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For Mike to fix MLFX

Metaphysical interview 7 recorded 7/5/2005

ML: Today, ~~which is July 5th, 2005,~~ we're going to tackle ~~the subject of~~theodicy, ~~and theodicy,~~ ^{which} just for the record is the attempt to reconcile the

coexistence of evil and God. In any attempt to deal with the problem of

MLFX evil, the so-called philosophical problem of evil, is generally called

theodicy. There are many of them. And what I'm going to do is hit you

with some of them and you can answer as you wish.

~~PM: OK.~~ML: ~~The first one is~~ God's ultimate purpose, some philosophers say, is ~~to~~glorifying Himself, which, by definition, He alone is infinitely entitled to ~~do~~

without vanity. He allows evil to exist so we will appreciate goodness all

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the more, in the same way that the blind man healed by Jesus appreciated his sight more ~~than~~ than those around him who never experienced blindness.

NM: Yes, but what I don't understand, and ^{have} ~~I~~ never understood ^{this}, is

why there is this enormous desire in God, as ^{He} ~~God~~ is presented to us, to be

glorified. ^{we laugh at} ~~What do we think of~~ people who insist on being ^{constantly} glorified all the

~~time? We laugh at them. We speak of them as being neurotic movie stars~~

or spoiled athletes. ^{Or} ~~Or~~ crazy generals. ^{And} ~~Or~~ impossible authors. One of the ~~few~~

^{human but seems that} ~~things we seem pretty certain of is excessive vanity~~ ~~vanity~~ becomes a ^{drive}

~~thing in itself, and nothing to honor especially.~~

ML: It's a god-sized vanity.

^{By that logic, ~~see~~}

~~NM: A god-sized vanity just makes it worse because there's no need for it.~~

ML: Maybe we can change "glorified" to "loved." God wants to be loved.

NM: Why does God need to be loved? That's a ^{large} ~~very big~~ question. It may

be true ^{but if} that God needs to be loved, ^{we are} ~~but if it is~~, then I think ~~we are~~ ^{we are} entitled to

start posing ^{a few} ~~some~~ questions. Is it that God's need to be loved is crucial

because God, like us, is over-extended? When is it ^{affairs, oh} ~~we have~~ a great need to

^{greatest need to} ~~be loved?~~ ^{we are} ~~It's~~ precisely when ~~we're~~ ^{we are} worn thin, when our courage, our

stamina, our determination, our confidence in ourself, our belief that ^{we are} ~~we're~~

worth something ^{have} ~~all~~ become attenuated. At that moment, ^{we are in a} ~~that's when we~~

^{of} ~~want~~ love.

ML: ^{Is} ~~Isn't~~ that where God is ~~right~~ now?

NM: Yes. Yes, I would say that God ^{suppose} ~~is~~ ^{may be} ~~at~~ that point now.

ML: Then maybe he needs ~~to~~

NM: Let me finish. ~~It's not working that well, so He's at that point.~~

ML: OK, ~~He needs to be loved—this is to justify the existence of evil—if~~

You find no interest in the argument that
~~He needs to be loved, wouldn't it follow that He allows evil to exist so~~

as to for Him?
~~contrast to the love, it only sets off the love all the more. That's the idea~~

NM: I find that extraordinarily strange. ~~That's one of the things that make~~

~~people laugh at theology. In other words, any explanation that will save the~~

~~Church—whichever Church it happens to be—becomes "the" explanation~~

~~ML: I thought I'd give you an easy one to start.~~

~~NM: It's almost too easy. I missed one point in it.~~ I've always been

it ~~seems~~ appears to
 bothered enormously by the excessive love that God demands. Worse than

~~that~~, that the people who found His churches, particularly His

fundamentalist churches, insist upon. "Jesus needs your love, Jesus wants

Does
 your love." Well, Jesus is giving love, presumably, and He needs it in order

to receive it and give it back? What they're saying—without understanding,

because they never follow anything to a logical conclusion—one of the elements in their thinking that repels most serious young people away from theology, is ~~they~~ ^{that fundamentalists} don't think through the consequences of their thought.

^{to}
 You see, if God ^{does} needs a great deal ^{of love} then why? Why? The question has to

^{Doesn't that suggest we dwell in}
 be asked. Isn't that then a situation where God's fate depends upon ~~ours~~ ^{our development} ~~the good or evil we do~~ ^{that we are developing?}
 other words, just as all the fundamentalists go around saying all the time:

"You need God's love," so in turn, God saying, "I need your love; I need

humans' love" — if this is the fundamental consideration on both sides, then

~~God and humanity both may be in considerable trouble.~~

Now, all we have to work with ~~and that is what we have, that is,~~

^{from our}
 is what we know about life and experience. And generally, the people who

really need love are in bad shape. And if God created us in His or Her

image, which I do believe, then God wants us to understand what's going on

in the universe. It's to God's advantage, I would argue, for us to understand

what God's needs ^{might be} ~~are~~ (Unless, on the other hand, human history has been so

vile and so awful, ^{so} permeated by the devil, that God lives in terror ^{expecting} that if ~~to be destroyed by man kind so soon as humans~~
~~man kind obtains enough power, man can destroy God.~~ which is a real
~~That may be a real~~
~~possibility. We see it in technology everywhere. We see it in medical~~

technology most of all.

^{There is another}
 ML: Good. That was an easy one. The second theodicy, ~~is~~ evil is one way

that God ^{can} tests humanity to see if we are worthy of His grace and His love,

~~and that~~ the evil and the suffering that comes ^{to} ~~with~~ ^{can be} us is also educational,

^{can} makes us better people. ~~So~~ He's testing us and the test are good for us, ~~and~~

~~it's God's way of proving our mettle.~~

~~MM: Repeat that to me, please~~

~~ML: The second theodicy is God allows evil to exist because it is the way~~

~~He tests humanity to see if we're worthy of His grace.~~

NM: I find that offensive. ~~I really find that offensive.~~ Apply it to a parent

and a child: we test the child—and in some situations we do test a child—

~~but to see if the child is worthy of our love? That's an awfully narrow~~

~~mind~~ ^{*do we do it to*} ^{*fathers and mothers*} ~~parent and literature is filled with detestable parents of that ilk.~~

ML: ~~But~~ Consider the second part: it's educational for us. It makes us

better people. We do that with children—we test them to improve them, we

say, "You've been through that; you're a better person for it." We do that all

the time to our children.

NM: I know, but there's such vanity in the assumption that God knows all

about evil. Why not take the notion that God is trying to discover what

^{*is*} ~~evil~~ all about? That evil perhaps is more bottomless than good. ^{*As you*} ~~you~~

well know by now

~~know~~ work on the notion that God is not all-powerful. As a point of

once we take up
departure, when you take the assumption that God is not all-powerful, all

the first
sorts of questions open up. And one of them is God's relation to evil. Is

God trying to discover more about evil? Maybe God doesn't ~~understand~~ *comprehend*

it
evil all that well, any more than as parents we understand ~~evil~~. If our

children are moving toward evil, are the parents always the first to know?

Not often. Not often.

ML: It was Dostoyevsky who said suffering is the soul-origin of

consciousness. That only through suffering ~~that we~~ *up* could improve our

and so be able to a little more
minds, understand the world around us. *Do you*
regret that.
~~Not only the origin, it was the "soul~~
~~origin."~~

NM: Well... I know, but that was ~~Dostoyevsky~~ *assent to*. I don't have to ~~agree with~~

Dostoyevsky
everything he said or thought. *I can agree*

ML: So you reject that?

→ *that suffering is, yes, a mighty*
 NM: ~~It's one of the great educational elements in existence~~ yes, suffering

it is also
 is a great educator, but an immensely expensive one. And yes, you can't

~~ignore suffering.~~ And ~~some~~ *and all* learn a great deal from suffering. ~~It's one of~~
too many are destroyed by it. Suffering
 the ways in which we learn. It may even be the most important single way.

can be a Bed of Procrustes (sp) and so
~~destruction more than it creates~~ *Sometimes*

~~But it's not as if you have to suffer in order to learn.~~ For instance, just as

one learns more from suffering in small
degree rather than equivocally, I think,
 examples; if you want to become a good person, that involves not exercising

unpleasant
 our greed in many minor matters.

ML: A form of suffering.

NM: A very modest form of suffering. If I really want something, and I

I want to
 can't have it, I'm suffering like a child. Whereas Dostoyevsky was *re.levsky* ~~talking~~

do
~~about~~ suffering at a very high level: Can I go on with my existence? Is

existence worthwhile? Suffering of that order, ~~existential suffering of the~~

can be most
~~most intense degree. That, yes, becomes a matter where you can pass~~

~~through an enormous amount of suffering. Certain people pass through it;~~

Some can ~~certain people become suicides under those conditions. But I think those~~ *in such situations. And*

at can be true that those

~~who pass through it and come out on the other side, are stronger for it and~~ *not emotionally crippled,*

can have much

~~have more to offer.~~

ML: Of course, that's part of what tragedy is: the tragic figure, tragic figures

are those who suffer the most and therefore learn the most—their eyes are

opened. I mean by this. . .

NM: Let's not get stuck on Greek drama. It's very rich, very complex, and I

never—I don't know anything that Oedipus did that was so incredible after

the fact.

ML: OK, but. . .

NM: No, you tell me. . .

ML: I think of Captain Ahab. And I think of his suffering.

NM: What the hell did he learn?

ML: Oh, he learned his topmost greatness was his topmost grief. He

learned that his intellect was destroying him. His desire to dominate. . .

NM: All right, I retreat, I retreat

ML: OK, let me ^{offer} ~~give you~~ ^{theology,} another one. ~~This is what we call~~ the "now and

then" ^{but} ~~theodicy~~. Evil and pain exist in this world ~~only~~. ~~This world is only~~

^{as a} ~~prelude~~ to the afterlife where no pain will exist. So there's a balance:

there's ~~much~~ ^{and} suffering and pain and evil in this world ^{and} because in the other,

~~world,~~ ^{Since there} there will be none. ~~This is one argument why there is evil in this life,~~

~~for~~ the scales balance.

^{That is} NM: It's ~~equal~~ ^{it's} equal in its probability to a ~~poor~~ ^{poor} man thinking, "I'm

~~poor~~ ^{I am} ~~poor~~ ^{poor} ~~now,~~ ^{well} but there'll come a day when I'm ~~wealthy.~~ ^{of course the} ~~poor man has~~

^{concerning he will}
 nothing to offer in the way of how he'll become wealthy as time goes on,
^{he has nothing but his}
~~other than this sentimental belief and desire and hankering that he wants to~~
~~become wealthy.~~ ^{we will} ~~only~~ by the same token, this notion that we're going to live
^{hard-sell}
 in peace and beauty afterward is ~~I think salesmanship of the worst sort.~~

"You won't know what true happiness is until you buy this car. Don't let
 people tell you it's a lemon; it's a wonderful car. You'll come back and
 thank me for having sold you this car."

ML: Good.

