now," as a boundary of time rather than a part of it. He wrote that "the now is like a boundary of time; it is not a part of time" (Physics IV, 218a). A boundary is intelligible only within a domain that it bounds. Thus the meaningfulness of any instant $t_0$ requires its place within an organised sequence of temporal positions.

Even the thinnest conception of a temporal index requires three elements. First, an ordering relation that distinguishes earlier from later and that situates $t_0$ within a series.
Second, a domain of temporal parameters within which $t_0$ is defined at all. Third, a rule of evaluation or assignment that links states or conditions to parameters of the domain.
Together these elements form the minimal structural framework within which any discourse about time, instants, or the state at $t_0$ becomes meaningful.

Absolute Nothingness, however, supplies none of these resources. It contains no ordering, no domain, and no rule of evaluation. To say that nothingness obtains at $t_0$ therefore assumes the existence of a scheme of temporal differentiation within which $t_0$ can be identified. Once such a

scheme is in place, the situation is no longer one of Absolute Nothingness, since the scheme itself qualifies as a form of being.

This point does not depend on any particular theory of time. One common view treats time as a series of independently existing instants, but to describe such a series already presupposes a manifold of distinguishable points. Another view holds that time arises from relations among events, yet Absolute Nothingness contains no events, no relations, and no relata. On either understanding, there is no coherent sense in which one can speak of a time $t_0$ at which nothing obtains.

The logical form of the proposal reveals the problem with even greater clarity. A statement such as

$$\exists t_0 \, (SAN \text{ obtains at } t_0)$$

quantifies over a domain of temporal indices while simultaneously denying the existence of any domain or structural background. It treats Absolute Nothingness as if it were one value among the admissible assignments of a representational scheme, yet the scheme itself contains the structural commitments that contradict the definition of the Abyss.

One might attempt to simplify this by imagining a solitary instant, with no interval around it and no larger temporal framework. This does not help. To identify or characterise a single instant $t_0$ is already to rely on a principle of individuation, and such a principle presupposes structure. If the concept of Absolute Nothingness excludes all structure, it also excludes any condition under which $t_0$ could be identified or singled out.

The conclusion is straightforward. Absolute Nothingness cannot obtain at any time, whether across an interval $I$ or at a single point $t_0$. Temporal predication requires structure, and Absolute Nothingness is the absence of all structure. PNE therefore closes both the interval and the instant versions of the "time of nothingness" hypothesis. Nothingness cannot occur within time at all.

SAN, as defined in Section 2, lacks any spacetime manifold, laws, symmetries, modal structure, entities, relations, or evaluative framework. It therefore cannot satisfy any persistence or "obtaining-at-$t$" condition, since those predicates are intelligible only relative to a temporal domain, an ordering on that domain, and a rule of evaluation connecting states to indices. The upshot is not that absolute nothingness undergoes a change *within* time, but that the very availability of temporal predication is already the presence of structure. If time is in play, SAN is not.

This yields the correct origin reading. If SAN cannot be located at any time, then it cannot be the content of an initial moment either. The beginning is therefore not a temporal transition from abyss to being. It is the onset of the first physically meaningful time-domain itself. Let $t_0$ denote the first time of reality in the model. By the foregoing argument, absolute nothingness does not obtain at $t_0$; $t_0$ is already a time of structure, because the applicability of temporal predication presupposes a structured domain within which $t_0$ can be identified.

At this point the defender of the classical contrast may try to relocate the temporal apparatus rather than abandon it. Even if there is no time in the world prior to $t_0$, perhaps there is a meta-temporal parameter relative to which $t_0$ is defined: a "before" that is not physical time but still allows one to

say that SAN obtained earlier. This is the meta-time strategy. It is dialectically natural because it preserves the intuitive drama of an abyss "preceding" reality while conceding that physical spacetime cannot host a time of nothingness. The next section argues that this relocation does not help: once any temporal index is introduced (physical or meta) structure has already been installed. And if one instead postulates a meta-time $t$ prior to $t_0$, that move likewise installs structure at the outset, since $t$ supplies a domain and ordering. Either way, the "nothing, forever" picture is blocked: there is no coherent temporal framework in which SAN can be said to obtain.

