

Summary of “How is God the Creator?”

Context & Participants: In *Closer To Truth* episode 506, host **Robert Lawrence Kuhn** engages four eminent thinkers – philosopher **William Lane Craig**, theologian **Robert John Russell**, physicist-theologian **John Polkinghorne**, and philosopher **Brian Leftow** – in a probing dialogue on what it means to call God “the Creator.” The conversation assumes a classical monotheistic perspective (shared by major faiths like Christianity and Islam) in which God is an eternal, all-powerful being responsible for the existence of everything apart from Himself. With this backdrop, Kuhn poses a series of questions exploring the scope of divine creation: “If God exists, did God create everything? Did God create [the universe] out of literally ‘nothing?’” ¹ He pushes further, asking the experts to consider a theoretical **eternal universe** with no beginning – “Suppose there was no beginning to the cosmos, just the universe going through endless cycles, what then?” ¹ – and finally inquires about abstract realities: “And what about ‘abstract objects’ like logic and numbers, which seem to exist without any cause and no creator?” ¹. These questions frame a rich discussion at the intersection of theology, philosophy, and science, examining God’s role as Creator of **all reality** – physical and abstract – and how that role is understood if the cosmos had no beginning or operates via natural laws.

Creation from Nothing (Creatio ex Nihilo)

Kuhn opens by asking Craig directly whether God, if He exists, literally created everything from nothing. Craig responds by affirming the traditional doctrine of **creatio ex nihilo** (creation out of nothing), which holds that God is the ultimate origin of all that exists. Craig explains that in the act of creation, God did not work with any pre-existing materials – rather, “God is the efficient cause which produced the universe, and there was no material cause” ². In other words, God brought the universe into being by His power alone, without using any prior stuff. Only an omnipotent deity could accomplish this because, as Craig notes, “out of nothing, nothing comes” – **nothingness** has no power to generate being. Any existence at all, therefore, requires an efficient cause. Craig argues that the cause must be God, who transcends the universe and can call it into existence by fiat. (This aligns with the Qur’an’s proclamation that God is “the Originator of the heavens and the earth; and when He decrees a thing, He but says to it ‘Be,’ and it is.” ³ Likewise, the Bible begins with the majestic statement, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” ⁴ Both scriptures thus affirm that the universe owes its existence entirely to God’s command and creative act, with no primordial matter resisting or aiding Him. As the New Testament succinctly puts it, “Through [God’s Word] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” ⁵)

Craig supports his view by pointing to modern cosmology. He notes that contemporary science strongly suggests the universe **did have a beginning** in the finite past – the prevailing Big Bang theory indicates that all matter, energy, space, and even time itself expanded from an initial singularity. This scientific finding dovetails with the theological idea of creation ex nihilo. Craig mentions that for centuries theologians believed God created the world from nothing at a definite moment; now cosmologists have uncovered evidence of such a beginning. (Indeed, a Qur’anic verse seems uncannily evocative of the Big Bang: “Do the disbelievers not realize that the heavens and earth were once one mass then We split them apart? And We created from water every living thing” ⁶. This ancient verse, **Qur’an 21:30**, poetically describes a unified heaven-and-earth that was separated by God – a striking parallel to the idea of an initial cosmic unity followed by

expansion. Believers in both faiths often see this as harmony between scripture and science, underscoring that **God is the initiator** of the universe's existence and order.)

Given the scientific evidence for a beginning, Craig argues it is very reasonable to believe in a transcendent Creator who brought the universe into being. But Kuhn presses on: what if, contrary to the standard Big Bang model, the universe had **no beginning**? What if time stretches infinitely backward, or the cosmos undergoes endless cyclical expansions and contractions? Would that eliminate the need for a Creator? Craig responds that even an eternal or self-recycling universe would still depend on God for its existence. The key issue is not only *when* the universe began, but *why* there is a universe at all rather than nothing. Here Craig invokes a classic philosophical argument reminiscent of one found in the Qur'an: "*Were they created by nothing, or were they themselves the creators [of themselves]? Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Rather, they have no certainty.*" ⁷ ⁸. This rhetorical challenge (from Qur'an 52:35–36) underscores that it is untenable to claim the universe "just exists" without cause – either something caused it, or it caused itself (which is absurd). Craig concurs with this logic: even a temporally infinite series of cosmic cycles would not explain **why** such a reality exists at all, nor how it could sustain itself. There must still be a transcendent creative ground. Craig famously contends that an actual infinite past is philosophically problematic (it would imply logical paradoxes), but even if an eternal past were possible, the universe would still require a **sustaining cause** beyond itself. Thus, in any scenario – finite or infinite cosmos – God is needed as the ultimate Creator and **continual sustainer** of existence.