- NM: In all these there's a kind of anomaly, because the existential argument is—in theology, which has never been explored because as we know from the piece I wrote, Sartre did cut that off for most people, so I haven't seen—well, I'm ignorant on these matters but I haven't seen any particular explorations into the nature of God, the existential nature of God, so I'm

making these... what can I say? These ~~innocent~~, ~~almost innocent~~ attempts

on my own because I think there is something there...

NM. In the Theodicies

But in all these you've presented so far, ^{there is always the} is the assumption that God is

^{beginning to end}

in control of the thing from the word "God". And I think that is the ^{prime} ~~huge~~

^{theological} ~~mistake~~ ^{we stare rear up right there} ~~mistake~~. Anyone who looks at nature, anyone who ^{even casually} looks at all the

the variety of

incredible animals that have come down the pike, has to assume that God ^{may}

^{have said to himself}

~~said~~ at a certain point, "This little animal, this macaw, is going to be the best

of its species"; ^{then that} ~~and~~ it turned out it wasn't. So God moved on and made a

better bird, ^{or} made a better hedgehog, ^{or} God made a better pig, ^{or} God made this,

~~made that~~, then man came into it and began ~~changing things~~, altering the

^{as well} ^{My underlying} ^{completely} animals. But the notion is not that God knows what He or She is doing, but ^{rather}

that God is searching to do the best ~~that~~ He or She can do to improve things.

against great odds. And the moment you bring the Devil into it, then it

is an effort against great odds,

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where no ~~only~~ human or divine knows,
 becomes a contest as to which side or the other may win. And this notion
 in contrast how much the milk is weakened
 down to assume
 that it's all being done for God's greater glory and all we have to do is keep

pass our because
 our patience and go through suffering and at the end there'll be a happy

Now I much prefer the Greek's assumption
 ending—no! (I think the Greek observation that next to happiness is tragedy)

and the two are the staples of our existence. We live with a sense that it
 may all turn out well, but each hope will
 be without ~~the~~ interest we are also
 prepared to live with a tragic outcome
 need for in no way can we
 answer. We have the bravery to proceed, but we don't have the confidence
 deserve the confidence)

(to proclaim this wonderful heaven is going to be waiting for all of us if we
 we have to do is)
 just keep our noses clean.

ML: Now the fourth theodicy is one of maya. Do you know what maya is?

NM: Maya. . .

ML: Illusion. And this is how some deal with the question of evil. They

say: what humans consider to be evil or suffering is either an illusion or it's

unimportant. Events that are thought to be evil are really not so, such as

death by natural disaster which could be part of God's scheme.

~~NM: Hummm~~

~~ML: This is Eastern thought. All eastern religions—Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism,~~

Confucianism, they all take this general stance—~~Indicism~~—they don't

~~worry about the problem of evil. You're mistaken; it isn't even really there.~~ *engage* *an* *if you think it is*

NM: That's an argument that could be advanced until the 20th century came

along. I think the 20th century shattered that argument. Shattered it ~~to~~

~~use that wonderful French expression~~ *that's a useful*
by force majeure. ~~It's a marvelous~~

notion, force majeure. It ~~just~~ means these particular facts are so strong that

they dictate the way ~~you're going to~~ *only you can* approach the problem.

Contemplative

So you start with the Holocaust and the gulags and ~~the~~ *mystery of* the suffering of

is intensified
~~humanity up to that point is warped utterly by at least one order of~~

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magnitude ~~and maybe two and~~ the notion that evil is illusion and we pass ^{become}

~~Of course, maybe assuming~~
through this. I find offensive, ~~note: the Eastern notion isn't restricted to~~

that all
evil. All of the "outside world," good, evil, and neutral, is illusion—

wonderful, lovely outer events are as illusory as suffering. It's all "maya".

But I must say I find that almost as
offensive. It suggests that we are at
I think what we have to recognize for instance, in the Holocaust this

IF I
some examples ~~that~~ you believe in karma as I do, and believe in rebirth,
in rebirth but in distinctly subtle
judgment concerning the manner in
which you are reborn, that is also
there is a part of me that feels sardonically that God has many bureaucratic
and expects

It's most
problems with reincarnation. But people die at a ~~slow~~ dependable rate with
only a statistical spike here and there
a spike here and a spike there a local earthquake, a terrible storm or flood,

receive and judge incoming souls,
God can handle them with reincarnation. ~~But~~ reincarnation is flooded

Forgive this unforgivably crude
penetration of celestial mechanics, but
it must serve to make my crude point, which
with a huge number of deaths that have no meaning—because part of

because they are abrupt even near
to instantaneous, without warning, and
provide no opportunity to

reincarnation in my mind is when you die, if you die with any grace, if you
to be bereft in the moment of
your death of possession

have the good fortune to die with some sense of why you're dying, that
worse, being executed → p17

(F) Indeed, the notion that all life is illusion was not a new idea. A good way for the human

(Hear you speak)
classes of India to gain their bad conscience at the sight of the helpless poverty around them, but there's a method of discussion

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~~then you are hardly prepared~~
~~prepares you for reincarnation much more than if you're just lopped off. A~~
~~you have been lopped off. I would~~
~~argue that a)~~
 sudden, unexpected death is much worse ~~than~~ ^{to} death that comes ~~with~~
~~one after a modicum of preparation.~~
~~full preparation when you know you're going to die and so forth. Not~~
~~I believe there is a profound difference,~~
~~even that you know where you're going, but a sense of continuation and~~

~~some logic in the preparations you're going in for.~~

(procedures of)
 exploded many of the divine ~~procedures~~

So I think the Holocaust shattered reincarnation. I think there was

(in the heavens, a celestial)
 terrible confusion, nightmare for God and the angels.

ML: Was it so different from trench warfare in the First World War where

they were killing 150,000 people in a week? Surely, that equals the ~~number~~ ^{raft}

~~being exterminated~~
 of people dying in the Holocaust. By the time the First World War was

over, something like 30 million people...

~~it's analogous to when the powers~~
 NM: Yes, I think if the deaths occur too quickly, it ~~shatters~~ ~~reincarnation.~~
~~and processes of reincarnation can get~~
~~think there's chaos in reincarnation.~~ ~~chaos~~

ML: So every time this has happened, like at Stalingrad, the battle of

Stalingrad, or the horrors of China when the Japanese went into

Manchuria—all of those. . .

NM: When people ^{you go into} die in a battle like Stalingrad, you're ^{are, at least} prepared to die.

You ~~go into combat prepared to die~~. You know, part of what was diabolical ^{most}

about Hitler and the Nazis ^{camp (that) so death} is they didn't prepare people to die on that day.

they ~~didn't~~ ^{did not state:} say, "We're going to gas you today." On the contrary, they ^{did} ~~said~~

^(are) the concentration camp ^{in many (not) they} ~~that~~ and they were getting showers, and since they were lice-ridden, filthy, especially ^{they would receive showers, so please} ~~undress. These prisoners who were most~~ the ones who might have been obsessed with cleanliness, ^{when they said,}

~~they were getting showers, they all~~ trooped happily into the gas chambers.

^{A minute later,} And then, there they were, they were dying, they were screaming, "You lied,

^{we, this is awful,} you cheated us, you violated us." And they didn't die at all in the proper

^{can} ~~state~~. And I am arguing that it's one thing to ^{to} have a thousand people die in a

large ^{the} given room at a given moment, but it makes a huge difference ^{is whether} ~~if they're~~
~~they are~~ ^{or that} ~~they are~~ ^{are something on high}
 dying in a rage at God, feeling God betrayed them, or whether they ~~were~~

prepared to die.

^{In contrast, the}
 Now, when you get to the soldiers in Stalingrad, they knew there was
 a very good chance they were going to ~~die~~ ^{perish. That, I would} ~~die, so even though they died in~~
~~submit, offered less grievous problems to the~~
~~great numbers, the problems for reincarnation, I would submit, were less~~
~~powerful or reincarnation than the~~
~~severity of~~ ^{I repeat, it is} ~~severe than they were in the Holocaust. And the Holocaust was even worse~~

~~than the gulags in that sense, because once one got into the gulags there~~
~~were't mass executions in the gulags, just that conditions were hideous~~
~~during the war that of course, great numbers of people died but they had a~~
~~real sense of why they were dying. That's~~ so important, to have a sense of

why you're dying, ^{experiencing} ~~are~~ ^{is}
 Dying because you're old, because your body's gone after
~~having lived~~ ^{you}
 you've been with it 60, 70, 80, 90 years. OK, that's it, you ~~wore~~ it out,

~~You may even be~~
 you're ready for the next existence. But ready for it, or not ready for it is

~~crucial. So the evil game with huge impact on human existence was the~~
~~holocaust~~

ML: ~~So, are~~ you saying God was not able to accommodate these people
~~who~~
 they were not ready for reincarnation?

NM: I'm going for a permanent notion of the universe. What's one thing we
~~know?~~ ^{is} What's basic in the universe? ~~Well,~~ ^{we do know} one thing is the conservation of
^{we know that you} energy — ~~the idea you just~~ can't do everything at once for everyone. ^{and everything.} That's

~~fundamental.~~ ^{seems to be} All existence, ~~all life is~~ built on that notion. You have to

~~knowing that life cannot~~
 we make choices ~~because life simply can't~~ take care of everything at once. ~~You~~

~~So,~~
~~have to decide what you're going to try to do with life. And to assume that~~

~~command~~
 God is in complete control of reincarnation is equal to assuming ~~that~~ ^{here's a}

~~simple example, there are so many examples. If either one of us is~~

~~reasonably witty on many an occasion, that doesn't mean we're going to be~~

~~witty on every occasion~~

ML: True.

NM: ~~There are times when you feel stupid, and times when you feel bright.~~

It or she is never

~~Why can't we say the same for God? If God's overloaded with worries, even~~

~~despair at huge, unforeseen disasters—why~~ *must we* ~~assume~~ God anticipates every

disaster?

ML: So, what happened to those ~~people~~ *victims of the gas chamber*

I would offer this large assumption.

NM: Oh, I think they were reincarnated, but were reincarnated in

~~the most of them received~~ *reincarnation, but in unsatisfactory fashion*

~~unsatisfactory fashion. The argument I proposed earlier, the closest~~

~~This follows from~~ *that* *decides* *to encounter the witty presence who* *you're*

~~we get to heaven or hell is the wit in the decision of how we're going to be~~

And where

~~reincarnated. And I tell my jokes about it—you can come back as a~~

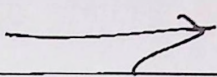
~~cockroach, and so forth, and so forth. And I think when that wit is present,~~

When God's wit is present, that's as close as you ^{will} get to heaven or hell,
~~the knowledge that you will~~ ^{at the start of} ~~whether you'll have a better rebirth or a poorer one.~~ But when God is not ^{your next} ~~life~~ ^{life.}

functioning at His or Her best because God is too beleaguered, too

extenuated, too despairing, too exhausted, then the choices made ^{for} ~~about~~

reincarnation can be second-rate, ~~third-rate, cheap, monotonous~~—there's not

enough of God to go around.  ^{The Holocaust}

Think of the problem of reincarnation and apply it to ourselves: That
we're supposed to pick our next lives to make ourselves better. It takes all
of God's artistry—that's a huge number of individuals. The monitoring
angels to have some sense of how deal with all this.