### 7. Meta-time and the 'Imposition' of Structure

A natural reply concedes the argument as stated while shifting levels. Even if Absolute Nothingness cannot obtain at any physical time t, perhaps it could obtain "before" the first physical time, relative to a background parameter $t$ (a meta-time) that is not itself part of the spacetime manifold. On this proposal, nothingness is not located at a time in the world; rather, it is indexed by a pre-world temporal ordering.

This manoeuvre, however, does not preserve SAN. To introduce $t$ is already to posit (i) a domain of indices, (ii) an ordering relation on that domain, and (iii) an assignment schema linking conditions to indices. But these are precisely the minimal structural resources that Section 6 identifies as necessary for any coherent "obtains-at" claim. Thus, the sentence "nothingness obtains at $t_0$" has the same defect as "nothingness obtains at $t_0$": it relies on a temporal framework that, if it exists at all, is itself a form of structure. In that case, the global condition is no longer SAN, since a domain and ordering are already in place.

Formally, the meta-time proposal has the same shape as the instant proposal. One posits a parameter set T, an ordering relation < on $T$, and an evaluation function E such that for some $t_0 \, E \, T$ we can write $E(t_0) \, = \, SAN$ (or, more carefully, 'SAN obtains at $t_0$'). But once $T$ and $<$ are admitted, we have an indexable framework within which sameness and difference across indices can be expressed. That is already enough to underwrite the very sort of 'obtains-at' claim the proposal wants. The point is not that $T$ must be physical time. It is that any $t$-like apparatus plays the relevant role: it supplies the backbone against which endurance- and origin-talk becomes intelligible. The diagnostic thus generalises: if the description requires an index space plus an evaluation rule, it is not a description of SAN.

The temptation, at this point, is to say that the meta-time apparatus is 'mere' scaffolding, an explanatory crutch that does not count as ontology. But that distinction cannot do the required work here. If $T$ and < are robust enough to support claims of earlier/later, 'obtains at', and 'for all $t$', then they are already a structure in virtue of which such claims have truth-conditions. If they are not robust enough, then the meta-time strategy collapses into metaphor and cannot underwrite the intended 'before' relation. Either way, the manoeuvre cannot recover 'nothing, forever'. Moreover, any attempt to ground the meta-time itself in a further meta-meta-time simply restates the regress pressure: the explanatory burden is pushed upward without ever reaching non-being. The only way to halt the regress is to stop treating 'before' as literal time-talk. Once that is granted, the classical image of SAN 'waiting' prior to reality dissolves entirely.

In this sense, meta-time makes vivid a stronger conclusion latent in the Principle of Non-Endurance: temporal indexability is structurally invasive. One does not first have strict nothingness and then add

time; rather, the introduction of any temporal parameter (physical or meta) already marks a departure from strict nothingness, because it provides the very framework required for persistence and predication. If one insists on a "before," one thereby concedes structure.

This yields the exact "time forces SAN to become structure" thesis, but in a way that does not contradict earlier claims: it is not a process within SAN; it is the claim that any time-parameter defeats SAN.


## 8. Atemporal and Modal Formulations

The collapse of the temporalised picture of nothingness, the thought that absolute absence might stretch indefinitely across a manifold of times, naturally encourages a retreat into atemporal or purely modal idioms. The critic may concede that the idea of nothing enduring forever is incoherent, yet maintain that the deeper question survives. On this view, absolute nothingness is still a metaphysical possibility even if it is not a temporal state. The suggestion is that there exists a possible world, call it $W_\emptyset$, in which no concrete objects, no laws, and no spacetime exist. The question then becomes why the actual world is not $W\emptyset$.

Under this reformulation, endurance appears to drop out of the dialectic. The puzzle is no longer why nothing failed to persist, but why the actual world contains any structure at all. At first sight, this seems to preserve the classical contrast. If the incoherence of the temporal picture arises solely from endurance predicates, then removing those predicates ought to rescue the modal claim.

However, PNE reaches beyond the temporal grammar of nothingness. When we examine the structural presuppositions of possibility in the same manner as we examined those of endurance, the modal formulation encounters a parallel difficulty. The concept of a possible world, in every major metaphysical framework, presupposes structure. A Lewisian world is a concrete spacetime; an ersatz world is a maximal consistent set of propositions; an actualist world is a structured state of affairs. In each case, a world is an organised entity that determines what is the case within it.