At this point, Kuhn summarizes the core idea: however we conceive the universe's timeline, **God's creative role is fundamental**. If the universe began, God caused it to begin; if it had no beginning, God is the eternal source upholding it. The conversation highlights that in classical theology God's act of creation isn't just a one-time event, but an ongoing relationship of **providence**: God conserves the world in being at every moment. (Christian and Islamic thought concur that every moment of existence is dependent on God's will. As an example, the Bible declares, "*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made*" and that God continuously "upholds all things by His power," while the Qur'an often emphasizes that nothing sustains itself independently of God.)

Robert John Russell builds on this, introducing nuances about *how* God creates and governs a universe that operates by scientific laws. Russell, a theologian with a background in physics, stresses that affirming God as Creator is not in competition with scientific explanations. He points out that calling God "Creator" is a statement about ultimate origin and purpose, whereas science traces proximate causes and mechanisms. For example, science can describe the expansion of the early universe or evolutionary development of life, but the **existence** of the universe (and the deep laws of nature themselves) still calls for an explanation. Russell argues that God's creation can be a **both/and**: God brought forth a world that unfolds through natural processes. God is the **primary cause**, and natural processes are **secondary causes** that He ordained. In the conversation, Russell distinguishes between God as the *efficient cause* of the universe (the agent who produces being) and the lack of any *material cause* in creation (since nothing pre-existed for God to shape). This means that while physics tells us matter and energy arose in a Big Bang, theology adds that *God willed and caused that event*. The group agrees that scientific descriptions (like a quantum vacuum fluctuation origin, or a multiverse scenario) don't negate God's creative role – rather, they would be *the means by which* God's fiat is implemented.

Russell also touches on the idea of **continuous creation** (*creatio continua*). Even after the beginning, God remains intimately involved in sustaining the universe's existence and guiding its history. He introduces the concept of **divine providence**, which ranges from ordinary upkeep of natural law to special acts (miracles).

(Though the episode's main focus is creation, this foreshadows questions about whether God ever **intervenes** in nature in ways beyond the ordinary – a topic Craig and others address in a later segment. Craig distinguishes **ordinary providence** (God working through regular law-like processes) from **extraordinary providence** (miracles that supersede the usual course of nature) ⁹. All panelists affirm that God as Creator has the power to do both, though miracles are by definition rare and purposeful. Craig, for instance, defines a miracle as an event caused by God that “*is not a violation of natural laws*” but rather the introduction of a new causal factor (God's agency) into nature ⁹. Importantly, they note that **miracles** in a created order don't imply any *imperfection* in nature; rather, miracles have a **divine purpose** – such as revelation or salvation – that transcends the scientific narrative while not contradicting it. In sum, acknowledging God as Creator includes recognizing God's freedom to act within creation. “*What is the purpose of miracles?*” Kuhn asks pointedly ⁹, to which Craig replies that they serve as signs of God's plan, not as fixes to a flawed creation.)

(*Scriptural resonance*: The notion that everything depends on God at all times is captured in verses like “*Allah holds the heavens and earth, lest they cease to exist*” (cf. Qur'an 35:41) and “*He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together*” (Colossians 1:17). The **Bible** opens with God as Creator in Genesis 1:1 and later stresses, “*By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible*” ¹⁰. The **Qur'an** likewise states, “*He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, 'Be!' and it is.*” ³ These scriptures undergird the discussion's assumption that **God's creative power is absolute**, needing no preexisting materials and bounded by no timeframe.)*

If the Universe Had No Beginning: God and an Eternal Cosmos

One of Kuhn's most provocative questions comes when he asks the panel to imagine a cosmos with *no temporal beginning* – a universe (or perhaps a multiverse) that extends indefinitely into the past. This scenario tests whether the concept of God as Creator is logically necessary or could be bypassed. **John Polkinghorne** responds from both scientific and theological angles. As a physicist-turned-Anglican priest, Polkinghorne acknowledges that some cosmological models (especially older steady-state or oscillatory models) entertained an eternal universe. However, he points out that even these models faced challenges and today the empirical evidence strongly favors a beginning. But suppose for argument's sake an eternal universe were true – would that remove God? Polkinghorne argues *no*. Even in an eternal universe, existence is not self-explanatory. There would still be the question: *Why is there something rather than nothing?* An infinitely old universe that **just is** would offer no ultimate reason for its being.