ML: But what I—

~~described God's will,~~

~~NM: And therefore the Holocaust wiped that out, wiped it out, because too~~

~~Too much was happening at once. Too many people dying at once, and too~~

~~many people had to be reassigned via reincarnation at once.~~

ML: But what you stressed before was the state of mind of people in the

Holocaust as distinguished from the people at Stalingrad. So their state of mind affects how God will do His work?

~~Yes.~~
NM: Absolutely.

ML: It isn't just the number.

NM: Take the number of people killed in Stalingrad over a weekend, and say 7000 people were killed in concentration camps in a weekend—or let's say they were equal—there may have been incredible difficulties with the reincarnations of those assigned to work with those who died in the

~~concentration camps because it was a worse death. It was a worse death in~~

~~that...~~

ML: But how does that affect God? Ten thousand get killed, God still has

~~ten thousand to reassign no matter their state of mind. How does this~~

~~ML: Because~~ God is not inexhaustible. This is ^{at} the core of everything ^{I have}

been saying. God is a divinity possessed of great energies, great creativity,

great possibility. ^{it}

~~ML: Right, but~~

~~NM: Just as we are but by 20 orders of magnitude greater. But that doesn't~~

~~mean that God is all-powerful and all in control of~~

ML: I hear what you say, but why is it more difficult for God to assign a

new birth to someone who died in the Holocaust than someone who died in

the trenches? I don't see the difference.

NM: OK, let's put it this way—you ^{have been} as a teacher. You certainly won't ^{dispute} ~~argue~~ the suggestion) ~~that there are certain classes when you walk in, they are energized and ready~~ ^{which} to learn, and others, ^{when} you walk in, they're lethargic—~~so obviously,~~

~~preparation is all.~~ So some are eager to be in class and others are there

because it's compulsory ^{or this or that}. I'm saying that when you die with great bitterness in your soul, ^{or} ^(or in despair) ^{you are} ~~much~~ harder to reach, it's

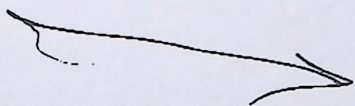
~~How then does this not apply to~~ ~~much harder to get nearer to the person.~~ So how would reincarnation take

~~I am now~~ ^{allow me, let us say, the} place? We're speculating outrageously, but it's fun to do. The monitoring

angel comes by ^{one} and takes a quick look and gets a sense ^{has of how the soul} this person is strong ^{recently expienced soul he saw him is strong} here, weak there, and not so good there, so forth and so on, and ^{might} should go

well go to here or to there. In normal situations ^{here.} In other words, they make ~~very~~ quick decisions. But if the person is

is in disarray, ^{soul} it is analogous to all fucked up, if you're deciding where to send someone and they come into deciding how to give necessary counsel to a person who has come into



and is now
your room with a terrible hangover, threatening to blow their brains out, you
necessarily, they should be assigned to class,
don't know where to assign them. And I think this carries over, to
some extent to what I'm talking about now

ML: OK, *That's good,* I understand now.

Next one: the big picture. We've talked about this before, but this is the
fifth theodicy. God's divine plan is good. What we see as evil is not really
evil. Rather it's part of a divine design that is actually good. Our limitations
prevent us from seeing the big picture. And certainly you'll grant that God
sees a picture much bigger than we do.

NM: Of course.

ML: So things we think are a terrible tragedy turn out—you know, you say a
year later—I've heard you do this many times.

NM: Yes, the army. The worst experience of my life. And the most
valuable. That's one thing. But to build a theological system on this *theodicy* is

~~hopeful.~~ ^{is} The most you can say for it is it's awfully hopeful. It doesn't

explain evil at all. ~~It explains perhaps aspects of evil, some of the more~~

~~superficial aspects of evil.~~ It does not explain the Holocaust. The first

person who can show me how the Holocaust was good for humanity will

~~change my thinking,~~ ^{alter} ~~drastic~~ ^{calley,}

~~ML: It may take a thousand years for us to come to any understanding, . .~~

~~NM: I agree. I agree,~~

~~ML: But you can see how God can sometimes use evil for good.~~ The great

example is Judas. Judas was a traitor, a betrayer, yet he was absolutely

necessary to God's plan. . .

~~NM: But~~ how do you know what God's plan was? You're ~~just~~ taking the

received wisdom of theologians who ^{have} been living with these enigmas for

two thousand years and coming up with answers that serve ^{their respective} the Churches

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But what they conclude~~Which may have nothing to do with the reality of things. What if, after,~~~~all, I wrote a book that says, in effect, that two things happened with the~~crucifixion. One, that God lost to the devil when He had expected ^{to} a win—He thought Jesus was going to change people ^{profoundly} ~~He didn't know that much~~*enough*

about people at the time. No more than we as parents necessarily know all

about our children—they can surprise ~~the hell out of us, they can surprise us~~*and over*
~~us~~ profoundly. And God, having so much to create ~~to, in other words, God~~~~has something to do with such a number of things at once~~ ^{all} is not necessarily*we as one of His creations*
~~highly~~ focused on what people are capable of. So I'm willing to assume that

Jesus was His bold stroke. In chess, for instance, when a really bold move

is made and you're not sure how it's going to turn out, you record it with ~~a~~ ^{an}exclamation point and a question mark. So I'd say ^{God's expectation for} ~~the perception of~~ Jesus*both*
was ~~an~~ ^{both} an exclamation mark and a question mark. ~~And~~ then, it didn't turn out

right. The devil won—Jesus was tortured. ^{At this point} ~~So then~~ God in His brilliance

came up with ^{He} ~~one~~ of the few great victories He had over the devil ~~which~~

^{gave us to believe} ~~was~~ that His Son had died for ^{our} ~~man's~~ sins, which ^{what a deep} ~~did~~ touch a chord and a

^{was struck,} ~~deep chord~~ (But to say this was planned in advance is dubious ^{to me})

^{God may well have been} ~~Rather, it was~~ responding to defeat with a victory. That makes ^{more} ~~as much~~

sense to me: ~~that~~ God was re-writing the depths of what had happened after ^{to}

^{to be place} ~~events had happened, just as we~~ ^{that is exactly what we humans} ~~do~~ all the time. It's one of ^{our} ~~the~~ fundamental

^{It} ~~activities that enable~~ ^{us} ~~you~~ to keep on living. Because you go through

disasters—you go through disasters and. ^{Look to}

ML: You ~~snatch~~ victories from the jaws of defeat.

NM: Yes, ^{I suppose the assumption is} ~~but you also go through disasters and~~ ^{well, let it go. I've said} ~~this is that God is so much like us in~~
~~so many ways that~~ ^{He or she also} ~~has an eye to protect,~~

~~ML OK~~

NM: How are we on time?

ML: Another 20 minutes.

NM: Good.

ML: The next ~~one~~ ^{theology argues that evil} is evil is the consequence, not the cause, of people ^{doing} ~~and~~

to observing God's will. Universal, reciprocal love would solve most of the

problems that lead to the evils in the world. So evil isn't the source but

NM: Well, ^{let me} I'll go back to something I said earlier. Which is ^{that} God is

searching for a deeper set of meanings ⁱⁿ ~~for~~ evil. God does not pretend to

^{completely} Evil has aspects that understand evil inside out. Evil is a phenomena that has no [cannot get]

^{God's understanding cannot penetrate} that God ~~can~~ recognize. In other words, if God is not all-knowing, then he

^{are understood sort of perfection} understands all things, including evil, imperfectly. (In other words, the

^{that God, like us, feels} The fundamental notion is we're here to learn. God then encounters evil in the

^{Maybe at the commencement of Genesis} universe. I do work on the notion that God is not all-powerful. Maybe ^{whatever form it really took}

vast
some deity, very far removed, said, "All right, *Young One,* this will be your territory. Do

what ~~you~~ you can with it." ~~You then have some very interesting ideas.~~

ML: That's a gnostic idea.

NM: "Here it is, do what you can with it." And if you fail—well, others

young and striving deities have failed before you. All the same, Give it your
have failed. There's a price to pay, but all right. Do what you want to do;

next attempt. You are an artist, after all,

you're an artist, a great artist; you're maybe the greatest artist we have in the

just now for your assigned part of the
cosmos." All right, so in the course of this, God discovers that He or She

a great deal
has enormous amounts to learn about evil. And is fascinated with evil. You

could go so far as to say God plays with evil, uses it sometimes, but is not

fundamentally evil. Is not fundamentally sympathetic to evil.

ML: Well, you have a view of evil as a powerful, dynamic force.

Yes, I see evil as
NM: *Looking to destroy the universe part of the*
universe that we know.

ML: ~~Looking to destroy the universe. God's universe.~~ You know, it was,

Emerson ~~was~~ said there really is no evil, there's just the absence of good.

~~that there are~~ ^{are}
But there's ~~degrees~~ of good, just as there's ~~degrees~~ of worth.

NM: ~~And~~ this is too easy. ~~It's too easy.~~

~~ML: OK.~~

~~NM:~~ It enables us to go to sleep at night without worrying. ^{But on} On the nights

when ^{one} you can't sleep, sometimes ~~when~~ ^{can} you feel there's evil in the room, evil

in your heart, evil in people around you—not all the time, but on those

^{one's felt that, you certainly can't say}
occasions when ~~we've felt it~~—you can't say it isn't really evil, it's just a

lesser degree of good.

^{Here is the argument for free will}
ML: This is ~~one, two, three, four, five~~—this is the sixth or the seventh. I

~~can't remember, and this is the free will argument.~~ Evil is the consequence

of God permitting humans to have free will. Human cruelty is the price of

freedom. God gave us this freedom and He can't interfere. Without the possibility to choose to do good or evil acts, humanity would be nothing but robots.

NM: That's the best single, strongest argument. *(theologians are not abusing it. They wiggle out of it, wiggle)* But then they abuse it, they ~~get out of it~~. Let's look at the notes here; let's turn it off for a moment [tape off, then on again]

ML: This is the seventh theodicy: Evil is the consequence of God permitting humans to have free will. Without the possibility to choose to do good and evil, humanity would be nothing but robots. So the cruelty we see in the world is the price of freedom, and God has given us freedom.

NM: ~~But generally speaking, with that argument, they then take it over~~
they again and put God back in control *by* at the end of the argument.

