

Fourth Interview

NM: This is the third tape we're doing in this theology speculation.

JML: ~~Correct.~~ On August 17, I want to begin by talking about

saints.

NM: ~~Saints.~~

JML: In most religions, ^{they} ~~saints~~ ^{are} play a tremendous role. They

intercede for lesser humans, they give witness to God's greatness,

they are models for humanity by their ability to withstand

suffering, ^{some} ~~some of them~~ ^{is} ~~some of the~~ suffering self-imposed. Do you see saints in

the same way as in the traditional religions?

Fixed to
Judith by
Dwayne
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Pages 1-98 Double- spaced

NM: You reach me on my weak point. I ~~really~~ ^{that} don't know I have

much to say on the subject. Let me see what I can scrape together.

~~It does~~ ^{same} It makes sense to me that there would be many people that ^{certain} ~~the sub-text to such a remark~~ ^{that} I suppose ~~that I am saying is that~~ God would feel close to. In other words, ~~I don't think God feels~~

~~God may not feel~~ ^{that he does} ~~equally close to all of us.~~ In fact, I would doubt ~~that very much.~~ ^{near to each one}

To begin with, ~~given my notions of the devil obfuscating the divine~~ ^{After all, the devil is always doing} ~~this best~~ ^{venture} to obfuscate the divine ~~venture~~, doing ~~his or her best~~ ^{to muddy God's vision of us}, the devil, that is, to stop God,

whether male or female in gender or both, the devil doing the best

to stop God, ^{are by now} ~~most~~ ^{most} human beings are a complex mixture of good ~~and evil~~ ^{all of us are}, they're devil-infested, they're God-illuminated, ~~we're both~~

~~at the same time~~ ^{not easy} and so it's very hard to reach ~~them~~ ^{us}. What

characterizes humanity today is that very few of us ever get a

directly (Of course, many hypotheses ~~are~~ ^{are} message from God or the devil directly. We live in a certain

for most of us, however, technology adds its subtle smudge to our senses and we live in a complex

receive several messages a day

and contradictory environment—sensually speaking, theologically

speaking, spiritually speaking, however you want to phrase it,

we may have been a few centuries ago. That's we're not as near to ultimates as ~~we~~ were a few years ago.

~~reads~~
my first thought

Now there are people who succeed, one way or another, of

divesting themselves of most of the devil. It's ~~very~~ hard for me to

however, says with nothing of the Gnostic believe that a saint exists without any of the devil in him or her. But I

have to assume that (at least after ~~they~~ ^{they} have shrived, ^{are} think saints are relatively pure. The notion that they're absolutely

pure— And that concept well, I find given my temperament, I find that almost

near to offensive because it begs too many questions. It makes everything

themselves

too easy and it opens up too many questions on the other side of it.

Because if a saint is perfect, why the hell do they fail so often?

~~Is it~~ Does? You see, and do they fail because the devil overtakes them, or ~~is it's~~?

Or ~~let me advance a~~ very interesting but essentially medieval arguments. Like maybe a

is the saint is so good that the devil has to use extraordinary ~~efforts~~ and exhausting

him on his, the saint the devil defeat this saint, and so serves God's purpose and the saint is happy

too ~~even~~ in his or her suffering, because the devil has also suffered ~~from the devil~~ conceivably even more

JML: But all saints are not defeated.

~~All the same~~ NM: No. But ~~give me an example of some triumphant saints.~~

JML: Saint Peter,

NM: Saint Peter was a mess! He deserted Christ three times.

JML: But then he redeemed himself and started Christianity.

NM: Yes, I ^{can't} know, but Christianity may still be laboring under the

fact that it was Peter who commenced it. You've got a three-time

treacherous ^{associate} ~~no good man~~ there. . .

JML: There are other saints. . .

NM: I won't say that people can't repent, ^{that} and they can't restore

their ^{spirit back} relation to something finer, ~~than themselves~~, but nonetheless

^{renegades have to} they remain under suspicion.

JML: That, in a way, brings me ^{beautifully} to my next question.

~~Because~~ Your god and your devil are limited, I assume—

NM: Not limited but ^{Certainly not} relatively finite. ~~Not~~ infinite.

JML: I assume that human perfection is truly impossible for you,

as you just said. If there were a human being who was all-good,

she or he would be better than God. And if we found an absolutely perfect human being, your theology would be hard-pressed to account for that person.

NM: I don't think I'm in any danger of having my theology, such as it is, overthrown by that premise. Of course, there ^{will} never be a perfect human being. It's ^{not in} ~~out of~~ the range of our thinking. I'm going so far as to say there's no such thing as a perfect divinity.

The nature of the universe is provisional, ^{and most certainly} ~~existential~~, ^{not} ~~finally determined~~. That is at the core of every thing I present here. The divine future.

JML: Ergo, there can never be a perfect human being.

NM: Well, ~~that just comes out of it. Apart from that,~~ ^{is as open as our own} we don't

need ~~the~~ ^{that conclusion} reasoning to justify the ~~remark that~~ ^{that} there's no such thing

as a perfect human being. ~~Everything in our experience tells us~~

~~that wonderful comic line by Jack Okie, that nobody's perfect~~

but—

I can admit that Saint Peter was not perfect.

JML: ~~You wanted to know if a saint is perfect. I admit, Saint~~

~~Peter was not perfect. But think of someone like St. Francis of~~

Assisi...

did think
NM: I thought of him as we were mentioning this and yes, he's

perfect in a beautiful ~~perfect~~ way that took care of a great many

animals, and thereby brought us a little more into sympathy with ~~creatures who often feel more like than ourselves~~ *creatures who often feel more like than ourselves*

our friends, the animals, but I don't know that he affected human

not even
nature that much to the good. I'm talking about the kind of saints *who*

I'm asking, rather

who were trying to change human nature that much to the good.

He didn't do that much. I'm talking about the kind of saints who

are
~~are~~ trying to change human nature, ~~strive valiantly to change~~

Indeed, the
~~human nature~~ and almost always end up as martyrs. ~~The~~ way they

true that
become saints is ~~first~~ they were martyrs. *first*

JML: The one way we know a saint is a saint, at least in

that
Christianity, is ~~they~~ were martyred. St. Steven was martyred, St.

Sebastian was martyred. . .

But you
You mentioned *[the]* animals there. To shift for a moment:

down
how far does the chain of being—*or, if you will—* ~~how far down the chain of being—~~

~~does~~ the war between god and the devil manifest itself?

NM: I have no idea.

JML: You said that dogs have souls.

NM: Yes.