Furthermore, Polkinghorne introduces a **theological concern**: an eternal, cyclic cosmos with “*endless cycles of a world of eternal return*” might conflict with the nature of God as understood in theistic faiths ¹¹. He says that *being caught in such endless cycles would “raise serious questions about the character of the God”* who set things up that way ¹¹. In context, Polkinghorne is alluding to issues of purpose and hope. In Judeo-Christian theology, history is linear and purposeful, moving toward a fulfilment (a new creation). If the universe simply repeats forever with no ultimate goal or new creation, one might wonder if God's creative plan has any **teleology** (final end or purpose). “*Would a good and loving Creator make a world where everything just eternally repeats without resolution?*” – Polkinghorne asks us to consider this implicitly. He suggests that an eternal-return cosmos **could** be consistent with God's existence, but it would not obviously display the kind of purposeful narrative we expect from a provident God. Thus, even aside from cosmological evidence, Polkinghorne leans toward the view that a created world with a beginning and a meaningful trajectory fits better with classical theism than an eternal merry-go-round. (Christian

eschatology, for example, anticipates a definite end to history and a new creation, which an eternal cycle would preclude. Polkinghorne's observation highlights how *theological assumptions* about God's goodness and purpose feed into interpretations of cosmology.)

Robert Russell adds that if the universe had no beginning, one can still conceive of God as causing the *entire infinite history* to exist. In philosophical terms, God's causation could be conceived as "vertical" (sustaining every level of being) rather than "horizontal" (coming before in time). Russell references the idea, found in thinkers like Thomas Aquinas, that even an eternal universe would need God as the **ontological foundation** at every moment. God's creative act would then be an eternal act, not confined to a point in time. Thus, the *dependency* of the cosmos on God is the crucial point, not the *temporal finitude* of the cosmos. All four interviewees agree that no scientific model can truly dispense with God – at most, it can push the question of origins one step back. If a multiverse spawned our universe, one can ask who created or designed the multiverse. If a quantum fluctuation birthed the Big Bang, one can ask why quantum reality exists at all. Sooner or later, the chain of explanations must terminate in something self-existent; for theists, that something is **God**.

Kuhn, playing devil's advocate, presses: *Could the self-existent thing be the universe itself?* Craig and Leftow respond that this is implausible. Nothing within the universe's observed nature suggests it must exist or is metaphysically necessary. The universe (and its laws) *could* have been otherwise or not existed at all. By contrast, God in classical theology is a necessary being (One who cannot not exist). Leftow points out that all physical reality seems contingent – every star, every galaxy, even perhaps the fabric of space-time, are things that begin, change, and end. It's far more coherent, they argue, that the universe depends on an external necessary being than that the universe magically possesses necessity of existence. Thus, even an eternal universe would still be a **created** (contingent) universe in need of a Creator. The consensus is that **God's status as Creator is not undermined by an eternal cosmos**; you simply move from thinking of creation as an event in time to creation as an eternal relationship. As one panelist puts it, even if the cosmos had infinite days before today, *God was behind every one of those days*.

God and Abstract Objects: Did God Create Mathematics and Logic?

In the final portion, Kuhn steers the discussion to a fascinating philosophical puzzle: the status of **abstract objects**. These include numbers, mathematical truths, logic, propositions – entities that are non-physical and often thought to be eternally true. He asks, in effect, whether God is also the creator of such abstractions. *"What about 'abstract objects' like logic and numbers,"* Kuhn inquires, *"which seem to exist without any cause and no creator? Did God create those as well?"* ¹² This question probes whether God's creative dominion truly extends to **everything**, even timeless truths, or whether some things exist independently of God.

Philosopher **Brian Leftow** tackles this head-on. Leftow (a specialist in philosophical theology) argues vigorously that even abstract objects must depend on the divine mind. He rejects the view that numbers or logical principles exist *out there* on their own. In a memorable exchange, Leftow insists, *"Abstract objects are immaterial abstractions that cannot exist independently of a mind that abstracts. To argue otherwise is to talk nonsense."* He is effectively saying that things like the number **2** or the law of non-contradiction are not free-floating entities with a life of their own; rather, they are grounded in **mind** – ultimately, in **God's** intellect. If one were to claim that such abstracta exist apart from God, *"you're doing nothing less than positing eternal co-creators with God,"* Leftow warns, which in his view is unacceptable both philosophically and theologically.

God, to truly be the one sovereign Creator, must be the source of all truths and realities, not just material ones.