^{yes}
ML: Well, ^{at} the end of time, God takes over again. This is a testing

time, and God

^{Here is}
NM: Now there ^{could rear up} exactly is where existentialism ^{rears up} on all fours. Yes,

God had to give us free will in order to find out anything about us. But we

^{so much more}
~~were~~ God's creation. He couldn't learn anything about us ^{once we were} unless we had free

^{of necessity}
will. But at that moment, the door ^{had to be left} was open to the devil ^{of necessity}. This

^{done on a cosmic level}
~~was not a blind move.~~ This was a move, perhaps, ^{done} in fear and

^{Yes, great fear because the final}
trembling. ^{On a cosmic level, perhaps it was done in fear and trembling.}

^{answer had to be left open. It was}
And it was done and the answer is open. The point is, when God created,

^{not free will unless the devil had}
God did not create alone. The devil is in there also. The devil may end up

^{equal opportunity.}
~~winning this war in which case, as I see it, the universe will be destroyed.~~

MI: Now the devil, of course, has free will too

NM: Well, I don't even begin to understand the devil.

ML: Well, the devil has free will and the devil chose to oppose God. That's

in the classic...

I would add that it is not only

NM: Yes, it's an open war, and it's a tri-partite war, which I think is very

important. If it's only a war between God and the devil, and ^{it is} ~~the battlefield~~ ^{we are up} ~~any one~~ ^{more than the recipient, the 90 they would} ~~itself, the two~~ ^{then we still do not have free} ~~is played out in us, then we still have the~~ ^{alliances between God and the devil} ~~with us being as players to God's~~ ^{to be free when to have the ability} ~~and we often do our best to play them against each other, so we end up,~~ ^{to stand, so to speak, as the third active} ~~force in this combat, that creates~~ ^{particularly in modern times where this has become more true than ever}

before, we end up with an extraordinary, a new kind of fear, ^{in humankind} ~~It used to be a~~

^{Some} ~~we~~ ^{used to} ~~fear that the devil would triumph and we'd all go down in disaster.~~ ^{Others}

^{supported} ~~opposed to those believing that God would triumph and we'd all go to~~

^{view} ~~heaven. That was the way it was for centuries. Now, it's as if~~ ^{any one of} ~~no one will~~

^{the three can} ~~triumph, that the devil and God will, perhaps, even be destroyed. And we~~

^{even} ~~can conceive of a universe that goes on for a period without either God or~~ ^{manages to keep surviving}

the devil—to a degree. I don't pretend to know ^{how to speculate} ~~what I'm talking about here,~~

^{on this,} ~~quite frankly.~~ Let's say ^{that man} ~~at the very least~~ man becomes more ~~and more,~~

powerful in relation to ~~god~~ ^{even arrive at} and the devil, and so there comes a point where it

becomes man's world, the humans' world. ^{That} ~~It~~ could be disastrous, absolutely

disastrous.

ML: What would make that come about?

NM: ~~Well, technology.~~ Technology. It's obvious—well, obvious to me—

that ~~these~~ ^{is} every effort being made in these years to replicate a human

being. It might take two centuries but that's what ^{we humans seem} ~~they're out to do.~~ And

~~well-kept on doing.~~ ^{At that point,} they're working on it all the time, all the time.

~~Free will becomes a disaster for~~ ^{cal.} ~~It has so grown in intensity~~
~~Now that's it. I can go through some notes.~~

~~that it looks to replace them.~~

there is the last
ML: No, ~~one more~~. This is the eighth, the last one. God is a righteous

And
judge. People get what they deserve. If someone suffers, it is because they

have committed a sin that merits such suffering. ~~That~~ . . .

Much suffering now exists
NM: Faulty reasoning. Faulty reasoning because . . . ~~there's a delicate~~
because a divine balance has been disrupted
~~balance. We think of all the cattle who are killed to feed us meat. And we~~

a different
We had ~~one~~ relation to existence a thousand years ago when you had to hunt ~~an~~
animal if you wished for such food
~~animals to eat them. Now they brought to stockyards, killed in all kinds of~~
are Meat for consumption is

Sows
disagreeable ways, it's all pretty god-~~damn~~. Calves are kept in cribs so small
they do not have room to move or once they are fattened
~~they can't even thrash around in the cribs. I don't want to get into that,~~

obviously, but the point is ~~it may be there are certain kinds of evil that you~~

~~wouldn't necessarily call evil. The world of nature was built on a basis that~~
once where

nearly everything
~~there were feeding cycles. Everything contributed to ~~everything~~ the~~

also
feeding cycle. Along with reincarnation, everything ~~was~~ taken care of. This

was the original and beautiful conception which ^{now} bears as much relation to
 the ~~contemporary~~ ^{agribusiness} ~~fine~~ ^{can offer}
 the final result as the initial beautiful conception of a movie script bears to
 a few traces to ~~have gone~~ ^{on the canvas}
 the final product—so many things go wrong. But this notion that evil's been
 But the earlier human notion that
 excessive evil was compensated for
 taken care of—if you were killed before your time, reincarnation could
 make adjustment ^{may no longer be operative, or}
 adjust for that. ^{and yet it is the} It's the only explanation I know for why young soldiers are,
 when tested ^{ready}
 so willing to die in battle. They're loyal to their buddies, loyal to their

~~countries, they adore this, adore that, but then we have cases like the~~

~~[cannot get]. Soldiers fought with each other to get into the front lines,~~

where the odds were much greater of being killed. And I think they have a

~~comparable in some degree to~~
 sense—even as the terrorists who are blowing themselves up—that they are

~~going to get something special.~~ ^{Somehow} Right or wrong, this is their belief. It's a

very deep belief. So deep a belief that ^{one cannot} you can't necessarily ignore it. ~~So~~
~~that introduces a dilemma and an~~
~~enigma. Perhaps there~~
~~that sense, evil in the world—how to put it? I say there are gradations to~~

and so some evils
evil, ~~depths to evil~~. Certain evils are meaningful, necessary evils. It may be

the world would
~~that the only way to have a world that wouldn't~~ consist entirely of vegans

if we did not kill animals
would be to ~~have people killing game~~. On the other hand, if you had a

~~world where nobody killed game and everybody ate vegetables, plants~~

Perhaps we need
might ~~be~~ beginning to suffer egregiously ~~which plants also do~~. So there
is differentiation between categories of evil,
~~very elements in the very creation of existence that had to be taken care of,~~

and those elements were necessary evils, if you will, *as* opposed to

evil is intoxicated
elements of excessive evil, *inspirational evil*, *inspirational evil* in the sense

by what
~~that evil sees something absolutely marvelous it can do for itself, and that's~~

If Report this Theodicy would you?
~~what it does. And we pay the price of the given, the price of existence. It~~

~~has to do with evil for the sake of evil, in and of itself.~~

~~For that matter that question, that last question how does it go,~~

~~again?~~

ML: God is righteous. People get what they deserve.

NM: ~~That's~~ ^{that} malarkey. God does the best He or She can do. ~~It~~ ^{that} doesn't mean people get what ~~the~~ ^{they} deserve. If they did, the universe would be ~~like~~ ^{equal to} a clock.

Would you agree that it was
ML: Wasn't it inevitable ~~that~~ once God gave us free will, and intelligence,

~~that~~ ^{then} technology would follow?

NM: Well, ~~no~~. ^{I am working} This is rank speculation and I must say, I'm working up

against the tide on this one, but it could be ^{that} at a certain point that God ~~hoped~~ ^{and expected that all of us} thought everyone would become psychic. Great entertainers would be

~~entertain in certain situations and it would be so intense, people all over the~~ ^{in their art that}
~~men and women all over the world could~~
~~world would know if they just concentrated, they would see or experience~~

^{Yes}
the performance. And depending on how skilled and beautiful your senses

^{had}
had become, because you paid great attention to your senses, so you could

show across the world
receive these performances. You could have people influencing people at

Of course, it didn't happen. We looked
great distances. And it didn't work. ~~We didn't go in for it and so we ended~~

instead [unclear] means
~~up with our technological ways of communicating. Which would play~~
And that blunted
the possibility of such fine senses
~~have with the senses.~~

I would say that if
ML: They do, ~~but~~ *if* you put people in a physical world, and they are

~~going to move through that physical world, and they have intelligence—~~

they are
~~they're going to invent the wheel. And once they~~ *do,* ~~have the wheel.~~

NM: But the wheel...

technology
~~ML: Once they have the wheel, everything just follows from that.~~

NM: No, sir. No, sir. ~~No, sir.~~

~~ML: You want to say it's electronics.~~

NM: Yes. Electronics have nothing to do with the wheel. That was *one* jump

by mankind that
~~(~~ God had nothing to do with.

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ML: So when we went from a mechanical universe to an electronic universe—

NM: That was a ~~jump~~ ^{leap} that may not ~~have been~~ anticipated. Or, ~~say~~.

ML: That was the jump?

^{Such is}
NM: Yes. That's my speculation. We still don't know what electricity is,

~~nor what light is, or sound, or~~
~~what lightning is, what sound is... we don't know anything.~~ So the fact we

~~can manipulate all these things without knowing what they are, brings a~~
~~forces their inner nature.~~

~~I say that brings a~~ ~~once again we are~~
~~great sense of uneasiness in us. Leave these things here, turn it off... [tape~~
~~face to face with knowledge that the~~
~~off, on again]~~

~~End is unknown~~
~~Even most people who believe in~~
~~most people reincarnation believes sooner or later everyone reaches~~
~~expect that~~

~~they reach~~ enlightenment or ~~some~~ some equitable resting place, and then the

problems and sufferings of earthly life become no more than way-stations. I

don't see that at all. I think reincarnation makes no sense if the end is

foretold. The end cannot be foretold, and I can't emphasize this enough.

None of my arguments make sense if the end is ^{known. It is} foretold. ~~It is~~ precisely

because the end is not foretold that ^{human gets at the root of} the terror ~~which has sapped the basic~~

^{every) and has} ~~It is so difficult for humans to~~ ^{accept the likelihood}
(theology for millennia) ~~the notion~~ that this world is as open and

undecipherable, as chaotic, as wayward, as playful, as perverse, as

^{I think this is what} unexpected as we fear it is, ^{these long} has driven any number of ~~leaders~~ to the notion

that it has all been foretold, ^{that has been} and the end is granted to us, ^{but such} and this is

^{conclusions are} ~~That has gotten~~ outrageous. ~~This is what gets~~ us into all sorts of terrible trouble. Because ^{it}
^{a foreordained end} narrows our lives and shrinks our thinking. And brings out the worst in us.