JML: Then I assume both sides have enlisted them. What about

you ready to say that some are
the other animals? Are ~~some~~ *on God's side?* Are the eagles and ~~the~~

? doves ~~some on God's side?~~ *?* The vultures and the snakes. ~~the~~

NM: It's ~~possible~~ *presumptive* Obviously, ~~for~~ me to speak with ~~anything~~

~~suggesting~~ authority on these matters is comic. *I would rather rely* I rely almost

instinctive
~~always~~ on the sort of verdicts that humans come up with after

centuries of dealing with certain problems. For instance, I ~~would~~

~~never dismiss it out of hand~~ After all, my belief in God and devil

a good
comes to ~~some~~ extent from the fact that the majority of people,

have believed
through all of recorded time, ~~believe~~ in both evil spirits and good

angels
~~spirits~~ and finally, in a god and a devil—with angels and demons.

And I feel that ~~if~~ the majority believe that, one has to pay a certain

attention to that. One can't ignore it.

*get so pulled up with our modern
pull up with the people and
egoism that we soon
ignore such ongoing human sentiments.
All right then. By that rule of thumb, I might say
So by that token, dogs tend to be closer to God, perhaps, in
than cats.*

~~that they~~ ^{Dogs} have loyalty, they have affection, they ^{exhibit} have the need to

love, whereas cats might strike me very often as being creatures of

the devil. Now, mind you, ~~this is all~~ they were all created by

God. It's just that the devil may have preempted some of those

creations earlier than others.

JML: Snakes and crocodiles and. . .

NM: Well, there ~~it's~~ totally beyond me. I'm an ignorant man when

concerning most
it comes to these animals. If I knew more about their positive

functions, I could talk about ~~it~~ *snakes and crocodiles but I* but I'm relatively I confess to

~~incompetence at declaring~~
 abysmal ignorance on what the positive functions are of snakes,

~~of~~ toads, rats, cockroaches, lice, ^{might be,} I don't pretend to be able to talk
 about that.

JML: Are there parts of existence in your view that are unclaimed

by either side? I'm thinking of ~~oh~~ microbes, uninhabited planets,

the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, ^{so to speak} ~~sort of~~ neutral territory that God

and the devil have not contested ~~or not used~~. Or is everything

polarized?

NM: No, I think it's ~~I'd say it's~~ ~~I'll use an odd word.~~ I'd say it's

more a matter of divine investment. ^{in part and in full,} ~~In other words,~~ I keep going

back to the notion that God is not all-powerful but the Creator. So

^{evolving certain creatures, their} ~~the creation~~
 in the course of creating, certain elements of creation are advanced
~~Future possibilities were more directly~~

~~Certain elements are more interesting to God. Certain elements are~~

Further, other elements may ~~are~~ ^{have} been viewed pursued. Others are seen ^{as} interesting possibilities for the future.

And ^{so} very often, ~~can~~ ^{they} live relatively unchanged for millennia, for

aeons. So when we come to such matters as bacteria, where I'm ~~any~~ ^{close} knowledge is just a blank slate, ~~absolutely~~ I would venture the guess ^{not important} immensely ignorant and can't pretend not to be, it's possible that

immensely ignorant and can't pretend not to be, it's possible that ~~that these may have been~~ ^{Yes, I} ~~made it but~~ ^{it does} ~~it does not~~
these are almost passive experiments by God. ^{Virtually} ~~Or it may be the~~ ^{to arrange} ~~not be~~

Or, does the devil dip

devil dipping his toe into the water when you have some

first interest.

Some particularly evil bacteria. On the other hand, I don't have, I don't add

that I hardly

subscribe to the modern notion that all disease is evil, is awful, is

to be eradicated at all cost, ^{so that we can} ~~and we should~~ ^{for centuries} all live 300 years as part ~~and populate the globe with ten trillion people.~~
life and death. I will repeat, do have
of our life situation. I think life and death, ^{so} as you know from what

~~I said before, have this intimate relation to each other in the sense.~~

that death is as great a test and as great an adventure as life. And

Just as we cannot
that no more could we conceive of an existence where there ^{is} ~~was~~

only daylight and never night, so I can't ^{comprehend} ~~conceive of~~ life without

death and rebirth. I think we ^(all, or most of us, or some of us) ~~all~~ go back in again through the mix

~~and come out, and go in and come out, and so when we start~~ ^{I will say} ~~commence~~ ^(at any rate)

~~therefore that~~
~~talking about karma,~~ I don't have the remotest clue what we ^{may}

become in our next existence. It's possible, it's perfectly possible,

that some or all of us have to descend to the bacteriological level

^{return} and come back from there. ^{that} ~~I don't~~ My guess is ^{elaborate} ~~its not that~~
a chain of reincarnation
^{for that would proper}
complicated ^{most} it makes for a very complex universe. But what I
^{universe in the after-life. I would rather}
^{assume} would say is I think (there's a purpose for everything, including the

agents that tend to infect us and ~~mutilate us and~~ kill us. It may be

there are agents of death ^{with which as} (God experiments ~~with~~ fully as much as ~~much as~~

~~God experiments with new kinds of life and~~ with the development

^{and animal} In that sense life and death
of human life. Human life being the masterwork.
are counterparts of the same ongoing

JML: Death and life being related. . .

existence

NM: Not interrelated. . .

JML: Intertwined. . .

NM: Actually—not identical but part of the same existence.

JML: Yang and yin. Interpenetrating.

NM: OK.

JML: You've talked a lot about the moment of death and the state

of mind one is in at the moment of death—this follows, I think

from what you just said. Peace of mind, I think, is important to

many religions—peace of mind at death, none more so than

Catholicism. Which actually has a sacrament called Extreme

Note to JML: CK w Sacrament

Unction [Mike, now called "Sacrament of the Sick" or some such]

which was created by the Church to give to people at the moment of death.

NM: ~~Let me get this straight—what were the origins?~~ How did

confidence in its
the Church arrive at this power?

JML: Well, ~~the Church~~ *the Church* over ~~the history of~~ a millennia, created

is Extreme Unction,
seven sacraments. And the last one that was created was expressly

(which Father of the Church had)
~~created~~ I can't tell you who came up with the theology of it.

there is
which Father of the Church, it was a sense of the Church reaching

out to the individual at the moment of death and applying all of its

powers to giving that person peace of mind as they ^{passed} ~~passed~~ over. . .

Q, at least, giving
NM: Giving them a belief in peace of mind. . .

JML: Yes, giving them the belief that ^{from the} ~~in the~~ Church's point of

view, Extreme Unction works—and I've seen people receive it—

and you know, it ^{does} ~~gives~~ them tremendous peace of mind.

^{can}
NM: I believe ~~that~~ it's effective. Certainly for devout Catholics, it

would be ~~effective~~. Let me tell you a small story about a dear

friend of mine, Eddie Bonetti, who was dying of cancer. And I

spoke to him a day before he ^{went} ~~died~~. He was a marvelous fellow and

you'll see from the conversation what his positive qualities were.