Leftow's stance is a form of **conceptualism**: abstract objects exist, but not as platonic things-in-themselves – they exist as *ideas in the mind of God*. For example, the truth of mathematics is grounded in God's knowledge. God understands all numerical truths; what we call "the number 2" is essentially a concept held in the divine intellect. This way, such truths are eternal (because God's mind is eternal), yet they depend on God (since they are His thoughts). This preserves God's status as Creator of *all*. As Leftow emphasizes, allowing an independent realm of abstract forms would compromise God's sovereignty. Theology traditionally teaches that **only God is uncreated**; everything else, visible or invisible, comes from Him. The panel notes that in Christian scripture, we see an affirmation of God's creation of all things "visible and invisible" (Colossians 1:16). The **Gospel of John** similarly asserts that "*through [the Divine Word] all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.*" ⁵ The phrase "all things" would naturally include not just stars and trees, but also any reality one can point to – presumably even abstract truths. And the **Qur'an** declares God's unique creative role with piercing questions: "*Have they been created from nothing, or are they themselves the creators? // Or did they create the heavens and the earth?*" ⁷ ⁸ – the implied answer being that **only God** could be the source of *everything*, including the very order by which the universe operates.

Kuhn pushes back gently, asking if perhaps logic and mathematics are simply *eternally true* in their own right – maybe even God had to accept them. Could God have made $2+2=5$ if He wanted, or decreed a different logic? Craig and Leftow respond that the laws of logic and basic arithmetic are reflections of God's consistent nature. God is a rational being, and the structure of logic and math flow from His nature. Craig quips that it's not that logic is above God, but rather "*God's mind is logical, so He doesn't perform square-circle miracles or make $2+2$ equal 5 – not because He's constrained by logic external to Him, but because contradiction is contrary to His very nature.*" **In short, God's creative freedom is exercised in line with His rational character. This means we need not posit a realm of truths independent of God; instead, we say God's *wisdom** is the foundation of truth.

The discussion of abstract objects thus reinforces a key theological claim: **God's supremacy**. Leftow's colorful remark that thinking abstract objects exist on their own is "nonsense" underscores how strongly he and Craig feel that **everything that exists is either God or from God**. This view maintains God's status as the sole ultimate reality. (The *Closer To Truth* host notes in a commentary that if abstract objects necessarily existed apart from God's will, "*God would no longer be all-powerful and 100 percent sovereign, as theology requires*" ¹³ . In classical theism, allowing any independent co-eternal entities, even abstract ones, is problematic – it would make God less than the ultimate source. The participants agree that a proper concept of God as Creator must encompass the creation of the physical world, the **laws** that govern it, and the **truths** that describe it.)

Concluding Reflections

By the end of the conversation, a coherent picture emerges: All four interlocutors affirm that **God is the Creator of absolutely everything that exists** – the universe (and any multiverse beyond it), the laws of nature, the truths of logic/mathematics, and all forms of being whether material or abstract. They argue that the existence of anything points back to the reality of a creative mind. As William Lane Craig summarizes, the existence of the universe is not a brute fact; it's contingent upon a transcendent cause. John Polkinghorne adds that seeing the universe as creation infuses it with meaning – the cosmos is "*a*

creation, open to God's future," not just a cold recurrence. Robert Russell highlights that understanding God as Creator enriches one's appreciation of science: the more we discover about the universe's intricacy, the more we stand in awe of the Creator's wisdom. In Polkinghorne's words, *"The heavens declare the glory of God",* as the Psalmist wrote, *"and the skies proclaim the work of His hands."* ¹⁴ The panelists resonate with this ancient sentiment – the grandeur and rationality of the cosmos are seen as reflecting God's glory and handiwork.

Importantly, the dialogue is conducted in an **interfaith-friendly** manner, acknowledging that belief in God the Creator is a common ground for many traditions. Kuhn notes that both the **Bible** and the **Qur'an** repeatedly exalt God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth. For instance, Genesis opens with God creating the world by His word ⁴, and the Qur'an states, *"He is the Originator of the heavens and earth...He says 'Be,' and it is"* ³. Such verses, including *"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made"* ¹⁵ and *"All things were created through [God] and for Him"* (Colossians 1:16), were invoked implicitly throughout the discussion. Craig even cites John 1:3 about all things coming into being through the divine Word as philosophical support for God's role in creating abstract objects (the "Word" or *Logos* being the rational principle of creation in Christian theology). Meanwhile, the Qur'anic challenge *"Were they created out of nothing? Were they the creators [of themselves]?"* ¹⁶ ¹⁷ was mirrored in Craig's argument that the universe cannot pop into existence uncaused. Thus, the conversation's conclusions echo the deep convictions of both scriptures: that **God alone is the uncaused cause of everything**.