ML: And ~~once you~~ ~~you begin with the notion~~ ~~which follows what in~~

^{It} ~~your thinking?~~ If that's the most ~~fundamental point~~ that the end can't be

^{cannot} foretold, then clearly, God can't be all-powerful or all-knowing. So you

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~~have to~~
don't begin with a God who is limited; you begin with an end that ~~can't~~ ^{could posit or not} be

known, and —

NM: It ~~doesn't matter~~. It's simpler for me to approach it from the idea that

God is not all-powerful. That ~~is something~~ ^{only way} I can grasp immediately. ~~Of~~

~~From~~ that comes the notion that the end is not foretold. Because the other ~~would~~ ^{plenty of}

~~be fundamentalism, if you will. If I declare "the end is not foretold," that's~~

~~another species of fundamentalism. I'm stating in effect I know how it's~~

~~going to end up which is we don't know how it will end up. On the~~

~~contrary — the moment God is not all powerful, the end of ~~us~~ foretold, OK?~~

~~One thing we didn't discuss at all, which is very large, very tricky,~~

~~and absolutely beyond my means, and it could be that God fears evil in~~

~~Himself or Herself. I know we've never touched on this possibility, Some~~

~~people say God uses evil to weather us, temper us, judge us.~~

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ML: Right,

~~NM: Even get to understand us, which is my argument. But the idea God~~
~~could fear evil in Himself or Herself is that God does not understand evil as~~
~~well as the devil. That is something that may be there to be explored—by~~
~~others, not by me.~~

ML: One thing that has occurred to me this morning when I was reading
these notes is [tape runs out]

NM: Testing—OK, you were saying—

ML: In all these conversations we've had about the nature of God, your
supposition has been that God makes mistakes, He^{is} not perfect, He's^{is} much
like us ~~in that sense~~. But ~~in us~~, we know we have evil in us. There^{is} evil in
us as individuals, and as a race. And if God is so much like us, then God

does indeed have evil in Him or Her. And that explains everything—you

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don't need a devil if God—

NM: No, no, no, no, I don't think that's it at all. God could have a little evil

in Him and the devil could have a great deal. If God ^{has} just had a little evil in

Him, fine.

ML: Let's say it's 80/20. If God just has 20% evil, wouldn't that be enough

to account for all the natural disasters and the Holocaust?

NM: Probably. But 80/20 is an assumption. What if it's 95/5 or 98/2? This out

~~one I don't want to get into particularly, because it's beyond my capacities.~~

~~it's too large. I think it's something you have to grapple with in a novel.~~

That could be interesting.

ML: There are theologians who take this position. They're called "open

theists" and take the position that God is imperfect and has enough evil in

Him—and the evil in God, coupled with the devil, is responsible for the

miseries of the world.

NM: Well, that could certainly be an answer, and if you want to pay ~~to~~

~~give what's the word?~~ if you want to respect the Old Testament as more

than a great work of literature, ^{but as} it's ~~also~~ a document with some reality ^{to it}.

with Jehovah there, you certainly have a ^{Jehovah out there} ~~god~~ who is wreaking evil as well as

goodness. And it could be that God, being existential ^{like us} ~~was~~ trying to reduce

the amount of evil in Himself or Herself.

ML: ~~By~~ By doing what?

^{For one thing,}
NM: Well, by trying to get that prodigious temper under control, ^{for one}

^{By} ~~thing, and by bringing the Son~~, daring to have a Son, ~~and this was a great~~

^{to improve matters}
attempt. It may be God was ^{always going up and down} trying for more, ^{over}

^{and over, and over}
and deciding, "No, ^{this more} ~~that more~~ won't work." It may be after Christ's death,

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~~He had to decide whether he wished to sail/~~
~~God was deciding if He wanted the Catholic Church the way it was~~

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And maybe) joining him. It may be
~~developing and maybe the devil was coming into it, so the two of them~~
~~each one to complete the history of the~~
~~Catholic Church if we assume that~~
~~were building this Church together in collaboration with some unhappiness~~
~~God and the devil built it together and~~
~~were most unhappy and enlisting~~
~~partners~~

In other words, God may be having the same sort of odyssey that

humans have. He may get better along the way, but not succeeding

altogether.

Are you
 ML: ~~So you're~~ saying that there's the possibility of many human institutions

~~that can be the simultaneous~~ ^{can be} or let's say, the co-creation of both God and

the devil. The Catholic Church would be one.

NM: ~~Oh~~ absolutely. I think the all are. I also think that God may have

~~elements of evil, along with the cooperation. If they cooperate. They could~~

~~be like two partners who can't stand each other but work together on a great~~

(49)

~~many projects regardless.~~

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ML: Do you see any human organizations or institutions that are free from the taint of evil? Or are they all mixed?

NM: ~~Oh~~, I think there's evil in everything.

ML: Baseball teams. . .

NM: ~~Oh~~, come on. . .

ML: Football. . .

(pause) One last thought

NM: Give me a break! I mean, George Steinbrenner, bless him, is a

wonderful study and—what could I say? Leave him out of it.

ML: Well, I can see what. . . Many people have said the Catholic Church has such byzantine machinery and resources that it must have. . . it must have made a kind of pact with the devil at some point.

NM: Oh, I take it for granted. There are a great many Catholic theologians who argue it all the time, that certain bishops are agents of the devil. Let's see if there's any more here.

Earlier, you were ^{adversarial} speaking about the argument that suffering is good

for you, ^{that}

ML: Right.

DM: Submitting to God's will without complaint is virtuous. And ^{this} your

virtue will earn you all kinds of rewards. It says further: "Surely we will

endure whatever God sends since that ^{is passage} your ticket to eternal bliss." Of

course, if you ask how a perfect God can make things ^{matters} so inefficient, ^{the} all you

^{only answer you receive is} get as an answer is, "Oh, how can you presume to understand the mind of

God?" Now, right there, is the most logical and the most dangerous single

argument advanced by ^{church men. It is} theologians. It's exactly what drives people out of

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Ready to look to Mike O
on Wednesday
July 20, 05
(Dwayne)

[note—material in []s with MLFX indicates "for Mike to fix"]

[MLFX

ML: Today, we're going to ^{diseases} ^{and its severity} tackle theodicy, which ~~just for the record~~ is the

attempt ^{venture that leads to} to reconcile the coexistence of evil and God. ~~In any attempt to deal~~

with the ~~problem of evil~~, the so-called philosophical problem of evil, is

^{And there} generally called theodicy. There are many of them. And what I'm going to

~~do is hit you with some of them and you can answer as you wish.]~~

God's ultimate purpose, some philosophers say, is to glorify Himself,

^{He} ~~which~~, by definition, He alone is infinitely entitled to do without vanity. ^{But he does} He

~~allows~~ evil to exist so we will appreciate goodness all the more. ^{It is analogous} ~~in the same~~

to ~~the~~ way that the blind man healed by Jesus appreciated his sight more than

those around him who ^{had} never experienced ^{such a condition.} blindness.

NM: ^{Let me take up ~~your~~ first what} Yes, but what I don't understand, and I have never understood, is why

^{What is} (there is) this enormous desire in God, as He is ~~present~~ ^{to us}, to be
^{so accepted by so many branches of religion,}
 glorified. We laugh at people who insist on being constantly glorified. We

speak of neurotic movie stars or spoiled athletes. ^{Of And} Of crazy generals. ^{Our} And

impossible authors. One of the ^{feels} things humankind seems pretty certain of is

that excessive vanity ^{once it} becomes a ^{is divine} thing in itself. (By that logic, a god-

sized vanity ^{seems} makes it worse, ^{where is the} because there's no need for it. ?

ML: Maybe we can change "glorified" to "loved." God wants to be loved.

NM: Why does God need to be loved? That's a large question. It may be

true, but if God needs to be loved, then I think we are entitled to start

posing a few questions. Is it that God's need to be loved is crucial because

God, like us, is over-extended? When, after all, do we have our greatest

~~need to be loved?~~ ^{adored.)} It is precisely when ^{we are} ~~we're~~ worn thin, when our courage,

our stamina, our determination, ~~our confidence in ourselves~~ our belief that we

~~possess~~ ^{is} ~~are worth something~~ ^{such times,} have ~~it~~ become attenuated. At that moment, we are in

need of love.

^{Are you saying}
ML: ~~Is~~ that where God is now?

NM: ~~Yes.~~ Yes, I suppose I ^{am.} ~~would say that God may be at that point now.~~ It is the only justification

~~I can comprehend if God truly needs~~
~~our adoration.~~

ML: ~~You find no interest in the argument that He allows evil to exist so as~~ ^{in order}

^{Moving on to my second point you}
~~to intensify our~~
~~to set off love for Him all the more?~~

NM: I find that ~~extraordinarily~~ strange. I've always been bothered by the

excessive love that God appears to demand, ^{on put into and} ~~Worse,~~ that the ^{clerkman} ~~people who~~

^{places of worship}
~~found His churches, particularly His fundamentalist churches, insist upon.~~

"Jesus needs your love, Jesus wants your love." Well, Jesus is giving love,

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presumably. Does He need it in order to receive it and ^{return it?} ~~give it back?~~ What

they're saying—without understanding, because they never follow anything

to a logical conclusion—^{but} one of the elements in their thinking that repels

most serious young people away from theology, is that fundamentalists don't ^{for example} ~~seem to make a point of not thinking?~~ ~~think~~ through to the consequences of their thought. For if God does need a

great deal of love, then why? Why? ^{The} ~~The~~ question has to be asked. Doesn't

^{it} ~~that~~ suggest we dwell in a situation where God's fate depends upon

our development—^{as well—} the good or evil world that we are developing?

Now, all we have to work with ^{as humans} ~~and~~ think ^{in these theological/} ~~is~~ ^{speculations} what we know from our ~~own~~ ^{own}

experience. ~~And~~ ^{not} generally, the people who really need love are ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ bad

^{good} (shape. If God created us in His or Her image, which I do believe, then God ^{also} ~~wants~~ ^{some real portion of what is} ~~is~~ wants us to understand what's going on in the universe. It's to God's ^{this} ~~advantage~~

advantage, I would argue, for us to understand what God's needs might be.

Unless, on the other hand, human history has been so vile and so awful, so permeated by the devil, that God lives in terror, expecting to be destroyed

by mankind so soon as humans obtain enough power. That may be a real

possibility. We ^{glance the edge of such danger} see it in technology, in medical technology ~~most of all.~~

For example

ML: Here is another theodicy: Evil is one way ^{of the means by which} that God can test humanity

^{can} ~~to~~ see if we are worthy of His grace and His love. The evil and the suffering

that comes to us ^{prove to} can also be educational, can make us better people. He ^{is}

testing us and the tests are good for us.

NM: I find that offensive. Apply it to a parent and a child; ^{we} test the

child—and in some situations we do test a child—but do we do it to see if

the child is worthy of our love? Literature is ^{ripe with portraits of} filled with detestable parents,

fathers and mothers of that ilk.

ML: Consider the second part: ^{it is} ~~the~~ educational for us. It makes us better

people. We do that with children—we ^{do} test them to improve them, we say,

^{"Now that you've}
"You've been through that, you're a better person for it." We do that all the

time to our children.

^{On the other hand, there is also large,}
NM: I know, but there's such ^{vanity} in the assumption that God knows all

^{try to live with}
about evil. Why not take the notion that God is trying to discover what evil

^{What if} is all about? That evil perhaps ^(not perfectly) is more bottomless than good! ^{To say} As you well

^{it once again,}
know by now, I work on the notion that God is not all-powerful. As a point

^{and opens up}
of departure, once we take up the assumption that God is not all-powerful,

^{He}
all sorts of questions open. And one of the first is God's relation to evil. Is

^{It? May it be that}
God trying to discover more about evil? Maybe God doesn't comprehend

evil all that well, any more than as parents we understand it. If our children

are moving toward evil, are ~~the~~ parents always the first to know? Not often.