We were talking on the phone and he knew ^{death close} it was very close ~~to the end~~.

~~And~~ at a given moment, I said to him, "Eddie, are you

scared?" He said, "Yeah, Norman, I am ⁴ ~~scared a little.~~"

I said, "Eddie, it seems to me you have less reason to be ^{a fraud} scared than anyone I know. Because you're the loyalest guy I've ^{met} ever been in contact with. You've never turned your back on a friend, no matter how much it cost you. I really can't believe that something bad is waiting for you."

He said, "You really believe that, Norman?"

I said, "I think so, I really do."

And the woman he was living with at the time told me he ^{did die later that day with a smile} died happily shortly after the conversation. Which pleased me

immensely because I loved the guy and if I was any use to him ~~at~~ ^{then,}

^{well, I'm} ~~all, and I am tempted, ^{to hope that a little} naturally, ~~my words had something to do~~~~

with his peace.

So, yes, I can believe ^{that} in Extreme Unction ^{can be} as something that's

^{some,} ^{I think} wonderful for people when they receive. I will say it's a human ~~creation~~ ^{creation} rather than a divine fact. ~~There were no miracles announcing it,~~ ^{creation, from what you tell me, there are no miracles, there was no}

revelation from God. This was ^a ~~the~~ human attempt, if you will, to

understand how God's mind works. Now it was ^{grandest into} ~~done with great~~

~~being as a sacrament by the fathers of the Church, which is to say it had power~~ ^{backing, huge culture, much tradition, many decisions, committees}

^{synods} ^{debating} ~~arguing over it, which makes me dubious~~ coming up with their

sacraments one by one, developing them, using them, ^{keeping} ~~I'm sure if I~~ ^{the ones that worked best.}

~~if I knew more theology, I could talk about the sacraments they used~~

~~sacraments that were~~
for a while then threw away because they weren't quite working.

In any event, they ended with these seven sacraments, with the mystical number seven, which again for so many people all over the universe, all over our world believe, that seven is an incredible number. I believe it too. I believe it's easier to believe that there's something right about the number than that it's wrong.

So, all right, yes, I can believe Extreme Unction ^{is there} works for a

devout Catholic. It might not work for someone like myself. If

someone came in and said, "You're going to die in peace," I'd

probably say, "Hey, cut it." ^u Let me ^{go,} ~~die~~. If you don't mind, I'll fine-

tune my own end—you don't need to do it for me."

Certain theologians would say, "Well, this is vanity. This is precisely why you're not going to have a good end." And my feeling is, "Hey, pal, it's open. None of us know. It doesn't matter how much tradition is behind it. Tradition suggests there may well be something powerful behind it, but it ^{can hardly} ~~doesn't~~ prove it. *Certainly not for every human case.*"

JML: Why is the state of mind at death so very important to you?

NM: Because I think it's our point of departure.

JML: So what? Everybody has a bad day. You could happen to have a bad day on the day you die.

NM: No, no—whenever you have a bad day, there's a lot of

reasons ^{hour} for the bad day. I can give you 20 reasons ^{causes an ugly hour} for a bad day,

Some are serious, some ^{are} ~~are~~ passing. But, no, I won't hide behind

~~that is,~~ I won't let you hide behind the notion of a bad day.

JML: But there's ^{are} also days ^{when} we have false euphoria. We ^{can} feel good

for no accountable reason and then the next day, we say, "Why did

I feel so good? ^{still} I have all these problems!"

NM: ~~There, I have my favorite notion. It is that it's karmic~~

~~Whenever~~

~~Whenever we have an emotion we can't account for, good or bad,~~

~~expect that the root is karmic,~~

~~that may be~~

it's karmic. It's the only visitation we ^{receive} can have from previous lives,

~~which by~~ the laws of the game, which ^{may well be} are basic and necessary, we

can't know who we were and where we were in previous lives, ~~But~~

~~None the less, intense and unaccountable~~
~~something has happened that comes to us from a previous life and~~

~~Emotions can come to us from our~~
~~ones karmic past~~
~~says, "Hey, this wonderful thing I'm thinking about it, now you~~

~~think about it too." Or in reverse: "There's doom approaching, pal.~~

~~Get ready for it."~~

~~Now in that sense, unaccountable emotions are almost always~~

~~karmic.~~

~~But I'm not answering your question. I want to try to answer~~

~~it.~~ I think at the moment we die, we are the ^{sum} result of all the good

and bad we've done, ~~and~~ all the courage and cowardice we've

exercised. ~~In other words, it can be drawn as an arrow of any~~

~~length and any intensity.~~ And so, for example, if we die with a

desire to be reborn, I think it means a great deal to God. If you

will, it's almost like we reach into a ^{little} ~~little~~ ^{box} to select a pup, ^(and the one) a pup that

^{who} catches our eye ^{whom} ~~that~~ we choose to take home. Using that crude

analogy, I think if we die—Eliot's wonderful line, "not with a bang

but a whimper"—which obviously ^{parenthetically} (obsessed Eliot, because Eliot's

writing was always ^{is so often} based entirely ^{how we} on the idea of how would one

meet ^{our} ~~one's~~ death. ^{of} If you approach his poetry with that in mind,

The Wasteland is a study of people who don't have a clue how to ^{becomes} ~~die~~ ^(perishes)

And yet it is so important to be ready, ~~die~~. Along with everything else it is, but that's a large part of it.

After all, that is the one situation

So in that sense, I think it's terribly important what our attitude is

we can't ^{simulate} ~~fake~~ ^{can't} preempt, ^{pretend to} ~~simulate~~ because we can't fake it. We can fake a huge number of emotions

in our lives

^{we may well} to ourselves, certainly to others, to our friends, to our enemies—we

^{being what we are not} ~~pretend~~, ^{(I would go} spend three-quarters of our lives acting. One of the reasons—this—

^{so far as to say that one} is a cynical remark but I do enjoy it—^{one of the reasons} people get

married is so ^{that} they can be themselves, ^{just a bit} ~~a little bit~~ ^{to wit}, they don't have to present

~~give~~ a face to the world. People who live alone are always ^{so} obliged
once ~~they leave their room.~~

~~to give a face to the world,~~ they have to depend ^{so} much upon
~~the opinion of others,~~
~~friends, etc., etc.~~

~~So, I would say that at the~~

~~So, at that moment when one's close to death, when one~~

~~that is, if one~~ can be a desire ~~for another~~
~~knows one's going to die, there is an urge toward more~~ life, or a

~~yearning~~ toward peace or—and this is the worst condition—toward ^{a wish} stupor.

