

Research Article

The Monad (o): Solving the Problem of Zero. A Process-Philosophical Synthesis

Mesut Tez¹

1. Department of Surgery, University of Health Sciences, Ankara City Hospital, Turkey

Modern metaphysical inquiry has long struggled with the tension between static and dynamic views of reality. Leibniz's concept of monads as ultimate substances and Whitehead's process philosophy, emphasizing constant change and becoming, offer two distinct ontological perspectives. This article proposes a novel metaphysical synthesis between these traditions through the concept of the monad (o). More significantly, it offers a radical reimagining of zero—both mathematically and metaphysically—as the key to resolving ancient paradoxes of nothingness, creation, and singularity that have plagued scientific and philosophical thought. The monad (o) is introduced as a processual unit defined by transformative axioms ($x \oplus o = x'$, $o \oplus o = o'$) that preserve continuity while producing genuine novelty. Unlike classical mathematical zero, which represents absence and generates paradoxes (division by zero, singularities in physics, the creation problem), the monad (o) represents *minimal presence*—a foundational unit that transforms rather than nullifies. Every arithmetic operation involving the monad (o), while appearing to leave the quantitative value unchanged ($x + o = x$, $x \cdot o = x$), involves an ontological transformation: the entity becomes historically enriched, relationally reconfigured, and qualitatively novel. This distinction between mathematical appearance and ontological reality resolves persistent difficulties: the creation problem (how something comes from nothing dissolves when there is no nothing), the singularity problem (division by minimal presence is defined), the void problem (vacuum as plenum), and the negation problem (cancellation as complementarity rather than annihilation). The monad (o) thus offers both a bridge between Leibniz and Whitehead and a constructive solution to the problem of zero that speaks directly to contemporary physics, cosmology, and mathematics.

Corresponding author: Mesut Tez, mesuttez@yahoo.com

1. Introduction: Zero as the Unresolved Problem

The concept of zero has always occupied an ambiguous and paradoxical position in Western thought. In mathematics, it functions as a number like any other, participating in operations and producing determinate results. Yet metaphysically, it represents absolute absence—nothingness—which, as Parmenides^[1] famously argued, cannot be spoken or thought. This tension between zero's operational behavior and its ontological status generates persistent problems across multiple domains:

The Creation Problem: How can something come from nothing? If zero truly represents absolute absence, then any operation involving zero that yields a positive result ($5 + 0 = 5$) seems unproblematic mathematically, but becomes deeply problematic when extended to cosmological or metaphysical contexts involving emergence, creation, or causality.

The Singularity Problem: Division by zero produces undefined or infinite results, introducing discontinuities and singularities into mathematical models. These singularities often correspond to physical impossibilities or breakdowns in theoretical frameworks—from the singularities of general relativity to the infinities of quantum field theory.

The Void Problem: The concept of absolute vacuum has been repeatedly challenged by scientific progress. From ancient atomists to modern quantum field theory, evidence mounts that what appears empty is actually seething with potentiality and activity.

The Negation Problem: Zero as additive identity connects intimately to negation ($x + (-x) = 0$), linking zero to concepts of cancellation, annihilation, and disappearance—concepts that carry heavy metaphysical baggage.

These problems are not merely academic curiosities. They manifest concretely: in the singularities of black hole physics, in the renormalization difficulties of quantum field theory, in the paradoxes of set theory, and in perennial philosophical debates about non-being.

This article proposes that these difficulties arise from a specific conceptualization of zero as absence, and that an alternative conceptualization—zero as *minimal presence*—dissolves them. The proposed alternative is the **monad** (*o*), a concept that simultaneously bridges the metaphysical systems of Leibniz^[2] and Whitehead^[3] while offering a coherent framework for understanding creation, continuity, and the nature of being itself.

2. Zero's Paradoxes: The Scientific and Mathematical Aporiai

Before presenting the monad (o) as solution, we must examine more precisely how zero generates problems across disciplines.

2.1. *Mathematical Aporiai*

In mathematics, zero's anomalous behavior has been recognized since ancient times. The prohibition against division by zero is not a mere convention but reflects a deep logical difficulty: if $a/0 = b$, then $a = 0 \times b = 0$, which forces $a = 0$, and even then any b would satisfy $0 = 0 \times b$, making the operation indeterminate. This indeterminacy introduces singularities that ripple through mathematical analysis, geometry, and algebra.

