

# Did God Create Evil?: Nancey Murphy

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## Transcript - Long

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Nancy, you believe God created the universe.

**Nancey Murphy:**

Yes.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

You believe there is evil in the universe.

**Nancey Murphy:**

Yes.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Do you believe God created evil?

**Nancey Murphy:**

No. [Laughter]

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Now that, you must explain.

**Nancey Murphy:**

Yes, I believe that God created the universe knowing full well that it would be a universe containing vast amounts of evil. But if God created and if God is good, then God must have known that the amount of good outweighed the evil to the extent that it would be worthwhile.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

But you're then rationalizing. God created the evil. I asked you if God created evil, you said, no. Now you're telling me that God created evil, created good and knew would outweigh the evil, so we said it's a good world. But God still created evil.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

No, God created the world in such a way that it would produce the outcome that he wanted. And to put it perhaps overly anthropomorphic terms, God wanted creatures with whom he could have a relationship, something like us. In order to have creatures like us, the universe had to be almost exactly the way it is, fine tuning arguments. Laws of nature produce the kinds of suffering that we're all aware of. Plate tectonics, tsunamis, earthquakes, famines, et cetera. So, my understanding of natural evil or suffering is that it is a predictable, unwanted, but necessary byproduct --

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Consequence

**Nancey Murphy:**

Of the way God had to create the world if God were to have free creatures, loving creatures like us.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

I can follow your entire argument and in -- sometimes in my psychic life -- can agree with you. But when I do that, I come to the conclusion that God created the evil and to avoid saying that sounds like philosophical timidity.

**Nancey Murphy:**

Oh, well, that gets into all sorts of theological metaphysical questions as to --

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

What do you mean by create, what do you mean by evil.

**Nancey Murphy:**

Well, more specifically, what's God's relation to the universe. If you are a pantheist so that God and the universe are identified, then I think you're stuck with saying that God is creating tsunamis, just as much as God is creating the blossoming of flowers. Because God and the world are one. If you are a deist then God creates, God sets up the laws and it runs its course the way it was going to run. And, so, God foreknew that there would be tsunamis, but God is not causing them.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

That's a fine distinction.

**Nancey Murphy:**

I don't think it's so fine.

**Nancey Murphy:**

I think it's a pretty radical distinction.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

No.

**Nancey Murphy:**

The universe --

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

God is not intervening to cause, but God set up the laws so that they would absolutely occur.

**Nancey Murphy:**

God set up the laws so that they would occur, but God did not intend that they would occur. It -- let me --

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

That is fine.

**Nancey Murphy:**

But it's very significant. You do all sorts of things that have negative consequences, just to take a really simple example. You flip on the light switch in your office so that you can work at your desk.

Your intention is to turn on the light so that you can work. An intended byproduct of that is that your using your electricity, you're running up your electric bill. You're depleting the environment, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. You are not intentionally doing those things. But that's a byproduct of an action that you are intentionally doing.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

Let me stick with your analogy. If I do that and if I'm consciously thinking ahead of time that this is what I'm doing, I am depleting the environment in order to work. I'm saying here are the two things I'm doing, but I am doing both of them if I were conscious at the time. I wouldn't say that [garbled] I have no responsibility for the depletion of the environment because I'm doing this and I don't want to do that. But I have to do that.

**Nancey Murphy:**

Well, you've changed my example to suit your purposes. [Laughter]

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

I've been known to do that. [Laughter] But again, I still think that there's nothing wrong in your world here. There's nothing wrong by saying that God created the universe with the best possible purpose of creating intelligent life with whom he can have a relationship and to bring an afterlife and all these wonderful things. Evil has to be part of it for whatever reasons you say and then come to the conclusion that God created that evil as part of his purpose. But the theologians don't want to say that.

**Nancey Murphy:**

Well, I think -- it sounds like splitting hairs to you, but I think it's a very significant difference, because it's a matter of whether you are attributing evil intent and evil action to God or whether you are attributing the permission of evil to God and assuming that God is just as aggrieved by that suffering as we are only infinitely more so.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

I can accept everything you just said. I can absolutely do that. God doesn't like evil. He's grieved more than we are by the evil. But God made a preordained decision to have that evil, to create that evil in order to have this greater good. And just come out and say it.

**Nancey Murphy:**

No. [Laughter] No, I think it -- I'm sure that this sounds like a very fine verbal dispute, but I think it's an important one to maintain the distinction between an intentional action and an unwanted byproduct of an action that is intended.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

I can accept that. But --

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

It is with knowledge of forethought that I am creating this universe and that -- all those evil things are part of it. I am creating it. And I'm doing it because I know the overall result is good. And by the way I'm really grieved by this. But there's no choice. But I am doing it. I'm making an affirmative decision. My alternative was not to have anything at all.

**Nancey Murphy:**

That's right. Maybe we can settle on that.