~~to pass away in stupor.~~ The largest ~~one of~~
~~the soul becomes~~ In other words, "I don't want to feel pain, let me feel nothing." ~~Not~~

I will accept ~~nothingness.~~

peace, but nothing. And ^{all} these are ~~choices,~~ I would say

^{on high, looking people over,}
And really, suppose you're looking at people and ~~wondering~~

~~which ones~~ Suppose ^{there's a}
~~who you'll refashion,~~ and there's ~~one~~ particular human being God is

most interested in, but at the last moment that person is pleading

for stupor. God says, "Do I really want to go through this again?"

^{13, finally,}
This person was really a great disappointment to me.⁴

^{I believe final}
You see, the notion I have is our judgment ^{in this life} comes in the form

^{the form} of our rebirth. ^(believe we've spoken of) I think we spoke about this before. So in that case,

~~no need to repeat it. But I think the only judgment we get is how~~
~~placement in the next life. Often~~
~~God places us to be~~
~~we're reborn. Or, very often, the decision is "No. No need to be~~

reborn. Off the board." True death. End of existence. ^{So, if you}

~~JML: Someone told me recently~~

~~NM: Let me just finish~~

~~JML: Sorry.~~

~~NM: What it comes down to, why the manner in which you meet~~

~~your death is important, is if you~~ have no desire to live again, that

could be determinative.

~~JML: I love the metaphor of the litter. [That's beautiful a]~~

~~wonderful metaphor. Fabulous.~~

~~JML: But I want to explore this a little more if I may. Several~~

~~thoughts. One of them is that many people, when they're dying~~

~~and a nurse told me this recently, a nurse who was a hospice nurse,~~

who cared for the dying, three times a week she went through this,

and she had great experience—~~she~~ told me that the end, often,

because people were taking drugs, they'd be on morphine to cut the

~~and~~ their personality, as she put it, "dissolves." That they were

live, they were functioning, but their soul ^{was} ~~is~~ already gone. And so,

for them, the death was before they died—the body was still

breathing, the automatic systems were working but—but indeed,

the people I have seen die, they revert ^{to} powerful impulses, powerful

atavistic impulses. The desire to keep oneself clean—they get on

the toilet when they're dying. The desire to remember one's mother

or grandmother. Or when someone touches you, the desire to

reach out—afraid you're going to be violated when you're lying on

your bed. And I've seen that, the few deaths I've seen.

So people don't ordinarily die in moments of clarity like

^(presumably)
Eddie Bonetti, thinking happy thoughts, ready to die and ready to

choose a new life. A lot of time when they die, they don't know who they are.

NM: I can't answer that ~~in that you know~~ the real question is

? You can pass away
when do you die spiritually, and you can die spiritually an hour, a

day, ~~or~~ a month or five years before your death. That may be when

and decided.
the question of rebirth is considered. I think as a harsh, practical

matter, the closer your soul can remain intact *up* to the extinction of

your body, the finer candidate you are for reincarnation. That's just

my notion ~~of the economy of...~~

So
JML: ~~That's~~ risky... You mean someone who really wants to be

reborn but goes into a coma loses their shot?

NM: ~~Someone who goes into a coma~~ Look, the soul can fight the

body right down to the very end. The soul can say, "all right, I

~~don't feel anything in my legs any more. I don't feel anything in~~ *Nothing in*

~~my fingers. I don't feel anything in my thoughts, I can hardly~~ *can't find*

~~think, but I know what I want, one way. That one way is more life, I~~ *still*

~~(to be reborn." Or the soul can feel it isn't worth it. It simply isn't~~ *want) for the contrary,*

~~worth it.~~ "Let the body have its day. I've abused this body all my

~~life, it's now claiming its wages. I'm bankrupt. . ."~~ *demanding a cruel payment and/*

~~But I do think that the soul—taking your lady at the~~ *this intelligence from*

hospice—if the soul leaves a week or two before the body, I think,

~~economically speaking in terms of the transmigration of souls, it~~ *cutting for the*

~~makes for a much messier travel schedule. You know, I have this~~ *could make) more complex)*

feeling—^{so many} everyone ^{as a vision: There's} talks about death that there's this wonderful

white light, and relatives come out to meet you, ~~so forth and so on~~

I'm a touch ^{dubious} cynical ^{For some} about that. Certain people, yes. They were

close to their relatives and their relatives do come out.

But there's an awful lot of ^{spirit} travel involved. The very

~~schedules~~, the logistics of the hereafter, interest me because God's

energies, as I see it, are immense but ^{to repeat} they're not infinite. So there

are all sorts of ^{logistics to be followed} logical procedures after you die. It isn't all just

~~Economic procedures if you will~~ ^{involving the energies available to the hereafter,} spiritual inspiration. The stuff in New Age, and what can you say?

The more flaming religions, the ones that promise everything in the

~~hereafter just so you'll put something in the collection box~~ ^{all that}

^{hereafter}

(brings out my cynicism, (which I consider my shield) ~~not~~

It may be much more complex and less acceptable than ~~that~~ ^{we assume}

[~~necessarily my sword but my~~ shield against ^{wishful} poor (thinking) So it

Often, I expect ~~when in the immediate~~
 seems to me very often if we die, it's going to be a huge
 hours or days after our death there
 can be long waits ~~for a~~
 disappointment in the beginning. You may hang around in a vast

^{somewhat}
 hall—~~it'll be~~ like the first day in the Army, when nobody knew

what to do with you and you're ^{were} waiting to get assigned to some sort

of temporary training platoon. And in that sense, ~~there'd be a lot of~~

~~waiting around~~. We can talk about limbo a little later on if you

wish. Limbo may be an absolutely realistic station for most people

when they die. That is, they hang around for quite a while before

~~they're assigned.~~

^{limbo can}
 JML: Could be for years. ~~8~~

NM: Well, I don't know. In the Catholic religion, there could be

an eternity ^{to} in limbo, but I think ^{(it could also be) divine} it's just a matter of bureaucratic—

dare I say it?—mismanagement. Because bureaucratic

mismanagement on earth—I don't we know we necessarily have to

^{all that changes} assume it's all perfect in the hereafter. ~~God and his angels~~—I don't

think angels are perfect any more than I believe demons are totally

evil. I think the rarest condition in existence is absolute purity of

^{varieties living or cut by glaciers into stone,} any sort.

If God is a Creator, then God ^{cannot be} is not absolutely pure, ^{because} ^{creation consists in part of improving} ^{upon one's errors, and offering less pure than}

JML: What about people—we've all heard about people who

die ^{after living} ~~they live~~ lives of greed and misery, they're rotten people,

^{to} ^{one's} ^{VICES.}

detestable in every way, but at the last minute, the last few weeks,

they call in the priest, they get a seraphic smile on their face, they have money, perhaps, they're surrounded by servants, and they go off into the hereafter feeling very good about themselves.

Deluded, perhaps, about their ultimate worth, but nonetheless, smiling, saying their prayers. They haven't gone to a church or done anything decent—

NM: Well, you're creating an imaginary person. . .