The calculus, for all its power, was built on the problematic concept of infinitesimals—quantities approaching zero but never reaching it. The rigorous foundations eventually provided by Weierstrass and others did not eliminate zero's strangeness but merely domesticated it through limit operations. Zero remains the point where functions misbehave, where continuity breaks, where definitions falter.

In set theory, the empty set serves as foundation for all mathematics, yet its very emptiness raises philosophical questions: How can something be both nothing and the building block of everything? The empty set is not nothing—it is a set that happens to have no members, but it is still a set, still an entity. This tension between operational utility and ontological interpretation mirrors exactly the zero problem.

2.2. *Physical Aporiai*

In physics, zero appears in multiple problematic contexts:

Singularities in General Relativity: The equations of general relativity predict points where curvature becomes infinite—black hole singularities and the Big Bang. These are not merely mathematical artifacts but points where the theory breaks down, suggesting either incompleteness or the need for quantum gravity. Significantly, these singularities involve division by zero or limits approaching zero in ways that mirror mathematical indeterminacy.

Infinities in Quantum Field Theory: Quantum field theories are plagued by infinities arising from interactions at arbitrarily small distances (approaching zero). Renormalization techniques subtract these infinities in ways that work mathematically but raise philosophical questions about whether we are sweeping problems under the rug rather than solving them.

The Quantum Vacuum: Quantum field theory reveals that what we call "empty space" is actually a seething sea of virtual particles, zero-point energy, and fluctuations. The vacuum has structure, energy, and observable effects (Casimir effect, Lamb shift). Yet we continue to call it "vacuum"—emptiness—creating a conceptual disconnect between our language and our theories.

Cosmological Origins: The question "what came before the Big Bang?" presupposes a transition from nothing to something. But if the initial singularity is a point where our concepts break down, perhaps the question itself is ill-formed.

2.3. *Philosophical Aporiai*

The philosophical tradition has grappled with nothingness for millennia:

Parmenides^[1] declared that non-being cannot be spoken or thought—yet we speak and think of zero constantly.

Plato's Receptacle in the *Timaeus*^[4] describes a third kind—neither being nor non-being—that receives all forms but has no character of its own. This anticipates the monad (*o*) but lacks formal articulation.

Aristotle's Prime Matter underlies all change but has no form of its own—again, a kind of something-that-is-not-something, perpetually paradoxical.

Heidegger's Being^[5] is not a being, yet is that which enables beings to appear—a distinction that mirrors the zero/monad problem without resolving it.

Sartre's Being-for-itself^[6] is a kind of nothingness, a negation that constitutes consciousness. But this phenomenological nothingness differs from mathematical zero, leaving the connection unclear.

These philosophical treatments share a common pattern: they reach toward a concept that is not nothing yet not determinate being, but lack the formal resources to articulate it without paradox. The monad (*o*) provides those resources.

3. Whitehead's Path to Process: From Relations to Prehensions

Whitehead's intellectual trajectory offers the methodological resources for reconceptualizing zero. His early work in logic and mathematics, particularly his logic of relations and method of extensive abstraction, contains the seeds of a processual understanding of units.

3.1. *The Logic of Relations*

Whitehead's contribution to the logic of relations carried a philosophical revolution. Traditional Aristotelian logic is predicative: it analyzes propositions into subject and predicate, reducing relations to properties of subjects. The logic of relations treats relations as primitive and irreducible.

This has profound ontological implications. If relations are irreducible, then objects cannot be understood independently of their relations. An object is not a substance that first exists and then enters into relations; it is *constituted* by its relations.

Whitehead's later concept of *prehension*^[3] descends directly from this insight. An actual occasion is nothing other than its prehensions of other occasions. It does not *have* prehensions; it *is* their concrescence.

3.2. *The Method of Extensive Abstraction*

The method of extensive abstraction, developed by Whitehead between 1919 and 1922, constructs ideal entities—points, instants, particles—from concrete extensive relations of events. A geometric point is defined as an equivalence class of convergent volumes; an instant as an equivalence class of convergent durations^{[7][8]}.

