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No Need for God? Stephen Hawking Defies Divine Creation

Professor Stephen Hawking is a remarkable human being. His courage and tenacity are an inspiration to all. His work on the theory of gravity has changed the way the field of physics is taught. But, when he crosses that border from science to theology, his worldview leads him into abject disaster.

Tuesday, September 7, 2010

By any measure, Stephen Hawking is one of the most famous and influential figures in modern science. For thirty years, he served as Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at the University of Cambridge, and his career before and after his decades in that post is the stuff of scientific legend. He is also probably the longest-living person ever to be diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis [ALS], and the very fact that he has been productive since that diagnosis at age 21 is a testimony to his sense of personal mission and sheer determination.

Professor Hawking is out with a new book, and in *The Grand Design*, he, along with co-author Leonard Mlodinow, now presses his case against God — or at least against any role for God in the origin of the universe or the beginning of time.

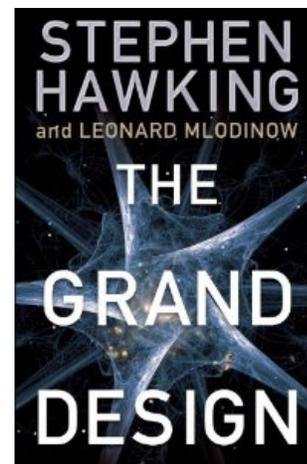
Asking the most basic questions of the universe's existence, Hawking and Mlodinow assert: "Some would claim the answer to these questions is that there is a God who chose to create the universe that way. It is reasonable to ask who or what created the universe, but if the answer is God, then the question has merely been deflected to that of who created God. In this view it is accepted that some entity exists that needs no creator, and that entity is called God. This is known as the first-cause argument for the existence of God. We claim, however, that it is possible to answer these questions purely within the realm of science, and without invoking any divine beings."

In the pages of *The Wall Street Journal* last week, Hawking and Mlodinow summarized their case against God. After presenting a case for the incredible fine-tuning that was required for conscious life on earth, they argued that the incredible "coincidences" involved in this fine-tuning are not evidence of the work of God. To the contrary, they conclude that science can provide all the necessary answers: "As recent advances in cosmology suggest, the laws of gravity and quantum theory allow universes to appear spontaneously from nothing. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going." The headline of their article, "Why God Did Not Create the Universe," pulled no punches.

Major newspapers and media outlets across the globe announced that Stephen Hawking had now come out against belief in God. Yet, a closer look at the evidence suggests that this is actually nothing new for Professor Hawking. All of the major arguments presented in *The Grand Design* have appeared earlier in Hawking's previous books or in interviews.

As has been argued before by others, Professor Hawking tends to deploy arguments about God when he wants to sell books. Nevertheless, given his stature and influence, his ideas are worth careful attention.

The major thrusts of *The Grand Design* are the magnificence of the universe and the glory of theoretical physics.



Hawking is committed to what he calls “M-Theory,” a “super-string theory” that encompasses a host of theories and predictions about the nature of matter and time. Most importantly, this theory allows Hawking and Mlodinow to advance Hawking’s theory that space and time have no boundary. If such a boundary did exist, Hawking allows that God might be a necessary or allowable theory of how all this began. But, if there is no boundary, there is no reason for God at all — the universe is self-explanatory.

Hawking actually believes that there are countless universes, and that the laws of physics on each might be radically different from all the rest. What we do know is our own universe and its operational laws, and these, he insists, do not require any notion of a divine Creator. “Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing,” Hawking and Mlodinow explain.

But is this really new? In his 1988 best-seller, *A Brief History of Time*, Hawking made very similar arguments and received strikingly similar press coverage. “So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator,” he explained. But, Hawking rejected the very idea of a beginning as such, and so he actually dispensed with the need for any Creator. Furthermore, he was certain that his theories rendered any belief in a traditional deity to be groundless.

In his infamous introduction to the first edition of *A Brief History of Time*, the late astronomer Professor Carl Sagan asserted, “This is a book about God . . . or perhaps about the absence of God.” Even more famously, Sagan argued that Hawking’s theories meant that there is now “nothing for a Creator to do.” Oddly, when *A Brief History of Time* was reissued for a tenth anniversary edition, Sagan’s introduction was deleted.

Hawking has acknowledged that his work “is on the borderline between science and religion, but I have tried to stay on the scientific side of the border.” That seems a strange comment, given the fact that he so routinely crosses that border.

On the other hand, that statement does betray another straightforward dimension of Hawking’s thought. He seems to imagine God only in terms of a deistic deity and a “God of the gaps” who serves as a causal explanation only when all naturalistic theories run out of steam. If nothing else, Hawking’s writings should warn Christians from taking refuge in any “God of the gaps” form of theological argument. If we invoke God only when we run out of other explanations, we will find God disappearing into a cloud of theory and endless theological surrender.

The God of the Bible is not merely a First Cause — He is the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all that is, who rules the universe by His Word. Christians must recognize the “God of the gaps” as a false idol of theological surrender. Furthermore, Christians must also understand that any scientific admission of God as a possible First Cause without continuing rule over creation is no cause for celebration. The triune God cannot be reduced to a First Cause among other causes.

Stephen Hawking’s worldview is based in positivistic scientism. He really believes that science holds all the answers. “Philosophy is dead,” he asserts in this newest book. Why? “Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics.”

In his 1980 inaugural address, given as he was installed as Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge, Hawking proposed that the great project of theoretical physics might be concluded by the end of the twentieth century. “By this I mean that we might have a complete, consistent, and unified theory of the physical interactions which would describe all possible observations.”

That statement speaks profoundly to Professor Hawking’s intellectual ambition — to explain the universe and all of its “possible observations.” That is nothing less than titanic in scale of ambition. Indeed, it is the quintessential audacity of a brilliant secular mind.

Professor Stephen Hawking is a remarkable human being. His courage and tenacity are an inspiration to all. His work on the theory of gravity has changed the way the field of physics is taught. But, when he crosses that border from science to theology, his worldview leads him into abject disaster. *The Grand Design* is yet another attempt to celebrate the universe’s breathtaking design, while denying the existence of a Designer. It will not be the last.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at

www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler.

Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* [London and New York: Bantam Books, 2010].

Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, "[Why God Did Not Create the Universe](#)," *The Wall Street Journal*, Friday, September 3, 2010.

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