JML: There are people like that who die happy after living a miserable life.

NM: Who says they died happy? They could be acting at the end,

~~number one.~~

JML: That's the moment you said you don't act.

NM: No, ~~no, no~~. I said people who are serious about their death

don't act. ~~In other words, they may be acting for others~~ ^{but} ~~they're~~

not ~~acting~~ before ~~God~~ ^{eternity}.

I'll give you an explanation why a truly rotten person can die

happy, which is they were so rotten in ^{their} ~~the~~ previous existence, ^{the life} ~~that~~
^{be ~~have~~ this one, that} ~~this life, bad as it was, was an improvement over the previous one.~~
^{proved to be a spiritual}

~~Really, I've seen this karmic chain.~~ They die happy because they

feel, everything considered, considering how bad were their

beginnings, and how absolutely loathesome the initial impulses

they were born with, ^{better under the circumstances} ~~they have gotten older.~~ We all know people

who were total pricks their entire lives who mellow a little bit at

the end. That's another human quality.

JML: But you said all the good and evil in one's life is ~~all kind of~~

summed up in death ~~and~~ I'm thinking of those who are miserable

people for the first 95% of their lives and then they're sweet old

people at the end—doesn't seem very just that they should have a

happy death. You'd think somehow they should have a miserable

death. Where's the fairness in things?

I think
NM: ~~Listen,~~ you're speaking too hypothetically. ~~Hypothetical~~

~~Speculations~~ of the sort I go in for make me most uneasy when

indulge than selves,
~~do it~~
others occasion them. I mean, this person you're talking about—as

him
a novelist I find ~~them~~ impossible to conceive in my head. ~~In other~~

~~words,~~ People who are rotten all their lives rarely end up sweet at

the end. If they do—there is such a thing as truly evil and ugly

impulses wearing out and burning out. Just as good people sour, ugly people can die in a more benign state. They've used up the ugliness in themselves. They've been rotten to people, horrible to people, and maybe they feel a bit of contrition at the end. Your religion is based on that.

JML: Absolutely.

NM: Between the stirrup and the ground. I've always found it excessively sentimental and too easy: be evil all your life and as

you're falling from the horse, before you head is ~~severed from your~~ *knocked off*

body—

JML: Say a perfect Act of Contrition!

NM: ~~What?~~

JML: ~~You make a perfect Act of Contrition.~~

Yes!
NM: I've always found that ~~a little~~ extreme. And a little

convenient. The Catholic Church is not only a study in immense

but ^{what} an applied skill ~~in~~ it has
human wisdom, it's a study in immense skill ~~at human mechanics.~~
at maneuvering our thoughts around the tightest corners

JML: It's thought of almost everything. It has an answer for

almost everything, every issue. [tape off, back on again]

You spoke a little bit about limbo but I don't recall that you

said much about purgatory—as an idea, as a place, as a metaphor.

Of course, it's a wonderful metaphor, we all use it. What is your

idea of purgatory as a metaphor, [?]~~as~~

NM: well, as a metaphor—~~we're talking about the same thing,~~

~~We're speaking of hell, endless torture—no~~ ^{tell me,} ~~purgatory, is a~~
temporary station. [?]

JML: It may last for a millennia, but it's temporary.

^{begin to}
NM: ^{I confess, I don't know these concepts} Wait a moment, there's heaven, purgatory, and hell and ^{Does}
^{words as well as I should. It (truth)} ~~and have any relation to~~
~~limbo. Limbo is the precursor to purgatory or heaven?~~

^{there}
JML: No. Limbo is the place for people on whom God can't make
a judgment. They died before they were baptized or something
like that.

NM: ~~Oh, Christ! I've found that—the old Marxists used to say~~
~~that religion is clot, absolutely meaningless and silly. When you~~
get into that. . .

JML: I agree. The Church doesn't even talk about limbo anymore. [#]

They've almost dropped it as a concept. But purgatory. . .

NM: Now purgatory. . .yes.

JML: Purgatory is not endless. There is an end to your suffering.

The amount of time you're there and what kind of suffering you have, according to the Catholic Church, would depend on what your crimes were.

NM: I see purgatory in altogether different terms. The notion that

if you suffer long enough you'll purge yourself—I don't see any

reason to have that in the hereafter. ^{I would suggest instead} ~~I see~~ (that being reborn takes

care of purgatory. For some people, ^{indeed,} life is purgatory. For a few

people, life is heaven—they're happy 90% of the time. For some

people, life is hell. I don't think we need these other structures. I

think we pay our debts through our reincarnations. That makes

much more sense to me than these immensely wasteful places *called*
heaven and hell

where nobody does anything, where nothing's brought back into

the divine economy, people are just marking time.

I see God, if you will, as *being as* Faustian, *aiming to go further*. God

is not satisfied with *his or her* creation, God wants *it all to* take it

become better, further. Therefore, wasteful procedure *is* anathema to God. *So,*

there's ~~always see~~ I do see heaven, purgatory and hell as wasteful

who procedures. *after all?* Nobody can speak interestingly of heaven, Shaw

made the best single attempt and decided heaven was boring. And

there is ~~that's always the uneasy little feeling people always have~~ *after* ~~My~~

have that it could be like

God, Club Med, a gated little community in Florida, all of that,

of course,
that's heaven,

a gated community. Whereas on earth, we know

heaven, we experience heaven. We may experience it ^{two} ~~2~~ three or

four times in a long life, maybe for a minute, no more, but we

know what heaven is. ~~We know what heaven is because~~ there's a

~~kind of~~ luminousness to the joy. Most of us, unfortunately, come

closest to heaven through drugs. But, all right—we know what it

is.

We know what hell is. Hell can be as simple as having a bad

case of gout. *Or a screamer of a drug trip.*

JML: There's conscience. . .

For me, is a sense of
 NM: Purgatory, ~~is the sense of~~ *to me, of possibly temporary but*

living, one's temptations and one's
 immense ~~conflict between~~ *(indecision and an overweening sense of one's*

responsibility. Purgatory. ~~When~~ *When* we feel dread, we're not that far

from purgatory. *Feel* We ~~know~~ *could be taking* something very important is ~~happening~~

place in our soul) *we're full of fear at taking*
 to us, but we don't know what, and we're afraid to take the step we

now believe) *human*
~~think~~ *men* is demanded of us. Most ~~men~~ *men* meet purgatory in terms of

their personal courage. If they're afraid—if they're afraid of

playing football, putting on a ~~suit~~ *pad* and going out to play can be

purgatory. Boxing can be purgatory. Skiing *of the truth* can be purgatory.

is steep and
 as *narrow* ~~as~~ *and the mags are*
formidable, can certainly realize you,
 Bungee-jumping can be purgatory—brief but intense purgatory.