SAN, as defined in Section 2, negates all structure whatsoever, including the structures required for something to count as a world. The difficulty becomes clear when we formalise the modal space. Let the set of possible worlds be:

$$W = \{W_1, W_2, \ldots, W_n, W\emptyset\}.$$

where each $Wi$ represents an ordinary structured world, and $W\emptyset$ is proposed as the representation of SAN.

Two problems follow immediately.
It is worth making the first problem explicit, because it is easy to miss how quickly the modal idiom imports structure. If $W\emptyset$ is treated as a Lewisian world, then it must be a concrete spatiotemporal totality; but SAN excludes spatiotemporality by definition, so $W\emptyset$ cannot even be the right kind of item. If instead $W\emptyset$ is treated as ersatz—a maximal consistent set of propositions, a world-description, a state-space point, or the like—then $W\emptyset$ presupposes a space of propositions, a logic of consistency, and rules of entailment and incompatibility. Either way, "worldhood" is not a bare label: it is a role defined by structural relations. The container error is therefore not merely that $W\emptyset$ is

'empty', but that placing SAN inside the world-container requires precisely the modal and logical infrastructure that SAN denies.

1.  The first is the container error. If $W\emptyset$ is treated as a member of $W$, then it possesses the properties required for worldhood and membership. It stands in the logical and modal relations that define $W$, and it is individuated by the same structural principles as the other worlds in the set. This violates the strict definition of SAN as the complete absence of any instantiated structure. To include strict nothingness in a modal space is therefore to reinstate precisely the structural features that the definition of strict nothingness abolishes.

2.  The second is the empty world bait and switch. What is commonly offered as $W\emptyset$ is not radical non-being, but a structured state such as an empty spacetime manifold or a world containing only necessary truths. These models preserve logical, mathematical, or geometric structure and are therefore not candidates for strict nothingness. They do not address the radical absence that motivates the classical question.

A practical diagnostic is this: ask what makes the proposed $W\emptyset$ a determinate alternative rather than a mere absence of this-or-that ingredient. If the proposal permits talk of what would have happened, what could have been otherwise, or what is ruled out as impossible, then it already presupposes a modal profile. If it permits talk of sameness across worlds (e.g., 'the same laws could have held'), it presupposes identity conditions. And if it permits talk of a world at all, it presupposes a world-carving scheme. Those are substantive structures. Calling the resulting object "nothing" is therefore a terminological compression, not a faithful description of SAN.

A further point concerns the psychological basis of the modal intuition. When we imagine that there might have been nothing, we almost invariably picture an empty temporal expanse or a silent void. PNE reveals this image to be incoherent. Once this temporal picture is removed, the modal claim loses its intuitive grounding. What remains is not an alternative metaphysical possibility but a representational illusion produced by applying the grammar of possibility beyond the conditions that make it intelligible.

For these reasons, the modal retreat does not preserve the radical alternative required by the classical question. Just as strict non-being cannot endure because endurance presupposes temporal structure, it cannot function as a possible world because worldhood presupposes logical and modal structure. A strict and radical nothing cannot be located within modal space at all. The alternative to the actual universe is not an empty world but the cessation of modal discourse.

Thus the modal version of the classical question does not survive once PNE is applied. Removing the pseudo-option of absolute nothingness narrows the space of genuine alternatives and shifts the inquiry from a contrast between being and non-being to an examination of the varieties of being that remain possible.


**9. Situating the Argument**
The Principle of Non-Endurance does not emerge from a conceptual vacuum. It intersects with, and diverges from, several strands of contemporary metaphysical, cosmological, and theological inquiry,

yet coincides with none. Its role is diagnostic. It identifies and removes a long-standing conceptual illusion without erecting an alternative metaphysical edifice in its place.

The first relevant body of work concerns the possibility of empty worlds. Van Inwagen, Lowe, Baldwin, Effingham, and others have argued about whether the domain of a possible world can be empty. These debates unfold within the standard possible worlds framework. As Baldwin (1996) argues, subtraction-style arguments depend on background identity and totality conditions, and thus cannot reach SAN in the sense targeted by PNE. They assume that a modal space exists and ask whether one element of that space may have an empty domain. Even those who defend the possibility of empty worlds do so within a framework rich enough to include logical structure, modal relations, and abstracta. PNE diverges sharply from this tradition. It does not claim that empty worlds are impossible. Rather, it insists that absolute nothingness is not the kind of thing that can be modelled as a world at all. Possible worlds already presuppose structure. The strict conception of absolute nothingness removes exactly what the possible worlds framework requires.