This method offers a third way between realism and nominalism. Points and instants are not discovered ready-made in nature, yet they are not mere fictions; they are derived from empirical events by logical procedures preserving the reality of those events in the structure of the construction.

3.3. *The Lacuna: From Construction to Creation*

Despite these anticipations, Whitehead's British-period work contains a significant lacuna. The method of extensive abstraction is *static*. It constructs spatial and temporal entities from events but does not explain how events themselves become, perish, and give rise to new events.

Whitehead's later metaphysics of concrescence^[3] fills this lacuna. An actual occasion is not a static construction but a dynamic process of synthesis. Yet the continuity between extensive abstraction and concrescence remains implicit. The monad (*o*) makes this connection explicit while simultaneously addressing the zero problem.

4. The Monad (o): Definition, Properties, and Axioms

The monad (o) is defined as a philosophical heuristic—a conceptual tool for thinking about the relationship between logical construction and ontological concrescence, and for reimagining zero as minimal presence rather than absence.

4.1. Mathematical Definition and Apparent Properties

The monad (o) exhibits the following behavioral properties:

- **Additive Identity:** $x + o = x$
- **Subtractive Neutrality:** $x - o = x$
- **Multiplicative Neutrality:** $x \cdot o = x$ (unlike zero, which would yield 0)
- **Divisive Definition:** $x / o = x$ (unlike zero, which is undefined)

These properties position the monad (o) as a unique mathematical unit combining zero's additive role with one's multiplicative role, while remaining consistent across all operations.

Crucially, these mathematical identities are only *apparent*. They describe behavior within formal arithmetic but do not capture the full ontological significance. When an entity x encounters the monad (o), the quantitative result remains x , but the entity itself is *transformed*. It bears the trace of that encounter; its history, relational network, internal constitution are modified. The mathematical notation $x + o = x$ is a *phenomenal* description concealing a deeper *noumenal* reality.

4.2. Philosophical Axioms of Process

To capture ontological transformation, we introduce process-axioms supplementing the mathematical definition:

Axiom 1: Transformative Encounter

$$x \oplus o = x'$$

Every encounter between an entity x and the monadic operation o produces a novel entity x' . This models Whitehead's principle that prehension is never merely reproductive but always creative^[3].

Axiom 2: Creative Synthesis

$$o \oplus o = o'$$

The integration of two monads yields a new monad, qualitatively distinct from its predecessors. This models Whitehead's central principle: "The many become one and are increased by one"^[3].

Axiom 3: Intensification

$$x \otimes o = x'$$

Multiplication-like operation by the monad represents increase in intensity, complexity, or determinateness—not quantitative scaling. This models how prehensions contribute to subjective form^[3].

Axiom 4: Historical Preservation

$$x' = f(x, o)$$

The function f preserves the entirety of x while integrating it into a novel unity. Nothing is lost; everything is transformed. This embodies Whitehead's doctrine of objective immortality^[3].

Axiom 5: Temporal Asymmetry

For any entity x that is not itself a monad ($x \neq o$): $x \oplus o \neq o \oplus x$

For monadic self-interaction: $o \oplus o = o'$ (covered by Axiom 2)

The order of prehension matters. The past is given; the future is potential. This captures the irreversibility of time and asymmetry of causation^[3]. When $x = o$, the operation falls under Axiom 2, describing monadic self-relation.

These axioms are a *phenomenology of Whiteheadian becoming* rendered in symbolic form. They make explicit what remains implicit in Whitehead's British-period work: that construction of mathematical objects from events is itself a process of becoming.

5. Reimagining Zero: The Monad (o) and the Problem of Nothingness

The monad (o)'s most significant contribution is its radical reinterpretation of zero, resolving the paradoxes identified in Section 2.

5.1. The Ontological Interpretation of Arithmetic Operations

Each arithmetic operation involving the monad (o) corresponds to a distinct mode of ontological transformation:

Addition and Transformative Encounter:

$x + o = x$ (mathematically) corresponds to $x \oplus o = x'$ (ontologically).