Men—now women are beginning to search for that purgatory as

well. It used to be that women's purgatory was related to the

terrors of childbirth. After all, in the Middle Ages, there was one chance in ten ^{a woman} ~~one~~ would die in ~~any~~ childbirth. That was a ~~true~~ purgatory, a true terror. One had to face ~~the~~ ultimates to have a child.

JML: How limbo and purgatory came about, if I'm remembering correctly, in the thinking of Christianity was they began with notions of heaven and hell borrowed from other religions because there were previous religions that had ^{both} ~~heaven and hell~~. Then ~~they~~ ~~became more~~ ⁷ the structure of the church became more complex and people asked questions. What if you've been bad but not so bad you should be condemned to eternal hellfire—you've only been sort of bad—and the Church said, "you're right, we have a

place for those people where they have modest suffering." Then people said, "what about people outside the Church? We've been told they're condemned but what if they haven't done anything evil? They died at 3 years old—~~they were~~ a wonderful little child but ~~were~~ never baptized. . ." The Church said, "we have a place for them too." So the Church was trying to create—I'm sure they would have created another place if they'd had to. But ultimately, the Church began to see the folly of limbo—what a ridiculous idea

for people to live in a big empty ^{space} ~~hall~~ forever and no positive thing ~~there was no positive~~ pain but no positive joy [??] "perfect natural happiness" said the Baltimore Catechism—no beatific vision but otherwise OK] ~~You've used the word.~~

for ~~hell~~
↓
Jail
from
J.M.C.A.

NM: I've mis-used it. As you were speaking, I was thinking in the piece I wrote, I was thinking about purgatory, not limbo.

Sometime I'll have to put a footnote in that piece because that was purgatory I was thinking of.

JML: We talked about saints but I never got to my question about demons. I remember you told me some time ago you had an

encounter with a demon. Or a succubus or—whatever you want to

call it, right here ^{in a room you rented} ~~in a house you lived in for a winter~~ ^{week one} on Commercial Street in Provincetown. Would it

be worthwhile to say anything about that experience? ~~How does it~~

~~relate to your theology? Does it fit into your theology, that~~

~~experience?~~

NM: Yes. ~~But it doesn't say much. Let me say stop this for a~~

~~moment [tape off - tape back]~~ I won't get into it, Mike, because it

takes too long to tell and there's no real point ~~to it~~. I can ~~I~~ can

certainly speak of succubi and incubi in the abstract sense. I think

they would be instruments or ~~tools~~ of the devils, and most useful ~~to~~

I only (such a presence)
~~you really, when you~~ ~~I've only~~ felt it once in my life and it

seemed to come out of nowhere, which is why I don't ~~want~~ ^{with} ~~can~~ talk

simply, why it was there.
about it because ~~I~~ don't understand it, ~~but~~ I really felt as if there

were some intangible creature fastened to my chest. I do have a

story that may be worth telling about a poetess named Mina Loy. ~~to~~

Something like seventy or seventy-five years ago

she was in a small hotel in the Left Bank in Paris and one night in

her room, she felt this hideous oppression, ~~and this~~ ~~hideous~~ ^{monstrous}

intangible creature, ^{which,} yet ^{most} seemed nonetheless ^{and} very alive, ~~seemed~~

fastened to her chest ^{and} she lived in horror through the night and ~~she~~

~~abominably wretched~~
was very shaken in the morning, ^{she} went downstairs to ~~get~~

~~drink some coffee~~ ^{the} breakfast on the terrace of ^{she was staying in} this little hotel just across the street from

the Seine. Alastair Crowley, the famous ^{and notorious} magician, was there, ~~and~~
~~a table or two away, and~~

~~he~~ was talking about a man he detested who was also staying at the

^{Crowley,} hotel. And ~~he~~ said, "You know, last night I sent an incubus to

invade him, ^{yet} ~~and~~ I saw ^X him this morning and he looked perfectly all

right. I don't understand it." ~~Well,~~ Mina Loy's comment was ~~she~~

~~told the story to friends—was~~ "Let no one say Alastair Crowley

has no powers. It's just that they're misdirected."

The story's ^{is} amusing but ^{it} also establishes ~~the extent of~~ my

incapacity to talk intelligently about incubi and succubi. I would

just assume they're tools of the devils and used rarely ^{perhaps} and ~~perhaps~~

~~often to good effect.~~ ^{employs} also It's possible God uses ~~them~~ ^{uses} once in a while to

to scare the very life out of certain people whom God feels ^{can use} need a ~~shake-up~~ ^{some} ~~shake-up~~ shaking-up.

~~As you see, I'm becoming a. I don't know how to put it. If~~

~~If~~ ^{hardly} you're sailing through seas you can ~~hardly~~ comprehend, given the

~~state of the light and the currents,~~ you tend to hold to the few

things you ~~do~~ know about sailing. So ^{I'm ready} in here, I try to stay close to

~~to drop my sails. These are confusing~~
~~whatever small powers of reasoning I have in these very large and~~
~~and uncharted waters, for me.~~
 uncharted waters.

JML: Let me shift then to talk about wealth and poverty. I've

listened to the last interview we did and ~~at several points in it, the~~

~~fairly comprehensive nature of your belief system — it occurred to~~

~~me~~ you never addressed this at all.

NM: Wealth and poverty?

JML: ~~Wealth and poverty. My question is this: wealth and,~~

~~poverty are evolutionary assets. Are they predetermined by God as~~

~~karmic agents? Do we get the tap on the shoulder—"OK, it's a go~~

~~for you"—are wealth and poverty just part of the package?~~ How

much of wealth and poverty is a result of what God gives you

when you're born and how much ^{comes from} ~~is~~ the accidents of the economic

jungle?

NM: The poor believe they're going to be rewarded in the next
^(at any rate - that)
^{also} a good many of them ~~at least the~~
 life. The wealthy ~~believe~~ they're going to be rewarded in the next

life. The Egyptians, for example, believed you had no chance

whatsoever in the hereafter unless you were ^{truly} wealthy indeed. You

had to be buried in such a way that you were ^{prepared} fortified to travel

through the underworld. The Egyptians believed ^{that} when you died

you had to pass through the underworld in order to reach ~~the~~ ^{their heaven,}

~~version of the~~
 the Elysian fields [GK - wasn't the Elysian fields a Greek term? Did,

the Egyptians have a specific term for paradise?] And for that you

needed all sorts of protections. ^{Priests used to pray for} You needed priests praying for
^{seven onto your burial garments,}
^{were attached} you, ^{also} you needed amulets strapped to your corpse, you needed

prayers being said by your relatives, you needed a tomb that would

protect you from evil spirits when you needed rest—you ~~would go~~ ^{could go}

out and explore the ~~land~~ ^{and} the underworld, then you'd come back to

~~your tomb and enter again into your embalmed mummy~~
your tomb. Finally, with all that, sometimes you made it through

