

THE COMING-TO-BE OF THE UNIVERSE

Kenotic Cosmogony and the Question of the Beginning

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Abstract

This treatise states the cosmogony of the Catharturgy Corpus: its account of how the universe comes to be. It rests on the key thesis, which establishes that every account of derivation requires limitation by dimension, and that the only possible ground of such limitation is the divine's free self-limitation, kenosis. From this the cosmogony follows: the universe comes to be by the kenotic self-limitation of the personal triune God — the outpouring by which the limitless freely takes on a bounded, dimensional, temporal mode that there might be a determinate other to which it gives itself wholly. The treatise then addresses the question of the beginning with deliberate care. It claims only what can be established from within: that this universe, this dimensional register, had a temporal beginning — a claim consonant with, though not dependent upon, contemporary physical cosmology. It does not claim an absolute beginning of all that is, and it leaves open, as its own perpendicular structure permits, the possibility of other universes, of cyclic or parallel registers, beyond what can be observed. Against this account the treatise locates the major cosmogonic alternatives: the Neo-Confucian self-limiting Limitless of Zhou Dunyi and Zhu Xi, which shares the system's intent and implementation while differing in its background view of how the universe comes to be; the Daoist spontaneity of ziran; and the Neoplatonic necessary emanation. The system honours these as serious accounts of the same structure, locates its difference from them precisely, and presses none of them into refutation, holding the disputed questions at their proper scope.

Cosmogony · Kenosis · The Beginning of the Universe · Self-Limitation · Neo-Confucian Wuji and Taiji · Zhou Dunyi · Zhu Xi · Ziran · Neoplatonic Emanation · The Big Bang · Multiplicity of Registers · Catharturgy

I. The Question and Its Ground

How does the universe come to be? The Corpus answers this question on a foundation already laid. The key thesis, in the treatise on determination and self-limitation, established that every account of derivation whatsoever requires limitation by dimension — that to derive anything from the divine is to introduce determination, and determination is limitation — and that, by the founding axiom that nothing can limit God but itself, the only possible ground of such limitation is the divine's own free self-limitation, which is kenosis. That thesis established the necessity: any coming-to-be of a universe requires kenotic self-limitation. The present treatise states what follows from it: the cosmogony itself, the account of how the universe in fact comes to be, and the careful answer the Corpus gives to the further question of whether and in what sense the universe has a beginning.

The cosmogony is therefore not a free invention but the working-out of the foundations. If creation requires kenotic self-limitation, then to ask how the universe comes to be is to ask how the kenotic self-limitation is enacted, and what kind of thing it produces. The answer is the subject of what follows: the universe comes to be by the kenotic outpouring of the personal triune God, dimensionally conditioned into a determinate and temporal order; and the order so produced has, from within, a temporal beginning, while what lies beyond it is left open.

II. The Kenotic Coming-to-Be

The universe comes to be by the kenotic self-limitation of God — the outpouring, the effluence that fills, by which the limitless freely takes on a bounded, dimensional, and temporal mode. This is not a withdrawal that vacates a space for the world, nor a necessary overflow that the divine nature cannot help but produce, but a free act of self-bestowal: the unlimited limiting itself that there might be a determinate other to which it can give itself wholly. The act is kenotic in the precise sense the key thesis established — to pour forth is to enter the bounded mode that pouring-forth requires, and for the unlimited to enter a bounded mode is self-emptying. The universe is thus the kenotic gift of a God who, in the act of giving it, takes on the limitation that giving it requires.

What this act produces is a determinate, dimensional order — and here the cosmogony joins the account of perpendicular ontology. The otherness of the universe is secured not by the divine's absence from it but by the dimensional conditioning of what is poured out: the universe is other than God because it is given its own register, substantially distinct and intersecting the divine perpendicularly, continuous with its source only at the intersection and dimensionally other in its own reach. The coming-to-be of the universe is therefore the coming-to-be of a dimensional register — a structured, bounded, temporal order — by the kenotic act that constitutes it. Creation is the giving of a register; the register is the universe; and the kenosis is the giving.