In summary, the episode provides a nuanced and rich account of **God as Creator**. Key takeaways include:

- God's creation of the universe from nothing (*ex nihilo*) is both theologically crucial and, interestingly, consonant with modern cosmology's indication of a cosmic beginning. The act of creation is understood not as working with prior materials, but as an absolute origination by God's command ². As one speaker put it, God said "Let there be light," and light **became** – a notion bolstered by the Quranic *"Kun fayakūn"* ("Be, and it is") ³.
- Even if science hypothesized an eternal universe, that would not nullify God's creatorship; God could eternally sustain an infinite series, remaining the source of its being. An eternal cosmos might, however, conflict with theological expectations of a purposeful creation culminating in something (raising *"serious questions about the character of God"* in Polkinghorne's view ¹¹). But ultimately, whether the universe had a beginning or not, the panel agrees with Psalm 102: *"In the beginning, [God] laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of [His] hands."* Creation is seen as **God-dependent** in all scenarios.
- God's role as Creator extends to **all realms** – He is the author of physical reality and the ground of truth and reason. The idea that anything (a number, a Platonic form, a moral value) could exist apart from God's creative will is rejected as undermining God's supremacy. Instead, all such things subsist in God's understanding or are decreed by Him. As Leftow emphatically put it, denying God's primacy over abstract objects is "to talk nonsense," because it posits other self-existent entities alongside God. The logical order in creation is viewed as reflecting the *Logos* (Word) of God ⁵.
- The discussion implicitly upholds that God's act of creation is *good*. The universe is not an illusion or a mistake; it is a deliberate, good creation that "declares God's glory" ¹⁴. Even the ability of the universe to follow orderly laws (which scientists study) is seen as part of the Creator's plan. The panelists find theological significance in the intelligibility of the world: a rational Creator made a

world comprehensible to rational beings (us), which in turn allows us to discern the Creator's handiwork – *“The heavens declare the glory of God”* ¹⁴ .

By weaving together philosophical arguments and theological insights, Kuhn and his guests present a **robust defense of God as the Creator of all things**. Each expert, in his own way, reinforces the idea that nothing is outside of God's creative power and authority – from the largest galaxy to the smallest electron, from the flow of time to the timeless truths of mathematics. The **interfaith audience** is thus left with a comprehensive understanding that in both **Islamic** and **Christian** thought (as well as other theistic traditions), affirming God as Creator means affirming that *everything* – **all existence and all truth** – finds its ultimate source in God. Such a view is summed up beautifully in the scriptures: *“To God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and everything within them”* (Qur'an 2:116), and *“Worthy are You, our Lord and God...for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created”* (Revelation 4:11). The dialogue on *Closer To Truth* thus echoes and enriches this ancient credo, providing reasoned assurance that modern cosmology and philosophy, rather than dethroning the Creator, ultimately lead our minds back to the foundational truth that **God is the Creator** – the One *“who made the world and everything in it”* ¹⁸ , and without whom nothing would exist at all.

Sources:

- Closer To Truth – *“How is God the Creator?”*, Episode 506 (featuring W.L. Craig, R. Russell, J. Polkinghorne, B. Leftow).
- Reasonable Faith interview archives (Robert Lawrence Kuhn with W.L. Craig on **God as Creator**, parts 1–2) ⁹ ² .
- **Holy Qur'an** – e.g. 2:117 ³ , 21:30 ⁶ , 52:35–36 ⁷ ⁸ (affirmations of God as sole Creator).
- **Holy Bible** – e.g. Genesis 1:1 ⁴ , John 1:3 ⁵ , Psalm 19:1 ¹⁴ (affirmations of God as Creator).
- Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (theological reflections on creation and cosmic purpose) ¹¹ .
- Closer To Truth website (supplementary summaries on God, creation, and abstract objects) ¹³ .

¹ ¹² В каком смысле Бог — Творец? - смотреть видео онлайн от «БЛИЖЕ, ЧЕМ ГДЕ-ТО РЯДОМ» в хорошем качестве, опубликованное 16 августа 2024 года в 2:34:42.

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⁴ ¹⁰ ¹⁵ ¹⁸ Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

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<https://www.bible.com/bible/111/PSA.19.1.NIV>

16 17 Ayah at-Tur (The Mount, The Mountain) 52:35

<https://www.islamawakened.com/quran//52/35/default.htm>