~~Not often.~~

ML: It was Dostoyevsky who said suffering is the soul-origin of

consciousness. That only through suffering could we improve our minds,

and so be able to understand the world around us a little more. Do you

reject that?

NM: ~~I don't have to assent to everything Dostoyevsky said or thought. I can~~

I can

(agree that suffering is, yes, a mighty educator, but it is also an immensely

expensive one. Some learn a great deal from suffering, ^{it;} and all too many are

destroyed by it. Suffering can be a Bed of Procrustes and so ^{again} ~~destroy~~ more

spirit)

Some learn best by
(than it creates. Sometimes one learns more from suffering in small degrees,

~~rather than egregiously.~~ If, for example, if you want to become a ^{better} ~~good~~

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*man or woman that might require not indulging
person that may involve not exercising your greed unduly in many minor*

matters.

ML: A form of suffering.

NM: A modest form. If I want something, and I can't have it, I may be

suffering like a child. Whereas Dostoyevsky was referring to suffering at a

very high level: Can I go on *with my existence?* Is existence worthwhile?

Suffering of that order can be most intense. Some people *become to* can become

suicides *in such situations.* And it can be true that those who pass through *if*
such storms of the soul can
and come out on the other side not emotionally crippled, *and* can have much to

offer. *But some are hobbled, and have
lost much.*

ML: OK, let me offer another theodicy, the "now and then" *theodicy.* Evil

and pain exist in this world, but only as a prelude to the afterlife *There,* where no

pain will exist. *God offers* So there's a balance: Much suffering, pain and evil in this

world ^{but} and in the other, there will be none. ~~Since there is evil in this life,~~ the scales balance.

NM: That is ^{comparable} ~~equivalent in its probability~~ to a man thinking, "I'm poor, but there will come a day when I am wealthy." Of course, the poor man has nothing

to offer concerning the way he will become wealthy ~~as time goes on~~. He

has nothing but his hankering ~~to be wealthy~~. By the same token, ^{is awful} ~~this notion~~ that we will live in peace and beauty afterward ^(maybe naught but) ~~is hard-sell salesmanship~~.

"You won't know what true happiness is until you buy this car. Don't let people tell you it's a lemon; it's a wonderful car. You'll come back and thank me for having sold you this car."

In the theodicies you've presented so far, there is always the

assumption that God is in control of ^{our fate} ~~the thing~~ from beginning to end. ^{By} ~~And~~ ^{my lights} ~~think that~~ the prime theological ^{mis-direction} ~~mistake~~ fears up right there. Anyone who

looks even casually at the variety of incredible animals that have come

down the pike, has to assume that God may have said to Himself at a certain

point, "This little animal, this macaw, is going to be the best of its species."

Then, it turned out that it wasn't. So God moved on and made a better bird

or made a better hedgehog, or a better pig. Then, ~~then~~ man came into it and

in his turn to
began ~~altering the animals as well~~. My underlying notion is not that God

knows completely what He or She is doing, but rather that God is searching

to do the best He or She can do to improve things. And, the moment you *accept*

The existence and therefore the hazards and perils added by God's effort takes place
bring the Devil into it, then it is an effort (against great odds, a contest where

It has become a contest where no one

no one, human or divine, knows which side may win. In contrast, *how* *look*

necessarily
at how our minds, our sense of challenge is reduced
~~much the milk is watered down to assume that it's all being done for God's~~

(if it is

guard)

greater glory and all we have to do is *keep* our patience and pass through

with
our suffering, because, at the end, there *will* be a happy ending—no! No! I

much prefer the Greek's assumption that ^{tragedy lies} next to happiness is ~~tragedy~~, and ^{both comfort} ~~the two are~~ the staples of our existence. We can live with ^{the} hope that it may

all turn out well, but such hope will be ^{empty} without ~~value~~ unless we are also

prepared to live with a tragic outcome. We need to have the bravery to

proceed, but in no way can we ^{appropriate} ~~deserve~~ the confidence to proclaim that a

wonderful heaven is waiting for all of us, and all we have to do is keep our

^{mind} ~~noses~~-clean, ^{and, most preferably, philosophically} ~~inert~~.

ML: The fourth theodicy is one of maya. Do you know what ^{that} ~~maya~~ is?

NM: Maya...

ML: Illusion. This is how some deal with the question of evil. They say:

what humans consider to be evil or suffering is either an illusion or it's

unimportant. Events that are thought to be evil are really not so, such as

death by natural disaster ^{It all} ~~which~~ could be part of God's scheme. All eastern

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religions—Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, take this general

stance—they ^{do not} ~~don't~~ engage the problem of evil. You are mistaken if you

think it is really there.

NM: That's an argument that could ^{is one} ~~be advanced~~ ^{survive} until the 20th century came

along. I think the 20th ^{Holocaust} ~~century~~ shattered that argument. Shattered it by

force majeure. That's a useful notion, force majeure. It means these particular

facts are so strong that they dictate the ^{have to} ~~only~~ way you can approach the

problem.

Contemplate the Holocaust, ^{and the atom bomb,} ~~and~~ the gulags and the mystery of

suffering is intensified by at least one order of magnitude. ^{Along the} ~~The~~ notion that

evil is illusion becomes offensive. Of course, maya assumes that all of the

"outside world," good, evil, and neutral, is illusion—wonderful, lovely outer

events are as illusory as suffering. It's all maya. But I must say I find that

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almost as offensive. It suggests that we are at best no more than the equal
 of any holy cow in any Hindu pasture. Indeed, the notion that all life was
 illusion was not a bad way for the upper classes of India to salve their bad
 conscience at the sight of the hideous poverty around them, but that's
 another discussion.

If you believe in karma as I do, and so believe not only in rebirth, but
 in ^{(divine) (hope fully)} ~~divinely~~ subtle judgment concerning the manner in which you are reborn,

there is also a part of me ^{which} ~~that~~ is sardonic and expects that God ^{man have this} ~~has many~~

^{or then} ~~(bureaucratic problems with reincarnation. If~~ ^{populations} ~~most people~~ die at a ^{steady}

~~dependable~~ rate with only a statistical spike here and there—a local

earthquake, a terrible storm or flood—God can receive and judge incoming

souls. Forgive this unforgivably crude presentation of celestial mechanics,

but it must serve to make my crude point. When ~~when~~ reincarnation is

flooded with a huge number of deaths that have no meaning—because they

are abrupt, even near-instantaneous, without warning, and provide no

opportunity to die with any grace, to be bereft ^{and so leave the victims} at the moment of your death ^{at (their)}

they possess no ^{they now must die, then they} of possessing some sense of why you are dying—worse, being executed, ^{have less preparation within themselves} as they enter ^{then} then you are hardly prepared for reincarnation. You have been lopped off. I

would argue that a sudden, unexpected death is much worse than death that

comes to one after a modicum of preparation. ^{thought and expectation,} I believe there is a profound

difference ^{between the two, and for all we} know, it may be profound.

So I think the Holocaust ^{ruined} exploded many of the divine procedures of

^{concerning} reincarnation. I think there was ^{even} terrible confusion in the heavens, a celestial

nightmare for God and the angels.

ML: Was it so different from trench warfare in the First World War where

they were killing 150,000 people in a week? Surely, that equals the rate of

people being exterminated in the Holocaust. By the time the First World

War was over, something like 30 million people ~~were~~ *were gone.*

NM: ~~Yes~~, I ~~think~~ ^{believe} it's analogous. When deaths occur too quickly, the powers and processes of reincarnation can suffer chaos.

ML: So every time this has happened, like at Stalingrad, the battle of Stalingrad, or the horrors of China when the Japanese went into Manchuria—all of those. . .

NM: When you go into a battle like Stalingrad, you are, at least, prepared

to die. What was most diabolical about the Nazi camps is that they ~~didn't~~ *were*

most careful not to
(prepare people for death ~~on that day~~). They did not state: "We are going to

gas you today." On the contrary, they told the concentration camp inmates

that since they were lice-ridden and filthy, they would receive showers, ~~so~~, *so,*

please undress. Those prisoners who were most obsessed with cleanliness,

trooped happily into the gas chambers. A minute later, they were dying, *with*
~~five in their lungs and~~
~~they were screaming, "You lied, you cheated me. This is awful."~~ I am
 arguing that ~~it is~~ ^{it is} one thing for a thousand people to die in a large room at a
 given moment, but the difference is whether they are dying in a rage, ~~or~~
 feeling that God or ~~someone or~~ ^{someone or} something on high betrayed them, or whether they were
 prepared to die.

In contrast, the soldiers in Stalingrad knew there was a ~~very~~ ^{very} good ~~chance~~
 chance they were going to perish. That, I would submit, offered less
 grievous problems to the powers of reincarnation than the carnage of the
 Holocaust. I repeat: it is so important to have a sense of why ~~you're~~ ^{you are} dying.
 I go so far as to believe that ~~any~~
 expiring because you are old, because your body is gone after having lived
 prepare you for your next existence
 with it for 60, 70, 80, or 90 years. You may even be ready for the next
 existence.

the witty presence who decides how ^{your path} you're going to be reincarnated. And

where. When God's wit is present, that's as close as you will get to heaven

or hell, knowledge that you will have a better life or a poorer one at the start

of your next life. But when God is not functioning at His or Her best

because God is too beleaguered, too exterminated, too despairing, too

exhausted, then the choices made for reincarnation can be ^{become} second-rate—

aggressively busy

there's not enough of God to go around. The Holocaust deafened God's

wit, wiped it out. Too much was happening at once. And God ^{too, was} is not

^(quite, is not)

inexhaustible. This is at the core of everything I have been saying: God is a

divinity possessed of great energies, great creativity, great possibility, but

^{must not} that
that doesn't mean God is all-powerful.

MM: I hear what you say, but why is it more difficult for God to assign a
 new birth to someone who died in the Holocaust than someone who died in
 the trenches? I don't see the difference.

MM: OK, let's put it this way—you have been a teacher. You certainly

won't dispute the suggestion that you can walk into certain ~~classes~~ ^{classrooms} which are

~~the students are~~ ^{energized and ready to learn, and others, when you walk in, they're}

~~but~~ lethargic. Some are eager to be in class and others are there because ~~it's~~ ^{it is}

compulsory. So, ~~I am~~ ^{I am} saying that when you die with great bitterness in your
~~heart,~~
~~soul, or in a fury, or in despair,~~ you are much harder to reach. How does

this not apply to reincarnation? I am now speculating outrageously, but

allow me. Let us say the monitoring angel comes by, takes one quick look

and has a sense of how the recently expired soul before him ^{can prove} is strong here,

^{deserve to}
 weak there, and might well go to here or to there. In normal situations, they

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make quick decisions. But if the soul is in disarray, if it is analogous to

deciding how to give necessary counsel to a person who has come into your

room ^{in less than ideal conditions} ~~with a terrible hangover~~ and is now threatening to blow his brains

out, you don't necessarily know where they should be assigned to class.

And I think this carries over to some extent to what I'm talking about.

ML: OK. Understood.