A second relevant tradition is the therapeutic approach to the "why anything?" question. Rundle, for instance, argues that space and time are necessary, and therefore that nothingness is not a genuine metaphysical alternative. Parfit, in his late writings, likewise suggests that certain necessary features of reality may collapse the space of alternatives. PNE is more cautious than these therapeutic approaches. It does not claim that space, time, or laws are necessary. It claims only that certain ways of imagining nothingness are incoherent. Yet it shares with therapeutic metaphysics the ambition of dissolving a pseudo-problem rather than solving an authentic one.

The third strand is theological. Discussions of creatio ex nihilo have long struggled with the question of what "nothing" means. Aquinas famously insisted that creation is not a change, for it does not involve a transition between two states of a subject. There is no persisting substrate that first "is nothing" and then "comes to be something." This insight echoes, distantly but unmistakably, the spirit of PNE. Absolute nothingness cannot function as an initial state that precedes being. It cannot play the role of a temporally extended condition from which creation might be thought to proceed. Nevertheless, the present argument is strictly conceptual. It carries no theological commitments and offers no conclusions concerning the existence or non-existence of a creator.

Fourth, in cosmology, talk of "nothing" abounds. Krauss's "universe from nothing" relies on the quantum vacuum, a highly structured state equipped with a Hilbert space, operators, symmetries, and laws. The Hartle–Hawking "no-boundary" proposal posits a quantum cosmological model in which spacetime emerges smoothly from a region without classical geometry. These accounts, whatever their empirical content, are orthogonal to the strict notion of absolute nothingness. They treat "nothing" as a physical state within a law-governed framework, not as the absence of any structure whatsoever. They therefore pose no challenge to PNE.

Finally, grounding-based approaches such as Schaffer's priority monism, which treat the cosmos as fundamentally one entity, are orthogonal to the concerns of the present paper. They explore the structure of the fundamental something, not the purported possibility of nothing. Their metaphysical commitments are irrelevant to the status of absolute nothingness, though the dissolution of "nothing, forever" might indirectly encourage a renewed focus on the structure of being that remains.

A recent and independent line of argument (Martins-Gabriel 2025) also denies the coherence of absolute nothingness through the 'Structure-Base Principle' (SBP), though from a different direction: it appeals to conditions of logical evaluability and structural admissibility. By contrast, the Principle of Non-Endurance focuses on the temporal grammar of endurance itself, showing that persistence predicates cannot apply in a context lacking all structure. This distinction highlights a difference in key focus and methodology, positioning PNE as a complementary approach within the broader debate.

PNE is best seen as a conceptual intervention. It is not offered as a positive explanation of why anything exists, and it does not attempt to identify necessary beings, selection principles, or a mechanism that 'chooses' universes. Its role is narrower: it removes one influential but incoherent image, namely a global history of "nothing, forever." Once that picture is abandoned, the dialectical landscape changes. We are no longer comparing our structured universe with a temporally indexed SAN that could have "obtained" indefinitely. The remaining live alternatives are all structured in some way, so any residual "why" question must be framed within that space of structured possibilities.

What is distinctive in the present route is the focus on predicational commitments rather than on a direct modal verdict. Many discussions ask whether an 'empty world' is possible and then debate what counts as a world. PNE instead asks what must be presupposed to make certain forms of discourse, 'for all times', 'at the first moment', 'before the universe', 'there could have been nothing', even intelligible. This shifts attention from the contents of putative worlds to the structural scaffolding required by the grammar of endurance and evaluation. In that sense, PNE is compatible with a range of views about laws and modality, while still denying that SAN can serve as the classical contrast case.


**10. Objections and Replies**
**Objection 1: PNE smuggles in the very temporal framework it denies to nothingness.**
It might be objected that PNE presupposes a temporal manifold for nothingness, only to declare that such a manifold is incompatible with nothingness. This would indeed be circular if PNE were attempting to describe how nothingness behaves. But PNE is not descriptive. It is diagnostic. Its role is to expose the incoherence in the familiar way of imagining eternal nothingness. We are not saying that absolute nothingness "fails to endure" within a temporal manifold. We are saying that endurance predicates cannot be applied without presupposing structures incompatible with absolute nothingness. The inconsistency lies in the picture, not in the principle.

