

Teilhard and Hawking on Creation . . .

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ABSTRACT

Assuming its validity, Stephen Hawking uses M-theory, a variant of the still-controversial Superstring theory, to present a rather impressive cosmological finding: the universe had no beginning. He then extrapolates this result into the theological realm to claim that, because the universe had no beginning, there is no longer any need for God. In what follows, I question the appropriateness of Hawking's theological claim and compare his approach to that of Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who views creation not as a one-time event that happened at a single point in space-time but instead as a cosmic becoming. Rather than attempting to set up a proof for God's existence or non-existence, Teilhard reflects on the theory of evolution and demonstrates that belief in a personal God is still consistent with the findings of modern science, whether or not Hawking's claim that the universe had no beginning can eventually be verified.

INTRODUCTION

I met Stephen Hawking only once. On that fall afternoon in the 1980s, he was carried in his wheelchair onto the stage of Drexel University's Disque Hall where he was scheduled to lecture on baby black holes. After being warmly welcomed by the audience, he began mumbling his talk, sentence by sentence, to his graduate student, who then conveyed the content to the audience. At that time, he was already beginning to suffer quite severely from ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), but was not yet using a voice synthesizer and could still be understood by those close by. During a coffee break in the physics lounge after the lecture, I was impressed with a person who not only could socialize so freely and perform complex computations without the aid of computer, calculator, or even pencil and paper, but who, despite a major physical difficulty, was determined to complete a work that seemed crucial.