Next one: the big picture. We've talked about this before, but this is the

fifth theodicy. God's divine plan is good. What we see as evil is not really

evil. ^{It's} Rather ~~it's~~ part of a divine design that is actually good. Our limitations

prevent us from seeing the ^{larger} big picture. And certainly you'll grant that God

^{envisions more} ~~sees a picture much bigger~~ than we do.

NM: Of course.

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ML: So things we think are a terrible tragedy turn out—you know, you say a year later—I've heard you do this many times.

NM: Yes, the army. The worst experience of my life. And the most valuable. That's one thing. But to build a theological system on this

may be excessively
theodicy is awfully hopeful. It doesn't explain evil at all. It does not

justify it
explain the Holocaust. The first person who can show me how ~~the~~ *that*

God's purposes
Holocaust was good for ~~humanity~~ will alter my thinking drastically.

MI: The great example is Judas. Judas was a traitor, a betrayer, yet he was absolutely necessary to God's plan.

NM: How do you know what God's plan was? You're taking the received wisdom of theologians who have been living with these enigmas for two

they
thousand years and coming up with answers that serve their respective *needs*
~~and he can be master for the church~~

~~But what they conclude~~ But what they conclude may have nothing to do with reality. I

(which concluded that)
wrote a book that said two things happened because of the crucifixion.

One: that God lost to the devil when He had expected to win—He thought

Jesus was going to change *humanity* people profoundly. He *did not* know enough

about His own most advanced Creation to be able to foresee it all.
about people at the time. No more than we as parents necessarily know all

enough
about our children—they can surprise us profoundly. And God, having so

much to create and oversee all at once is not necessarily focused on what as

one of His Creations are capable of. So I'm willing to assume that Jesus was

His bold stroke. In chess, for instance, when a really bold move is made

and you *are* not sure how *it is* going to turn out, you record it with an

exclamation point *plus* and a question mark. *I would* So ~~He~~ say God's expectation for

Jesus was both an exclamation *point* mark and a question mark. Then, *it is* it didn't

another bold move; it did not

turn out right. The devil won—Jesus was tortured. At this point, God in

His brilliance came up with one of the few great victories He had over the

devil. He gave us to believe that His Son had died for our sins. What a

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Van Brunt

with them and Mimi had slurped down her food, as if everything were
 deep chord was struck. But to say this was planned in advance - obvious.
 spaghetti. The Strawbridges tried not to notice her lack of table manners,
 but the conversation became strained as Mimi picked up a chicken
 God but the conversation became strained as Mimi picked up a chicken
 and began gnawing on it. I'd asked Harris about his work and he asked
 me about mine. God was re-writing the depths of what had happened
 more sense to me. Rosalyn tried to make small talk, about the weather, and

how awful Reagan was. Mimi gave her a I don't give a damn look, and
 after the events had taken place - that is exactly what we humans do all the time
 afterwards said they were dull and boring people, and she never wanted
 to see them again. Were all my friends so boring, she'd asked.
 time. It's one of our fundamental activities. It enables us to keep on living.

I said she wouldn't call them to check on my whereabouts. Some
 Because you go through disasters - you go through disasters and look to
 little voice in my head trickled down, saying I could spend the night with
 Laura Cohen, and Mimi couldn't prove that I hadn't been with the
 ML: ... snatch victories from the jaws of defeat
 Strawbridges.

NM: Yes. I suppose the assumption in this is that God is so much like us in
 You're right, I told Laura. "I do want to see it." I decided to let
 things go in their natural direction, just to see where they would take me.
 so many ways that He or She also has an ego to protect.

We rode the subway to Manhattan, getting off at Seventh Avenue

ML: The next theodicy argues that evil is the consequence, not the cause, of
 and Christopher, walking hand in hand to Sixth Avenue. The theater was

cool and uncrowded. We sat in the front row of the balcony, where I had
 of people failing to observe God's will. Universal, reciprocal love would
 plenty of leg room. Laura nestled in close to me, her head on my
 shoulder. I put my arm around her. I had day-dreamed of scenes like this
 solve most of the problems that lead to the evil in the world.
 before meeting Mimi six years ago.

The movie itself was silly, but the music redeemed it. I thought
 Tom Hulce as Mozart went over the top, as if he might be putting the

devil. He gave us to believe that His Son had died for our sins. What a

deep chord was struck! But to say this was planned in advance—dubious!

God may well have been responding to a ^{crushing halt} defeat with a victory. That makes

more sense to me: God was re-writing the depths of what had happened

after the events had taken place—^{which} ~~that~~ is exactly what we humans do all the time

We call it—forgive me—we call it History. It is,
~~time. It's~~ one of our fundamental activities. It enables us to keep on living.

I suppose I even offer the
~~Because you go through disasters—you go through disasters and look to...~~

assumption that God is not only
ML: ...snatch victories from the jaws of defeat.

NM: Yes. I suppose the assumption in this is that God is so much like us in

but, indeed,
~~so~~ many ways that He or She also has an ego to protect.

ML: The next theodicy argues that evil is ^{not the cause but} the consequence ~~not the cause, of~~

of people failing to observe God's will. Universal, reciprocative love would

solve most of the problems that lead to the evils in the world.

NM: Well, let me go back to something I said earlier. ~~Which is that~~ God is

searching for a deeper set of meanings in evil. God does not pretend to

understand evil completely. Evil has aspects that God's understanding

cannot penetrate. ~~God is not all-knowing, then all things, including evil,~~

~~is understood short of perfection.~~ The fundamental notion is that God, like

us, seeks to learn. Maybe at the commencement, ~~at Genesis~~, whatever form

close to Genesis or, vastly differently,
it really took, some vast deity, very far removed, said, "All right, Young

One, this will be your territory. Do what You can with it."

ML: That's a gnostic idea.

NM: "And if you fail—well, other young ~~and striving~~ deities have failed

before you. All the same, ^{do} give it your best attempt. You are an artist, after

all, a great artist; maybe, You are the greatest artist we have available just

now for Your assigned part of the cosmos." All right, God soon discovers

that He or She has a great deal to learn about evil. And is fascinated with evil. You could go so far as to say God plays with evil, uses it sometimes, but is not fundamentally evil. Is not fundamentally sympathetic to evil.

ML: Well, you have a view of evil as a powerful, dynamic force.

NM: Yes, I see evil as looking to destroy the part of the universe that we know.

ML: ~~You know~~, Emerson said there really is no evil, ~~there's~~ just the absence of good. But that there are degrees of good, just as there are degrees of worth.

NM: This is too easy. It enables us to go to sleep at night without ~~worry~~ ^(fear, a pang or)

But on the nights when one can't sleep, sometimes you can feel there's evil in the room, evil in your heart, evil in people around you—not all the time,

but on those occasions when one's felt ^{such a presence} that you certainly can't say it ~~is~~

is not really evil, it's just a lesser degree of good. ^{it is} Emerson may perhaps never have snipped the wire. He was, ~~after~~ after all, such a fine spirit.

ML: Here is ~~the~~ ^{another} argument for free will: Evil is the consequence of God

permitting humans to have free will. Human cruelty is the price of freedom.

God gave us this freedom and He ^{cannot} ~~can't~~ interfere. Without the possibility to

choose to do good or evil ^{as}, humanity would be ~~nothing but~~ robots.

NM: That's the best single, strongest argument. But theologians ^{abuse it} ~~are~~

~~abusing~~ it. They wiggle out of it. They put God back in control by the end

of the argument.

ML: Well, yes, at the end of time, God ^{does} ~~takes~~ over again. This is a testing time.

NM: Here is exactly where existentialism ^{needs to} ~~could~~ rear up on all fours. Yes,

God had to give us free will in order to find out about us. He could learn so

much more about us once we were given free will. But, of necessity, the door had to be left open to the devil. This was a move done, perhaps—on a cosmic level—in fear and trembling. Yes, great fear because the final answer had to be left open. It was not free will unless the devil had equal opportunity. God did not create alone. The devil is in there also.

I would add that it is not only an open war, but ^{has become} a tri-partite war, which I ^{contest} think is very important. If it is only a war between God and the devil, and we are no more than the ~~recipient, the battleground itself~~ the turf, then we still do not have free will. We ^{have to be equal} belong as players to God or the devil. To be free we have to have the ability to stand, so to speak, as the third creative force in this combat. That creates a new kind of fear in humankind. Some ^{be terrified} used to fear that the devil would triumph and we would all go down in disaster. Others supposed that God would ^{be victorious} triumph finally, and, yes, we, ^{this soldier}

would all go to heaven. That was ~~the~~ ^{a held} view ^{it is} for centuries. Now, ~~it's~~ as if any

one of the three ~~can~~ ^{could} triumph. We can even conceive of a universe that

manages to ~~keep surviving~~ ^{survive} for a period without either God or the devil—to

a degree. I don't pretend to know how to speculate on this. Let's say that

it is not inconceivable that
man may become more powerful in relation to God and the devil, ~~even~~ ^{and then} if they
have exhausted each other, we may even
arrive at a point where it becomes man's world, ^{our} the humans' world. ~~That~~ But
if we are in ~~rough~~ ^{rough} course ~~of the thing~~
~~that~~ ^{could be} disastrous, absolutely disastrous.

ML: What would make that come about?

NM: Technology. It's obvious—well, obvious to me—that every effort is

(and, once done, large armies of them.)
being made in these years to replicate a human being. (It might take two

~~it does seem to be~~
centuries but that's what we humans seem hell-bent on doing. At that point,

~~we~~ ^{we} will have grown so large and so ^{live} ~~live~~
free-will becomes a disaster for God. ~~It~~ ^{It} has so grown in intensity that it
~~that it will be looking to replace God,~~
~~looks to replace Him.~~

ML: Here is the last theodicy. The eighth. God is a righteous judge. And 50 people get what they deserve. If someone suffers, it is because they have committed a sin that merits such suffering.

What if a divine
NM: ~~Faulty reasoning. Much suffering now ensues because a divine~~

balance has been disrupted. [?] We had a different relation to existence ^{ten}

thousand years ago ^{down} when you had to hunt an animal ^{if} you wished to eat

such food. Now ^{the beasts} they are brought to stockyards. Meat for consumption is

^{slaughtered} ^{fashion} ~~kill~~ in all kinds of disagreeable ways. Sows are kept in cribs so small

they do not have room to move once they are fattened. The world of nature

was built ^{the} ^{that} once on a basis where nearly everything contributed to the feeding cycle. Along with reincarnation, ^{and the} ^{cycles of life and death} ^{and the} ^{more} everything ^{was} taken care of. This

^{Adel} ^{doubtless} ^{Today, as one example,} ^{but the overlay of} was the original and beautiful conception which ^{now} bears as much relation

^{has shown it all along} ~~to the~~ contemporary agribusiness ^{as} the initial conception of a farm

~~movie script can offer a few traces to the final product—so many things~~

In like fashion, the
~~have gone wrong. But the~~ earlier human notion that excessive evil was

~~that~~
compensated for ~~if~~ you were killed before your time, reincarnation could

make adjustments ~~for that~~—may no longer be operative, and yet it is the *still*
remains the
only explanation I know for why many young soldiers are, when tested,

ready to die in battle. I think they have a sense—comparable in some

degree to the terrorists who are blowing themselves up—that they are going

somewhere special. Right or wrong, this is their belief. It's a deep belief.