~~it through~~

the underworld and sometimes you didn't. They used to have a

Rich Egyptians used

which nested of course in your highly decorated decorated chests.

prayer: "Oh, God" ~~who was Amun~~ ^{Amun, do not} "do not let me die a second

time in the Land of the Dead." The Egyptians believed in the

that

second death ~~which~~ was final. The first death was provisional. If

~~you were able to pass~~

~~you got~~ through the underworld into the Elysian fields, you could

After some rest you'd go out into the underworld again. Finally, you might even make

A poor man without the protection

live forever. So, for them, wealth was crucial. Which is why you

of priests, amulets and a tomb was no chance at all.

have that phenomenon of a ~~land~~ ^{land} an early ~~land~~ ^{land} and civilization

where

with most people living at a subsistence level and absolute,

But there is,
fabulous wealth at the top. ~~At the top of the pyramid were the,~~

~~Pharaohs:~~

I think that belief carries over. ~~Sometimes~~ ^{are} people who ~~were~~
^{might}
abstemious ~~look~~ with horror on rich people who ~~will~~ have gold

^{studishes}
plates under the serving ~~plates~~ for dinner. But the rich obviously

^{that the afterworld} to enable people
believe, the way the world is structured, people who are rich have

who are rich to have more of a purchase on ^(eternity)
more of a purchase on the afterworld than the poor. Not all rich

~~on the level of the here on life~~
~~on the level of the here on life~~
~~Not all rich~~ ^{people. Some rich people} ~~feel~~ through their philanthropy—maybe
^{feel guilty, late in life, they pursue}

^{late} philanthropy—they're terrified of the hereafter. They know
what they did to get that wealth and they are in terror.

^{Then}
~~There are~~ the poor—some of whom are just bitter and furious,

^{they}
and feel they were absolutely denied any kind of chance at any

existence at all, ^{they} and ^{also} are very angry at God, ~~then~~ _o you have the poor

who believe ^{that} ~~no, no~~ it's all right, I've lived a clean life, I've lived,

a good life, I've raised my children, done my best, I've never

despaired and I'm going to go to a good place.

^{separate outlooks,} We have these phenomena and we also have the ^{can} question, ^{ongoing} ~~for~~ ^{So} those who believe ~~in a~~ ^{in a} ~~blissful~~ ^{continuation after death} ~~state~~ ^{well, how does it work?} And ^{my guess} at a guess, I would think there's a

^{ongoing} great deal of negotiation between God and the devil over who ^{travels} ~~goes~~

where. ~~In other words you know the old story about negotiation~~

~~When both parties walk away somewhat dissatisfied from the,~~

~~result, it's been a good, clean negotiation.~~

So I'm assuming by now that not only is God not all-powerful

^{all-conquering either. The two} powerful but the devil is not all-conquerable. You can truly have

^{are}
~~two~~ systems in deep contest with one another. ~~And so, the devil,~~

~~therefore,~~ ^{wish} ~~excluded~~
 would not want to be ~~separated~~ completely from the possibility of

^{might desire to have}
 rebirth. The devil ~~will want to have a say. And the say that the~~

~~devil would want~~ ^{his} ~~would be some of the rich people~~ ~~could be taken~~

care of.

JML: It's "my people can be taken care of."

~~NM: Now,~~ ^{also} ~~of course, if you~~ ~~obviously,~~ there are rich people who

are close to saintly, who manage to live with their wealth in such a

way that it hasn't corrupted them. I think ^{that's} ~~it's~~ rare—but it ^{does} ~~certainly~~

^{occurs}
~~exists~~, we've all known a few. They are lovely people sometimes.

Not all rich people are awful, but a great many rich people ~~are~~ ^{definitely}

~~fit that category~~ ^{are certainly in no}
~~And particularly when they're new to wealth~~ ^{shape to look at the}
~~the concept of~~

^{eye of the needle,}

~~nouveau riche is not a small one. They very often lead lives that~~

~~disgust many people.~~ ^{you can find} Nonetheless, there is also ^{live} a certain energy in

~~the rich, some of the rich, not all.~~ But ^{then} some of the rich made their

money ^{offe all their} through huge energy. Not all people who gain power ^{arrive} gain

~~just through~~ ^{Soul} ~~dirty~~ means. They just as often gain it through n

~~intensity of energy that's greater than other people's.~~

① ~~So, the hereafter is~~ ^{as seen by and} ~~So it's a complex matter for the rich.~~ I think God ^{to be} perfectly ^{expect}

^{of the} willing to discriminate. Certain ^{rich people}, yes, absolutely, let's

send them ^{out} forward ^{Even promote the} to be born again. They're interesting. I want

~~them around again. Then there's certain people the devil will have~~

~~to smuggle in. The imaginary dialogue.~~

particular emblematic
 "Surely you don't want that awful collection of old piss and
~~old~~ turds surrounded by gold!"

The devil says, "You never did know how to comprehend
excrement
 that type. I have a better feeling for *those people* than you do."

God: "All right." I'll give you that one if you release those
folks
women
 two to me. . ."

I'm speaking in excessively speculative. . .I'm making a
 comedy out of it. The reason is I'm not sure of my ground—I have
 to retreat. This is a tough one for me today.

Are you saying that God will
 JML: But you're saying to me, the possibilities of wealth—some

people can be born and actually be endowed with the power to be
some to be

again
 wealthy, or actually be born into great wealth? Or into poverty?

NM: Born into wealth is another matter [side one ends] The

question is—you're saying God may want certain people to be born into wealth.

JMI: Or into poverty.

Why not?

NM: Yes. Absolutely. It's a species of testing. I think one aspect

~~of wealth and poverty in karma I find very interesting is certain~~

~~People who were very high born in one life and were spoiled and~~ *in rich and favorable circumstances* ~~had~~ *grown*

~~ended up having lives that were disappointing by the highest~~ *to the extent*

~~might be,~~ *Others who were* ~~measure are (reborn as poor people. There are other people who are~~

~~never got it through their heads~~ *heads* ~~poor who can simply never get it through their heads that they're~~

~~that they were deprived. They have a touch of~~ *poor. They have a certain aristocracy innate in them. And there*

are rich people who have the modesty of poor people. I think you

but can be your 58

find that all the time—these are ^{not only} spiritual tests. ^{One} The function of

~~spiritual~~
~~traits~~
spiritual inheritance

reincarnation is to give God ^{further} deeper insights into the people ^{He} or

She is dealing with. I go back to the fundamental premise: God

does not understand us completely any more than we understand

our children. We ^{can know them} understand our children quite well, ^{on terms} but we ^{of their habits and attitudes, but}

^{in all ways} we certainly don't understand them perfectly. So God wants to know

more and more and more about ^{His} creation, and the devil, many

times, is attempting ^{precisely} to muck up ^{such} God's clarity.

