

## Transcript - Long

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

Bill, in promoting intelligent design, one of the problems that you have to deal with is the so-called sub-optimization of the world, I mean, anybody can see that. Whether you're talking about molar teeth that our jaws seem to be too small to, to encompass, or more seriously, the problem of evil in the world. How do you deal with the problem of evil, particularly as a Christian who has very well-schooled in philosophy and mathematics, and understand the rigor of making coherent arguments?

### William Dembski:

Right, well, you know, I comment [ph] this about trying to develop intelligent design as a scientific program, in a sense, I try to set the problem of evil aside when I deal with that. Intelligent design, the reason for that adjective, intelligent, in front of design, is as it were to emphasize that the design there is real, that there's so much of, design is a term that's used in biology.

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

Parent.

### William Dembski:

But it's, but it's meant to be a parent design. So, in a sense it's not redundant and, because it's emphasizing that there is a real intelligence. But once you say that, I mean, you're not offering any value judgment about well, is that design good, morally right, optimal, that becomes a further question. But it becomes an important question to people because you look at the world and you see all sorts of what, seeing not just sub-optimal design but even malevolent design, when you think of parasites. I mean, the sorts of things, and they seem wonderfully designed to do a number on, on certain organisms. I mean, Darwin looked at the Ichneumonidae wasp and paralyzed a caterpillar, put its eggs in there, and then the eggs hatch and feed on the caterpillar but don't knock out any vital organs until right at the end, so it has a ready food source. I mean, he saw this as monstrous. So, how do you get, you know, how do you account for all that evil? And then what's the nature of this, you know, this designer then, that seems to design a world where such evil exists? Now, I think one move that's made, and I think one appeal of evolutionary theory is that it's supposed to get around this problem. In a sense, even if, if God creates a world in which evolution brings about such things, well, evolution is a messy process, and it'll bring about such things like this. But I think that--

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

So, you think God's not responsible, so to speak.

### William Dembski:

God, God's not responsible. You see that Francisco Ayala's latest book, Darwin's Gift to Science and Religion, he makes exactly that point. But it seems to me that it doesn't get around the problem because a god who sets up a world in which these evil happens [sic], it seems that he still has to take responsibility for them. And in my review of Ayala's book I say, you know, it's one thing, you know, if a mugger attacks you directly or if a mugger has a vicious guard dog that he allows to attack you, you know, the mugger is still responsible in either case. You know, so I don't, I don't see evolution as letting God get off scot-free. And in fact, what you often find then is that people who look to evolution to solve the theodicy problem, usually they're going well beyond that. They're actually tinkering, or fundamentally reconceiving the nature of God. I mean, often you with a process God who's been somehow subservient to nature in some way. But not, not a God who's responsible, who can take sovereign responsibility for the whole show.

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

So, in that solution, what you're doing, you're, you're, theodicy, you're solving the problem of evil by diminishing God's, some of his characteristics [crosstalk] like omnipotence.

### William Dembski:

God's power. I mean, the classical problem of evil is God is good, God is—

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

All-powerful.

### William Dembski:

All-powerful, whence evil. And I mean, how do you reconcile those, those three. And so, you can go—

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

You can diminish one of, right.

### William Dembski:

[crosstalk] Diminish one or the other, but the challenge is to maintain God's goodness and omnipotence. Now—

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

How do you do that? You—

### William Dembski:

How do I do that? So, well I think, it used to not be a big problem for theology. I mean, it was, basically it was what you might call a version of the free will defense. I mean, humans sin and brought this evil in the world on themselves. And not just the moral or personal evil of you know, human relationships. People being envious or killing each other, things like that, but also natural evil. Now, I think within a, within a classical Christian conception, that made sense because the people would read Genesis, they read it as, took it very literally where God created the world in a short space of time, and then humans were put in this perfect environment. They rebelled against God. They sinned, and then there was a curse that fell, and the curse fell in the sense as a, in part as a teaching tool, to teach humanity of just the gravity of their sin, and help, and serve as a way of coming back. But the point is, I mean, what gave, I think, this theodicy teeth was that humans, in a sense, were responsible for the evils they were experiencing. Now, the, that becomes a problem though, with the rise of modern science, and then with our understanding of the world being much older and you know, with not just a few days predating humans, but a few billion years predating humans. And so, what does that history that predates humans show? Well, it's a history of predation, and you know, parasitism, death, extinction, you know, you name it. I mean, so there's all this—

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Red in tooth and claw.