Addition represents the most basic form of encounter: an entity meets the monad and is thereby taken up into a new relational context. The entity remains numerically identical but historically enriched. This is the primordial form of prehension.

Subtraction and Differentiation:

$x - o = x$ corresponds to a process of differentiation or discernment.

Subtraction models how an occasion distinguishes itself from its background, or how a prehended datum is abstracted from the continuum of potentiality. The entity remains quantitatively unchanged but now stands in relation of distinction from the monadic ground.

Multiplication and Intensification:

$x \cdot o = x$ corresponds to $x \otimes o = x'$.

Multiplication represents intensification of an entity through its prehension of the monad. The entity does not grow in extension but deepens in comprehension; its subjective form becomes more complex, determinate, intense. This is concrescence attaining greater satisfaction^[3].

Division and Self-Disclosure:

$x / o = x$ corresponds to a process of self-disclosure or objective immortality.

Division models how an entity makes itself available for prehension by future occasions. It opens itself to the monad, allowing its being to become datum for others. The entity remains quantitatively identical but now exists in a mode of availability, having passed from subjective immediacy to objective immortality^[3].

These four operations are aspects of the single process of becoming constituting every actual occasion. Together, they provide a formal lexicon for describing how entities enter relation with the foundational presence the monad (*o*) represents.

5.2. Resolution of the Creation Problem

The question "how can something come from nothing?" dissolves when we recognize there is no nothing. What appears as absence is always already presence—presence of a particular kind, presence that is transparent or non-manifesting under certain conditions.

The monad (*o*) is not nothing; it is the *minimal mode of being*. Creation is not *ex nihilo* but rather transformation and manifestation of what was already present in potential or contracted form. This aligns with Whitehead's insistence that creativity is the ultimate category, and that novelty emerges not from void but from synthesis of already-existing elements^[3].

In cosmological terms, the Big Bang is not a transition from nothing to something but a transition between modes of presence—from the contracted, potential presence of the monad (*o*) to the expanded, determinate presence of the cosmos. The question "what came before?" becomes ill-formed, not because there was nothing, but because "before" itself is a mode of presence we must reconceptualize.

5.3. Elimination of Singularities

The singularities that plague mathematical and physical theories when division by zero occurs are artifacts of a flawed conceptualization. If zero truly represented nothing, division by nothing should be meaningless—and indeed it is.

But the monad (*o*), as a unit preserving identity under division ($x / o = x$), eliminates singularities at the conceptual level. This is not to suggest that physical theories should simply replace zero with monad (*o*) in their equations; rather, it suggests that the appearance of singularities may indicate points where our models have encountered the limits of the zero-concept and need rethinking in terms of plenitude rather than absence.

Black hole singularities, for instance, might be understood not as points where density becomes infinite but as transitions to modes of presence where our concepts of "inside" and "outside," "before" and "after," require revision. The monad (*o*) provides a philosophical framework for such revision.

5.4. The Void as Plenum

Modern physics has progressively undermined the concept of absolute void. Quantum field theory reveals the vacuum as a seething sea of virtual particles, fluctuating with energy and potentiality. General relativity shows that even "empty" space has geometric structure and can be curved. The Casimir effect demonstrates that vacuum fluctuations produce measurable forces^[9].

The monad (*o*) makes philosophical sense of these findings: what appears empty is actually filled with *potential presence*, with being in its most transparent and non-resistant mode. The vacuum is not nothing; it is the monad (*o*) in its cosmological instantiation—the background of being upon which all determinate entities emerge.

Zero-point energy is not energy from nothing; it is the minimal mode of energy, the energy of presence as such. That it proves difficult to calculate or conceptualize reflects not its nonexistence but the inadequacy of our zero-based conceptual framework^[10].

5.5. Reinterpretation of Negation and Annihilation

In standard arithmetic, negation relies on zero as reference: $x + (-x) = 0$. This creates the impression that negation is annihilation, return to nothing.

With the monad (o), negation is reinterpreted as *complementarity*. The relation $x + (-x) = o$ means that x and its complement together constitute the minimal mode of presence—not absence, but balanced, neutral presence from which particular determinations have been suspended.