So deep that one cannot necessarily ignore it. ~~That introduces a dilemma~~

and an enigma. Perhaps there are gradations to evil, and so some evils are
meaningful. It may be that the world would consist entirely of ~~vegans~~ if we
did not kill animals. On the other hand, if everybody ate vegetables, plants
might begin to suffer egregiously. Perhaps we need to differentiate between

~~categories of evil, necessary evils, if you will, as opposed to excessive evil,~~

~~inspirational evil, evil intoxicated by what it can do for itself.~~

But, repeat

Repeat this theodicy, would you?

ML: God is righteous. People get what they deserve.

NM: ~~Melancholy~~. God does the best He or She can do. That doesn't mean

people get what they deserve. If they did, the universe would be equal to a

clock.

ML: Would you agree that it was inevitable once God gave us free will, and

intelligence, that technology would follow?

NM: No. I am working against the tide on this one, but it could be that at a

certain point ~~that~~ God hoped and expected ~~that~~ all of us would become

psychic. Great entertainers would be so intense in their art that men and

women all over the world could experience the performance. Yes.

Depending on how skilled and beautiful your senses had become, ~~because~~

~~you had paid great attention to your senses, so~~ you could receive these

performances ~~from across the world.~~ ^{you} You could have people influencing ~~other~~

people at great distances. Of course, it didn't ^{not} happen. We looked instead

for technological means of communicating. And that blunted the possibility

of such fine senses. *It helps to account for the near-mute, somewhat odd and wistful song we get when we watch a world event on television,*

ML: I would say that if you put people in a physical world, they are going

to invent the wheel. And once they do, technology follows from that.

NM: No, sir. No, sir. Electronics have nothing to do with the wheel. That

was one jump by mankind ^{which may have} that God had nothing to do with.

ML: So when we went from a mechanical universe to an electronic

universe—

NM: ~~That was~~ a leap not anticipated. Or such is my speculation. We still

don't know what electricity is, nor ~~what light is~~, ^{now} or sound. We ~~can~~

manipulate ~~at~~ these forces without knowing their inner nature. I say that

~~contributes to~~ ^{contemporary} brings a great sense of ⁱⁿ uneasiness to us. Once again we are face to face

~~with knowledge that the end is unknown.~~

^{Now,} Even most people who believe in reincarnation ^{do} expect that sooner or

later they ^{will} reach enlightenment or some equitable resting place, and ^{look back} ~~the~~

^{upon the} problems and sufferings of earthly life ^{as} ~~become~~ no more than way-stations ^{on the journey} ~~at~~

^{can't agree} But I ~~don't see that at all.~~ I think reincarnation makes no sense if the end is

foretold. ~~The end cannot be foretold, and~~ I can't emphasize this enough.

None of my arguments make sense if the end is known. It is precisely

because the end is ^{unknown} ~~not foretold~~ that human terror sits at the root of every

theology, ^{as it} ~~and~~ has for millennia. It is so difficult for humans to accept the

likelihood that this world is as open and undecipherable, as chaotic, as

wayward, as playful, as perverse, as unexpected ^(in secret) as we fear it is. I think this

is what has driven any number of theologians to the notion that it has all

been foretold, that the end has been granted to us, but such conclusions are ^{not} ~~not~~

~~only philosophically but have~~
outrageous. ~~That has~~ gotten us into all sorts of trouble. Because a

foreordained end narrows our lives, ^{and limits to} and shrinks our thinking, ~~And brings~~

out the worst in us. ^{we become solicited to}
~~quick judgement concerning others?~~

ML: If the end can't be foretold, then clearly, God cannot be all-powerful

or all-knowing. So you don't have to begin with a God who is limited; you

could posit an end that cannot be known.

NM: It's simpler for me to approach it from the idea that God is not all-

powerful. That I can grasp immediately.

ML: In all these conversations we've had about the nature of God, your supposition has been that God makes mistakes, He is not perfect, He is much like us. But we know we have evil in us. There is evil in us as individuals, and as a race. And if God is so much like us, then God does indeed have evil in Him or Her. And that explains everything—you don't need a devil if God—

NM: No, no, no, no, I don't think that's it at all. God could have a little evil in Him and the devil ~~could have~~ a great deal. If God has a little evil in Him, fine.

ML: Let's say it's 80/20. If God just has 20% evil, wouldn't that be enough to account for all the natural disasters and the Holocaust?

NM: Probably. But 80/20 is an assumption. What if it's 95/5 or 98/2? This

sort of argument one can only
~~one is something to~~ grapple with in a novel. That could be interesting.

ML: There are theologians who take this position. They're called "open theists" and take the position that God is imperfect and has enough evil in Him—and the evil in God, coupled with the devil, is responsible for the miseries of the world.

NM: Well, that could certainly be an answer, and if you want to respect the Old Testament as more than a great work of literature, but as a document with some reality, you certainly have a Jehovah out there wreaking evil ^{as} ⁰⁹ a large stake as well as goodness. And it could be that God, being existential like us, was trying to reduce the amount of evil in Himself or Herself.

ML: By doing what?

NM: For one thing, by trying to get that prodigious temper under control.

By daring to have a Son, a great attempt to improve matters. It may be God was trying for more, over and over, and often deciding, "No, this move

won't work." It may be that after Christ's death, He had to decide if He

wished to build the Catholic Church. And maybe the devil was joining

Him. It may be easier to comprehend the history of the Catholic Church if

we assume that they were building this Church together in collaboration, *and*

considerably, yes, God
with some unhappiness, *as* God and the devil built it together, *and* ~~were~~ most

unhappy and embattled partners.

out again
In other words, God may be having the same sort of odyssey *not*
unrelated to ours,
on the
humans have. He may get better along the way, but not succeed altogether.

ML: Are you saying that many human institutions can be the creation of

both God and the devil?

NM: Absolutely.

ML: Do you see any human organizations or institutions that are free from

the taint of evil? Or are they all mixed?

NM: I think there's evil in everything.

ML: Baseball teams. . .

NM: ~~Come on...~~ *Of course,*

ML: Football. . .

NM: *How not?* ~~Give me a break-~~ [pause] One last thought. Earlier, you were

advancing the argument that suffering is good for you. That submitting to

God's will without complaint is virtuous. And this virtue will earn you all

kinds of rewards. We will endure whatever God sends since that is our

passage to eternal bliss. Of course, if you *ask* how a perfect God can make

matters so *imperfect, or worse so unjust,* inefficient, the only answer you *can* receive is, "Oh, how can you

Do not presume to understand the mind of God?" Now, *Right* there, is the most

~~logical and the~~ most dangerous single argument advanced by churchmen. It

is exactly what drives people out of *their* faith because it tends to make faith

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brittle. In other words, ^{comprehend} any time there is something you cannot answer, you

^{you are told, "It is,}
^{say, "It's beyond ~~the~~ your} ^{you} ^{So,} my faith has to carry me through this." Greater and

greater demands are placed upon faith until it snaps. And people leave the

Church, leave religion, cease to believe. While it is the ^{most-employed} nearest of the

various explanations of evil, it is also the ^{unbalanced.} most dangerous for the various

purveyors. If I vote then, as is obvious,
 for an existential God who does
 not demand my unwavering Faith,
 but prefers instead that we look
 to find, despite God's flaws
 and oars, a core of mutual
 respect as we get out together
 to create a vision that can
 lead us ^{into} the unfathomable
 future ^{out there} with its galaxies, its
 light-years, ~~and~~ its enigmas,
 and ultimately, let us hope,
 its ^{subtle} reversibility. Perhaps the
 greatest gods of the cosmos
 are also on a search and
 may not be wholly inclined
 to welcome us.

faith because it tends to make faith brittle. In other words, any time there's

something you ^{cannot} ~~can't~~ answer, you say, "It's beyond me—my faith has to carry

me through this." Greater and greater demands are placed upon faith until it

snaps. And people leave ~~leave~~ the Church, leave religion, cease to

believe, ^{while} ~~and so forth~~. So it is the neatest of the various explanations of evil, ^{it is}

^{also} ~~is~~ the most dangerous for the various purveyors of it.

ML: Up to a point.

NM: Yes.

ML: You know, I read somewhere that—well, Alfred Whitehead was somebody who believed in a limited God. You might want to take a look at that. . .

NM: All right. Read that. [Tape ends.]

end

evidence all over the place that evolution had done it over millions of years so that we could not get near to God's roots. So, implied in all that is that *only* when we get close enough to God to feel we are in some kind of *active* alliance with ~~God~~ *him* ~~which I think has always been implicit in the relationship, why,~~ *we* ~~then we might begin~~ *begin* to have some knowledge of who is behind God. But that won't happen until we get nearer to ~~God~~.

ML: But you do see that as a possibility.

NM: ~~Ultimately~~. If things go far better than I expect they will.

ML: I don't know if you're familiar with the philosopher David Hume—

NM: Vaguely. I had him in college.

ML: Well, he got into the *argument for* intelligent Design ~~argument~~ way back. One of the proofs of St. Thomas Aquinas for the existence of God is the argument from design. It goes back that far, a thousand years. Aquinas has many proofs of God's existence but the fifth one was that design is so perfect in the universe—he didn't even see beyond the solar system—

reveal something new about himself and the world. He's one extreme, Henry James is the other. And between them lies the effective use of Intelligent Design.

ML: But what would Joyce have done?

NM: Joyce is so much of a genius I don't want to hang onto his coattails.

Def
~~He~~ fall off. I don't know what he would have done with the cow turd.

ML: I think he would have appreciated it.

NM: He might have looked for the twenty-two words in fifteen languages that were closest to the sound of shit. What would be the wonderful sound he would come up with? On the other hand, he would have been removed from the situation. It was not life he was interested in so much as language.

ML: I disagree. The first person to wipe his ass in a novel is Leopold Bloom.

NM: Your point.. You are ad-in.

resting upon a turtle." "Madam, that's very helpful, but what is the turtle resting upon?" And she says, "It's turtles all the way down!"

ML: I do remember that.

NM: I'm not going to get trapped in arguments that ask me to explain what came behind the God I'm talking about.

ML: But you beat Sartre over the head because he won't allow for a force behind humanity. Why can't we then try to find out—I'm not trying to refute you, but—

NM: Let me put it this way: we first have to become close enough to God and helpful enough to God—large questions we haven't even entered—the relationship of humankind to God is something we haven't even touched upon—~~and~~ until we're a great help to God. ^{until then} why should God trust us? You remember, at the end of Harlot's Ghost, Hugh Montague goes off on this—to me—intriguing speech that God, having decided man was wholly untrustworthy, created the illusion of evolution, that indeed, the universe ^{actually} was created ~~entire~~, ex nihilo, by God in six days, but He then laid in