The universe comes to be by the kenotic self-limitation of the personal triune God: the free outpouring by which the limitless takes on a bounded, dimensional, temporal mode, that there

might be a determinate other to which it gives itself wholly. Creation is the giving of a register; the register is the universe; the kenosis is the giving.

III. The Question of the Beginning

Does the universe so produced have a beginning? Here the Corpus answers with deliberate care, claiming neither more nor less than can be established. It claims this: that this universe, this dimensional register, had a temporal beginning. Within the register, looking along its own time-axis, one arrives at a first — the register does not extend infinitely backward; it began. This is consistent with what the kenotic account already implies, for a temporal order constituted by a creative act is an order that begins with that act; and it is consonant, though not dependent upon, the findings of contemporary physical cosmology, which trace this universe's expansion to an initial state a finite time ago.

But the Corpus is careful about what it does not claim. It does not claim an absolute beginning of all that is. The temporal beginning it affirms is the beginning of this register, established from within this register; it is silent on whether other registers, other universes, prior or parallel or cyclic cosmoi, lie beyond what can be observed. And its own structure gives it reason for this reticence rather than mere caution. Perpendicular ontology holds that the registers of being are dimensionally distinct, and there is no principle in it that limits the kenotic outpouring to a single register. The one outpouring might constitute many registers — many universes, in parallel or in succession — each with its own temporal beginning as seen from within it. The multiplicity of registers is left open precisely because the system's structure neither requires nor forbids it. What can be said is bounded by what can be known: this universe, from within, had a beginning; what lies beyond this register is not foreclosed.

The Corpus claims only what can be established from within: this universe, this register, had a temporal beginning. It does not claim an absolute beginning of all that is, and its own perpendicular structure leaves open the possibility of other universes, cyclic or parallel registers, beyond what can be observed. The one outpouring might constitute many registers, each with its own beginning seen from within.

This scoped claim is not a weakening of the cosmogony but its precise statement. A bolder claim — that all that is began absolutely with this universe — would exceed both what can be observed and what the system needs, and would foreclose questions the system has no reason to foreclose. The careful claim is truer to the evidence and truer to the structure: the temporal beginning is a real feature of this register, and the larger question of multiplicity is held open as a question, not settled by overreach.

IV. Contemporary Cosmology, at Its Proper Scope

Contemporary physical cosmology bears on this account, and the relation must be stated carefully

so that it is neither overdrawn nor wielded as a weapon. The prevailing cosmology holds that this universe expanded from an initial hot, dense state a finite time in the past — that it has, in this sense, a beginning. This is consonant with the Corpus's scoped claim that this register had a temporal beginning, and the Corpus is glad of the consonance. But two cautions govern its use. First, the physical account establishes a beginning for this universe; it is silent on whether anything preceded it — a prior state, a parent vacuum, other regions — and serious cosmology treats such questions as open. The physics therefore supports the scoped claim exactly, and no more: this universe began; the rest is open. Second, and consequently, the Corpus does not wield the physical beginning as a refutation of the beginningless cosmogonies of the great Eastern traditions. Those cosmogonies concern a scope larger than a single universe — the character of coming-to-be as such — and a beginning established for this universe neither refutes them at that scope nor is needed to. The claims sit at different scopes, and to press the one against the other is to mistake their subjects.

V. The Cosmogonic Alternatives

The Corpus locates its account among the serious cosmogonies of the traditions, honouring them as accounts of the same structure and marking its difference from each precisely. Three are decisive.

The first and closest is the Neo-Confucian. The cosmology of Wuji and Taiji — the Limitless and the Supreme Polarity — set out by Zhou Dunyi in the *Taijitu shuo* and systematised by Zhu Xi, shares with this system both its intent and its implementation. Its intent is the same: to account for how a limitless ground gives rise to a real, ordered, determinate world — and notably, against the dissolutionist tendency of the Daoist and Buddhist traditions, Neo-Confucianism affirms the reality and goodness of the determinate world, as this system does. Its implementation is the same: the limitless limiting itself into the first determination, from which polarity and the manifold differentiate — a structure its own interpreters describe as the Limitless beginning to limit itself, which is proto-kenotic in all but name and theology. The two traditions differ in their background view of how the universe comes to be. The Neo-Confucians, like much of the Eastern tradition, landed on a beginningless, self-determining cosmos of perpetual alternation, and they framed the self-limiting as the cosmogonic self-determination of an impersonal principle, *li*. This system frames it as the free, loving, kenotic self-limitation of a personal triune God. The two share the same intent and the same structural implementation upon different metaphysical ground: what the Neo-Confucians reached by natural reason — a limitless that limits itself into a real, ordered, determinate world — this system completes with what it holds revelation to add, that the self-limiting Limitless is personal, triune, and gives the world in love. The relation is therefore not identity but a shared architecture on differing foundations, and the difference is not pressed into a refutation, for the beginningless cosmogony concerns a scope this system does not need to adjudicate.