This aligns with process-philosophical understandings of opposition and contrast, where apparent contradictions are not eliminations but phases of larger concrescence^[3]. In physics, particle-antiparticle annihilation produces not absolute nothing but energy—a transformation, not a disappearance.

5.6. The Monad (o) and Contemporary Scientific Problems

Quantum Field Theory: The infinities requiring renormalization arise from interactions at arbitrarily small distances—approaching zero. If zero is reconceived as minimal presence rather than absence, perhaps these infinities reflect not physical reality but our mathematics' struggle with a concept that cannot bear the weight placed upon it. The monad (o) suggests that a process-oriented mathematics might handle these limits differently.

Cosmology: The initial singularity problem dissolves when we recognize that the universe's origin is not a transition from nothing to something but a transition between modes of presence. The "before" is not absolute non-being but the monad (o) in its most contracted form—a form that our concepts of time and space cannot grasp because they are themselves emergent from it.

Information Theory: In information theory, zero and one are fundamental bits. But zero here is not nothing; it is a positive state—a voltage level, a magnetic orientation. The monad (o) formalizes this: even the "off" state is a mode of being. Information is not inscribed upon nothing but is pattern of differences within a field of presence.

Complexity and Emergence: Theories of emergence struggle to explain how genuinely novel properties arise from simpler substrates^[11]. The monad (o)'s self-interaction property ($o \oplus o = o'$) suggests a model:

even at the most minimal level of presence, interaction produces novelty without requiring external input or pre-existing complexity.

6. The Monad (*o*) as Bridge Between Leibniz and Whitehead

Beyond solving the zero problem, the monad (*o*) mediates between Leibniz and Whitehead in three respects.

6.1. *Unity and Multiplicity*

Leibniz^[2] insisted that reality consists of simple, indivisible unities—monads. Whitehead^[3] agreed but insisted these unities are moments of experience, not eternal substances.

The monad (*o*) captures both insights. Like a Leibnizian monad, it is indivisible, fundamental, self-contained. Yet unlike a Leibnizian monad, it is not windowless. Its very nature is to enter relations that transform it and its partners. The axiom $x \oplus o = x'$ expresses this relational constitution. The monad (*o*) does not first exist and then encounter *x*; it is the encounter.

6.2. *Permanence and Flux*

Leibniz^[2] explained change through pre-established harmony—a metaphysical tour de force that explains change away rather than explaining it. Whitehead's^[3] actual occasions are nothing but change, yet he struggled to explain continuity.

The monad (*o*) offers formal representation of continuity-in-change. The entity *x'* is not identical to *x*, but it is the successor of *x*, bearing *x*'s past within its present concrescence. Axiom 4 ensures nothing is lost—Whitehead's doctrine of objective immortality rendered operational.

6.3. *Abstraction and Concretion*

Leibniz's monads are abstract, removed from causal flux. Whitehead's actual occasions are concrete, the very stuff of reality. Yet Whitehead's method of extensive abstraction^{[7][8]} proceeds oppositely: constructing abstract entities from concrete events.

The monad (*o*) captures this double movement. As operation of abstraction, it produces abstract from concrete: $x \oplus o = x'$ can be read as construction of mathematical entity from empirical events. As

moment of concrescence, it produces concrete from abstract: $o \oplus o = o'$ can be read as synthesis of prehensions into novel actual occasion.

Abstraction and concretion are not opposites but phases of a single process. The monad (o) is the operator of this process.

7. The Monad (o) and Contemporary Process Philosophy

Whitehead's work in natural philosophy was, in his term, a "pan-physics"—an integrated framework for understanding nature combining logic, mathematics, geometry, and empirical science^[12]. This project was transformed, not abandoned, by his turn to speculative metaphysics.

The method of extensive abstraction constructs spatial, temporal, and physical objects from events^{[7][8]}^[13]. The method of concrescence constructs all actual entities from their prehensions^[3]. The former is a special case of the latter.

If this interpretation is correct, Whitehead's process ontology is not departure from his natural philosophy but its fulfillment. The monad (o) is the link connecting them—the conceptual hinge between logical construction and ontological concrescence.

This has implications for contemporary process philosophy. The monad (o) invites us to ask: What would it mean to take seriously Whitehead's claim that "the many become one and are increased by one"^[3]? What would it mean to construct a mathematics of becoming rather than being^{[14][15]}? What would it mean to think of units not as substances but as processes, not as atoms but as drops^{[16][17]}?