**William Dembski:**

[cross talk] evil. Red in tooth and claw. You know, or Darwin's battle for life. And so, you know, how do you make sense of that? Because here you have humans that come after the fact. How, how is it that, you know, you don't seem to have that good old-fashioned theodicy where humans are responsible for the evil they're experiencing? And so, the, I've struggled with this as a, in trying to formulate a theodicy. And what I find is that even among some of the older creationist people who say, well yes, the Earth is older, they try to make a distinction between natural evil and personal evil.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Moral evil.

**William Dembski:**

They'll say, they'll say, well natural evil, God's okay with it. You know, at some level they'll say, you know, it's not such a big deal. Well, you know, for me, it is a big deal and I can't just, couldn't just let it stand. So, I thought about this problem for a number of years and it struck me, as a Christian, you know, we take God's work of salvation, of Christ on the cross, as not only proleptic, looking into the future, but also retroactive, that you know, the Old Testament's saints were saved in virtue of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Well, couldn't something like that hold, this is how I thought to myself, for also the fall? You know, we think of the effects, the old way of thinking of the effects of the fall is that the fall happens, and then things go haywire. Well, couldn't it happen that the fall happens, and in a sense, God, who's outside of time, changes the past, and introduces natural evil? You know, for the sake of humanity to, to be a mirror of their, the fall. You know, and it seems to me that even our understanding of evil, we understand evil by the evils we see in nature. Could we fully appreciate evil if we didn't have examples of vipers, and parasitism, and things like that? I mean, you know, nature gave us wonderful metaphors for the evil in our hearts, so—

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

So, what you're saying is that by the fall, which in your theology, is a very important event, where sin entered the world in some way, so that that event was so pivotal that, that God had to make that more obvious, or more poignant, and so therefore, when that happened, because God is outside of time, and time is all happening in the same moment, so to speak, to God, that it would be not a problem to restructure what had, what looks like the past to us, but to God is all of the, the omnipresence, so to speak.

**William Dembski:**

I mean, roughly. I mean, the thing is, I don't think that there was a perfect history, and then God changed it. I mean, I think there's a plan that God had, and then, you know, the defects ramified into the past, but it's—

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Then that sounds like backward causation.

**William Dembski:**

Well, in some sense, it is. [crosstalk]

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Okay, I won't be embarrassed to criticize you for that, if you accept it, yeah.

**William Dembski:**

[crosstalk] You know, it's, in a sense, it is. But it was God acting. But I would say, you know, you say, well to make it more poignant, I mean, I think, the point is not just to, you know, I want you humans really to understand, you know, what you did. But I think to, in a sense, it's respecting our freedom and what we have done, and that we really are the crown of creation, and what we do has ramifications, both at the personal level and in nature. You know, so it's, you know, the thing is, I'm saying this within my theological framework. I mean—

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Sure.

**William Dembski:**

[unintelligible] lots of perspectives which won't find that congenial, but you know, I'm trying to make sense of a problem that really does weigh heavily on, I think, at least certain sectors of the Christian community, and trying to make sense of intelligent design.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

And what I, I like about this, actually, is that you have certain predisposed assumptions that you want to keep. You want to keep the fall. You want to

keep a certain logical progression, and you need a theodicy, and you're trying to harmonize things that at least superficially look like they're incompatible. And then, and then deal with natural evil, which predates humans.

**William Dembski:**

Yeah.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

And, and not willing to dismiss natural evil as something that's not important.

**William Dembski:**

Right and, you know, try and take into account the science, which certainly seems to show that we're dealing with billions and not thousands of years.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Yeah. Yeah, I mean, to me, that is interesting. I, I can't say that it, it's a view that I would subscribe to personally. But I do think it recognizes the lengths you have to go to harmonize some of these positions.

**William Dembski:**

Well, it's you know, but I mean, the problem of evil is that everybody, you know, I don't think it's easy for anybody. I mean, if there was some really neat, packed [ph] answer, you know, I don't think we'd be arguing about it. But it's, it's—

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Right.

**William Dembski:**

It's a tough problem.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

The tough problem exists because you have God in there. If you don't have God, the problem's pretty easy.

**William Dembski:**

Well, but then you have the problem of good that you've got to deal with. You know, I mean, it's, you know, I look at some of the evolutionists, and they have to explain away Mother Teresa and people like that. You know, it's, and try to treat it in terms of evolutionary self-serving.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Right, right.

**William Dembski:**

So, you know, you've got, everybody's got problems. But, you know.