The second is the Daoist. Classical philosophical Daoism, distinct from the Neo-Confucian appropriation of its terms, holds the cosmos to be self-so — *ziran*, spontaneously self-generating — with the Dao not a cause, force, or agent but the immanent pattern along which the self-

generation unfolds. This is further from the system than the Neo-Confucian account, for it has no creative act and no creating source at all, only spontaneous patterned arising; and its sage seeks to return to the undifferentiated, where the Neo-Confucian and the Corpus alike affirm the determinate world. The contrast is exact at one point: ziran is the cosmos arising of itself, with no giver; kenosis is the cosmos given by a self-emptying giver. The third is the Neoplatonic, the necessary emanation of the One, which the key thesis has already addressed: an overflow by necessity of nature rather than a free act, and one that, in disowning the limitation its derivations require, leaves that limitation ungrounded. Against all three the system's distinctive claim is the same: that the coming-to-be of the universe is the free, kenotic, loving self-limitation of a personal triune God — the structure others have approached by natural reason, grounded here in the axiom and completed in the persons.

Neo-Confucianism: the limitless limits itself into a real determinate world — shared intent and implementation, on the ground of an impersonal principle and a beginningless cosmos. Daoism: the cosmos arises of itself, ziran, no giver. Neoplatonism: necessary emanation, the limitation disowned. The system: the free kenotic self-limitation of a personal triune God — what the others approached by reason, grounded in the axiom and completed in the persons.

VI. The Cosmogony Stated

The cosmogony of the Corpus may now be stated whole. The universe comes to be by the free kenotic self-limitation of the personal triune God: the outpouring by which the limitless takes on a bounded, dimensional, temporal mode, dimensionally conditioning what is poured out into a determinate register substantially distinct from its source and intersecting it perpendicularly. This register — this universe — has, from within, a temporal beginning, consonant with the findings of physical cosmology, while the system claims no absolute beginning of all that is and leaves open, by its own structure, the multiplicity of registers, universes, and cycles beyond what can be observed. The account stands among the serious cosmogonies of the traditions as a shared architecture on a distinctive foundation, closest to the Neo-Confucian self-limiting Limitless in intent and implementation, differing from it and from the Daoist and Neoplatonic accounts in holding the coming-to-be to be the free and loving act of a personal triune God.

What follows from this cosmogony is the rest of the Corpus: the dimensional register so constituted is the world of the perpendicular axes, the projected lower registers, the Tree of Life imaged at every scale, the body and the soul, the natures and the wills, and the long work of catharturgy by which the determinate creature — real, affirmed, given in love — is healed and joined to the source that freely limited itself that the creature might be. The coming-to-be of the universe is the first act of that giving; everything the Corpus treats is its unfolding.

References and Related Papers

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thesis: kenotic self-limitation as required by any account of derivation); Nothing Can Limit God But Itself (the founding axiom); Kenotic Effluent Panapotheism: The System Stated; Perpendicular Ontology (the dimensional register and its perpendicular intersection with the source). Catharturgy Corpus, 2026.

Etter, Christopher E. Wuji, Taiji, and the Limitless Ground (the complete treatment of the Neo-Confucian and Daoist material on which the comparative section here draws). Catharturgy Corpus, 2026.

Zhou Dunyi, Taijitu shuo (Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate); Zhu Xi, on Taiji as the supreme principle (li). With the classical Daoist Daodejing and the concept of ziran; and the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation (Plotinus, Enneads).

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