**Objection 2: Endurance might be metaphysically primitive, requiring no structural support.**
A metaphysical primitivist might claim that persistence could be a brute fact. Some conditions might simply endure without requiring laws or identity conditions. But even primitive endurance is a relation between a state and itself at different times. It presupposes a temporal ordering and the possibility of identity across that ordering. These presuppositions violate the definition of absolute nothingness. Primitive endurance therefore cannot be invoked to save the idea of "nothing, forever."

**Objection 3: A block universe advocate might claim that the four dimensional manifold could have been empty.**

But an empty spacetime manifold is still a manifold. It is endowed with topology, geometry, and structural relations. It is not absolute nothingness. The block universe view therefore preserves one of the weaker forms of emptiness but does not touch the strict notion at issue.


**Objection 4: By withdrawing logic and modality, the strict definition renders absolute nothingness unintelligible.**

This objection presses one of the deepest implications of the strict conception. If the instantiation of logical or modal structure is withdrawn, then perhaps the very thought "Reality might have been nothing" is unintelligible. I am sympathetic to this conclusion. Indeed, I regard it as a natural extension of the argument. But the official claim of this paper is more conservative. The claim is only that "nothing, forever" is incoherent. The stronger claim, that absolute nothingness is not a genuine candidate for modal evaluation, is left open.


**Objection 5: PNE offers no positive explanation; it merely removes a pseudo option.**

True. PNE is not an explanatory principle. It does not answer the grand question. It clarifies its contours. By removing the impossible alternative of eternal absolute nothingness, PNE shifts the focus from a contest between being and non-being to an exploration of varieties of being. This is not trivial housekeeping. Much of the rhetorical power of the question derives from the illusion that "nothing, forever" is a possible competitor. Once that illusion is dispelled, the nature of the remaining puzzle changes fundamentally.


**Objection 6: Meta-time can be introduced without importing structure.**

A critic may concede that nothingness cannot obtain at any physical time while insisting that a meta-time could still order a "before" and "after" without thereby adding any ontology or structure. On this view, $t$ is just a thin background parameter, so nothingness could obtain at $t_0$ without contradiction. But a domain of indices and an ordering relation is already a structural framework. To say "obtains at $t_0$ presupposes temporal differentiation and evaluability, exactly what strict nothingness excludes. A meta-time therefore does not preserve strict nothingness; it reintroduces the very structure the proposal sought to avoid.


**Objection 7: PNE overreaches by invoking laws and symmetries; time alone would suffice.**

It may be objected that endurance predicates require only a temporal ordering, not a law-governed or symmetry-based background. Perhaps one can coherently say "at every time, nothing obtains" without positing laws. But even granting a temporal ordering already concedes structure and so already defeats strict nothingness. Moreover, "obtains throughout" and "remains the same" are success predicates that require persistence-conditions across distinct indices. Whether these conditions are cashed out in laws, invariances, grounding facts, or brute regularities, some structural support is unavoidable. The appeal to laws and symmetries is therefore not essential to the minimal diagnosis, but it correctly highlights the usual physical underwriters of persistence.

**Objection 8: The classical question does not require 'nothing, forever,' so PNE targets a dispensable picture.**

A critic may argue that the real contrast is simply "world" versus "no world," not a temporally extended interval of nothingness. Even if "nothing, forever" is incoherent, the deeper problem remains. But the strict "no world" option must still be formulated as a candidate alternative, and every standard formulation, possible worlds, states of affairs, proposition sets, or other representational surrogates, presupposes structure. Once the temporal picture is removed, the supposed alternative loses not only its imagery but its coherence as an admissible rival. PNE therefore does not merely prune a rhetorical embellishment; it removes the dominant route by which strict nothingness is treated as a genuine contrast case at all.


## 11. Conclusion

In one sense, the Principle of Non-Endurance is a modest conceptual claim. Its key assertion is two-fold: that endurance requires structural support, and that SAN lacks such support entirely. Yet the consequences of this modest claim are profound.

The familiar image of "nothing, forever," the notion that reality might have had a global history whose content was pure absence, turns out to be a conceptual artefact produced by applying endurance predicates where they cannot intelligibly operate. Once that pseudo-option is removed, the classical question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" is not answered but transformed. It cannot be the question of why something exists rather than an eternally enduring void, because the latter is not a metaphysical possibility. Nor can it be the question of why being supplanted a temporally extended nothingness, since no such transition is coherently thinkable. The space of genuine possibilities is far narrower and more structured than is usually assumed.