These questions remain open. They are the inheritance of Whitehead's unfinished project and the task of process philosophy today.

8. Objections and Replies

Objection 1: What is the domain of quantification for x in the axioms? Axiom 5 appears absurd when $x = o$.

Reply: The axioms are not intended as a formal system in the mathematical sense but as a phenomenological ontology rendered in symbolic form. Quantification is not unrestricted; each axiom implicitly carries its own domain of applicability, specified by phenomenological context. Axiom 5

applies only when x and o are distinct in temporal status; when $x = o$, the operation falls under Axiom 2, describing monadic self-relation. This has now been made explicit.

Objection 2: Axiom 3 appears to follow from Axiom 2 if $x = o$.

Reply: While Axiom 2 ($o \oplus o = o'$) models creative synthesis of two monads through encounter, Axiom 3 ($x \otimes o = x'$) models a distinct operation: intensification through prehension of the monad. When x is itself a monad, we have both $o \oplus o = o'$ (encounter between monads) and $o \otimes o = o'$ (intensification through self-relation). These are not equivalent operations phenomenologically; the former emphasizes relational synthesis, the latter internal depth. They yield the same formal result but describe different aspects of becoming.

Objection 3: The paper engages minimally with recent literature, suggesting the topic lacks contemporary relevance.

Reply: The topic engages directly with active research areas: the metaphysics of zero^{[18][19][20][21]}, Whitehead's philosophy of mathematics^{[14][15]}, contemporary process thought^{[16][17]}, the ontology of vacuum in physics^{[9][10]}, and philosophical treatments of nothingness^{[20][21]}. These connections are now explicitly developed.

Objection 4: Replacing zero with the monad (o) would undermine mathematics.

Reply: The proposal is not to eliminate zero from mathematical practice but to reconceptualize its metaphysical interpretation. Zero remains indispensable as a computational and formal device. The monad (o) is a philosophical interpretation of what zero *means*—a reinterpretation resolving metaphysical paradoxes without altering mathematical operations.

Objection 5: The distinction between mathematical appearance and ontological reality is unnecessarily complex.

Reply: This distinction is precisely what allows the monad (o) to function both as mathematical tool and metaphysical concept. Without it, we would be forced either to abandon zero's mathematical utility or accept its paradoxical metaphysical implications. The distinction is not complexity for its own sake but necessary clarification.

9. Conclusion

The concept of zero, for all its mathematical utility, has generated persistent paradoxes across scientific and philosophical domains. The creation problem, the singularity problem, the void problem, and the negation problem all stem from a common source: attempting to give positive form to negation, to treat absence as if it were presence.

The monad (o) offers a way out by reconceptualizing zero as *minimal presence* rather than absence. This subtle shift dissolves ancient paradoxes: creation becomes transformation rather than *ex nihilo* emergence; singularities become indicators of conceptual limits rather than physical realities; void becomes plenum; negation becomes complementarity.

Simultaneously, the monad (o) bridges the metaphysical systems of Leibniz^[2] and Whitehead^[3], connecting Leibniz's insight that reality consists of discrete unities with Whitehead's insistence that these unities are events, not substances. It links Whitehead's logical constructions with his ontological concrescences, making explicit what remained implicit in his intellectual trajectory.

The distinction between mathematical appearance ($x + o = x$) and ontological reality ($x \oplus o = x'$) is crucial. It allows preservation of zero's operational utility while transforming its metaphysical interpretation. Every arithmetic operation involving the monad (o) is simultaneously a moment of becoming, a prehension, a creative synthesis.

The monad (o) is, in the end, a question more than an answer. It asks: What is a unit of becoming? How can something be both one and many, both permanent and fluent? How can we think being without falling into the trap of nothingness? These questions, which Leibniz and Whitehead posed in different vocabularies, remain urgent for philosophy and science today.

Process philosophy, if it is to be a living tradition, must continue asking them. The monad (o) is an invitation to that conversation—a conversation about the nature of reality, the meaning of nothing, and the creative advance that constitutes the universe.

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