

# The politics of creationism: from John Philoponus to Stephen Hawking

C. K. Raju

*Indian Institute of Advanced Study*

*Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla 171 005*

## Abstract.

By way of background, quasi-cyclic time was once the widely prevalent notion of time as represented by symbols such as the Ourobours (a symbol for eternity/infinity), the Nataraja (Dancing Shiva), the Buddhist wheel of time (Ashok chakra), etc., in Sufi poems such as those of Rumi, down to Bollywood songs of the 1960's. This belief in quasi-cyclic time was also part of pre-Nicene Christian beliefs, such as those of Origen.<sup>1</sup> This was transformed by Augustine into "linear" (apocalyptic) time, on the grounds that it involved a destruction of church morality. The underlying politics however was that quasi-cyclic time was associated with equity, and apocalyptic time with inequity.<sup>2</sup> This led to the first creationist conflict, with John Philoponus<sup>3</sup> denying the beliefs of Proclus (in quasi-cyclic time) on the grounds that an eternal (uncreated) world was in conflict with the notion of creation in the Bible. This was long before the creationist conflict between Darwinian evolution and Biblical creation in the US. Few are however aware of how this conflict has spilt over into modern-day physics of Stephen Hawking,<sup>4</sup> through the metaphysics of infinity in formal mathematics,<sup>5</sup> which I will try to explain. The underlying politics is to use the credibility of science to leverage the credibility of a particular political understanding of religion.

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1 Origen, *De Principiis*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04122.htm>. For relevant extracts, see "Appendix on Origen", <http://ckraju.net/papers/Appendix-on-Origen.pdf>.

2 C. K. Raju, *The Eleven Pictures of Time: the physics, philosophy, and politics of time beliefs*, Sage, 2003.

3 John Philoponus, *Die aeternitate mundi, contra Proclus* (ed. H. Rabe) Teubner, Leipzig, 1899. See, also, R. Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200-600 AD, A source book*, Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca, 2005.

4 S. W. Hawking and G. F. R. Ellis, *The large scale structure of space-time*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974. Also, S. W. Hawking, *A brief history of time*, Bantam books, 1988.

5 C. K. Raju, "Eternity and Infinity: the Western misunderstanding of Indian mathematics and its consequences for science today." *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies* 14(2) (2015) pp. 27-33. <http://ckraju.net/papers/Eternity-and-infinity-Pages-from-APA.pdf>.