A final corollary closes a familiar escape route. One might accept that absolute nothingness cannot obtain at any physical time while insisting that there is nonetheless a meta-temporal "before" in which absolute nothingness obtains. But any such $t$-framework reinstates precisely the structural resources, domain, ordering, evaluability, whose absence defines the abyss. Thus PNE is not merely a thesis about endurance within time; it implies that any attempt to place strict nothingness under temporal indexing (physical or meta) collapses it into structure. If the origin question is to be posed coherently, it must be posed within the space of structured possibilities, not against the pseudo-contrast of "nothing, forever."

PNE therefore eliminates the only genuine rival, namely the SAN whose eternal persistence is incoherent. It does not claim to explain why this structured world exists. It only explains why the classical "eternal nothing" is not among the options. What remain are the substantive questions internal to being. Why these laws, this Universe, this modal framework? Which elements of reality are necessary, and which contingent? Why does the universe exhibit this particular architecture rather than another?

These questions remain as profound as ever, although how we see them is altered. They are questions about the variety and form of being, not about a contest between being and an impossible non-being. In this way our viewpoint is clarified. The spectre of an eternally enduring nothingness can be dismissed. The mystery that accompanied the classical question does not vanish, but it moves

to a different place. One no longer confronts the imagined possibility that everything might have failed to exist in favour of strict non-being.

To make the upshot as explicit as possible: PNE delivers a constraint on admissible contrast classes for the Leibnizian question. If a proposed "nothing" can be indexed (at $t_0$, throughout an interval, or relative to a $t$-like parameter), then it already presupposes a domain, an ordering, and an evaluation rule, and so it is not SAN. If a proposed "nothing" can be packaged as a world in a modal space, then it already presupposes the logical and modal relations that constitute worldhood, and so it is not SAN. The familiar drama of an abyss 'obtaining' and then giving way to a structured universe is therefore not a deep metaphysical possibility but a representational composite built out of incompatible parts. In short: if you describe 'nothingness' using endurance grammar, "for all times", "at the first instant", "before the universe", "it lasted", you have already committed yourself to enough structure (a domain of indices, an ordering, and an evaluation rule) for those claims to have truth conditions. But that is precisely what SAN forbids.

What remains of the Leibnizian question is therefore a revised demand: not "Why being rather than SAN?", but "Why this kind of structure rather than another; why these laws, this modality, this order?" Those are still profound questions. But they are questions asked within the space of structure, not against the mirage of an eternal blank. PNE's claim is modest in form and radical in effect: it removes SAN-as-enduring from the menu of genuine alternatives, and with it the most beguiling image that sustains the thought that reality might have been nothing at all.

## References

Aristotle. 1930. *Physics*, Books IV & VIII. Trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye. In: *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Baldwin, Thomas. 1996. There Might Be Nothing. Analysis 56(4): 231–238.

Effingham, Nikk. 2020. The Possibility of Empty Worlds. In Non-Being: New Essays on the Metaphysics of Nonexistence, edited by Sara Bernstein and Tyron Goldschmidt, 93–112. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hartle, James B., and Stephen W. Hawking. 1983. Wave Function of the Universe. Physical Review D 28(12): 2960–2975.

Heidegger, Martin. 1929. What Is Metaphysics? In Pathmarks, edited by William McNeill, 82–96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Krauss, Lawrence M. 2012. A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing. New York: Free Press.

Leibniz, G. W. 1714. Principles of Nature and Grace. In Philosophical Essays, translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, 206–213. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989.

Lowe, E. J. 1996. Why Is There Anything At All? Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume 70: 111–120.

Martins-Gabriel, Thiago Tadeu. 2025. Why Nothingness is Nowhere to be Found: The Structure-Base Principle (SBP). PhilArchive

Parfit, Derek. 1998. Why Anything? Why This? London Review of Books 20(2): 24–27.

Rundle, Bede. 2004. Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Schaffer, Jonathan. 2009. Spacetime the One Substance. Philosophical Studies 145(1): 131–148.

van Inwagen, Peter. 1996. Why Is There Anything At All? Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume 70: 95–110.

Weyl, Hermann. 1952. Symmetry. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.