JML: ~~This works very well~~, I don't have any disputes on the

individual level, but when I think of that phrase of Adam Smith's,

"the wealth of nations," there are some peoples, some nations, who

have lived in terrible, terrible misery. Take one nation I know a

little about, the Irish. For 500, 600 years they lived under British wealth and power and now it seems almost just that the Irish are richer than the English.

NM: Are they? I didn't know that.

JML: Yes. They ^{have} surpassed them. In per capita income now, the Irish passed the British—they're the wealthiest nation in the European Union.

NM: Why are they so wealthy?

JML: Because they took over a lot of the finances and the entrepreneurship and the banking, and they have a great gift of languages and various abilities, and now they're the banking center of Europe. They've just done it.

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NM: Per capita income—I know, but if 3% of the population is immensely wealthy. . .

JML: No, no, no. It's spread throughout the country. You know, the Irish for many years ^{were} trying to get Americans to come back and live there with free citizenship, my wife has it. They've cut it off.

"We don't want any more people ~~any more! We don't want more~~ people coming in to be part of Ireland." Ireland was ~~being~~

depopulated for hundreds of years. Now people are going there because ~~they want~~ the standard of living is so high, all that EU

money that was invested ^{has} returned at a great rate. But I'm thinking of the poverty, the potato famine, the de-population, two or three million people died over there. . .

NM: I'll give you another example. ^{For a thousand years} The ~~800 or 1000 or 1200~~

~~and more~~ ^{igher the} years the Jews lived in the ghetto ~~and what happened?~~ They

^{on farm} weren't allowed to hunt or fish ⁱⁿ most parts, they were allowed to

^{or inn-keepers or own shops} be money-lenders ~~and they could live~~ in their own communities as

~~shopkeepers, whatever.~~ So what did they do? They gave

^{I would say that the results} everything they had to their schools, ~~and it~~ got into the gene

^{stream those ghetto Jews} ^{learning and} stream ^{put their emphasis on intelligence} they became immensely intelligent people. ^{Because that} ~~because their own books, particularly the Talmud,~~ ^{was still open to them.} ~~was what they were obliged to me.~~ So the Irish in a certain sense

~~learned—they had to be—I'm guessing—they have the ability to~~

~~live with fine economy and high levels of money.~~

JML: ~~So~~ If you look at all the plusses and minuses of all the

nations—great wealth in some and great poverty in others—how

does that mesh in with ~~all~~ the individual ^{decisions} things God and the devil

^{express}
~~are doing~~ with reincarnation? It seems God may have to give up a

whole country or a whole nation or whole race of people for long periods.

NM: I don't want to get carried away with understanding God's motives in ~~every situation~~. I'm looking to find a few general principles. . .

JML: You're looking at individuals. I'm asking you to look at it from a ^{rational} Marxist point of view.

NM: That means first, you have to believe in races. I do, to a certain extent. It's completely incorrect these days to talk about ^{such matters,} ~~races~~ but I think no, the very mixture of climate and language

through many, does
~~around over~~ (centuries produces) one kind of person as opposed to

That may now be
another kind. ~~There are differences. I think that's~~ part of God's

interest in us as individuals. "Will this particular man or woman

turn out better or worse than I think he or she will?" God's also

interested in races—how will they turn out?

JML: In nations.

NM: Yes. And also in nations—which, obviously, are not races.

~~They're often~~ far more complicated.

JML: God must be thinking a lot about China, with ^{3.4}~~two~~ billion,

~~(three billion) people. . . [CK— isn't it ONE billion out of 6 billion,~~

~~total population planet-wide? Still impressive.]~~

NM: God must be wondering if China is going to take over the

world. ~~And~~ God learns from that. I keep coming back to my

fundamental mnemonic—God learns. This is why I'm so opposed

to ^{those} ~~organized~~ religion ^{that} which assumes God knows everything ^{so} ~~and~~
 as fast as you can
 get down on your knees, ~~put your nose on the ground, stick your~~

~~ass in the air and pray.~~

JML: ~~Can we talk about~~—I don't know if you'll want to talk about

this, but ^{discuss} ~~can we talk about~~ some of the pivot points in human

history. . .

NM: Oh, I'll talk about it but

JML: ~~I don't want to over do it, but let's say the last 500 years. . .~~

NM: Gunpowder. The mirror.

JML: Nobody ever talks about the mirror. . .

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NM: ~~You~~^{ever} thought about it? The first mirror that was made?

JML: The first mirror was water.

NM: Yes, but that was highly imperfect. ~~Highly imperfect.~~ The

~~least bit of wind could distort~~ *the picture*

~~JML: It killed Narcissus.~~

NM: In myth.

~~JML: Yes.~~

NM: I think the mirror had a profound effect. Gunpowder had a

~~profound effect. The safety match—not even the safety match, the~~

~~match.~~ The wheel.

JML: That's interesting. I didn't necessarily mean technology. I

meant a war, a battle, a birth—could be the discovery of a nation—

you know, Columbus. . .

NM: I think it's too broad.

JML: Last time we spoke, you ^{got into} ~~talked about~~ evolution a lot, and at

~~At~~ one point you said ~~I may have this wrong that~~ God was

learning about evolution as ^{he} went along.

NM: Yes. God learns.

JML: Then in those early periods of time, with slime covering the

^{when} oceans ^{you indicate that} and land had just been created, ~~that maybe~~ God was in the

^{yes, in there} slime of early creation (evolving with everything else. Yet you also

said with great assurance that God is the creator of the world and

Just the ^{same} ~~left~~ ^{time} I ~~capitalize~~ He. You know that.

the solar system. I was having trouble reconciling God in the slime
and God as the creator—

NM: ~~Well, if I contradict myself, I wouldn't get bogged down in it.~~

I lean to the notion God is the ⁶creator—or, what's the word I'm
III

looking for—the factotum of the solar system. The notion that

God is something we can conceive in unified form is—I don't

necessarily adhere to that. Suppose God is the lord of the solar

system but at the same time, had to learn how to develop the

from the slime on up /
system, ~~not just the slime.~~ (Most people, myself included, have no

great trouble believing Jesus was the son of God—but God was

many things and looked to become more and ^{He}searched and ^{He}learned.

God learned. ~~We can come back to that dare I call it this?~~ as

our slogan.

JML: ~~No, I think it's a good rule. But I think where we got~~

~~logged down at that particular point of the discussion was when~~

Yes, but when
~~did God put the souls into creation?~~

NM: ~~How do I know? Why would I know? I think at a certain~~
~~point...~~

JML: ~~It must have started at a certain point... It had to.~~

has to (at this point.)
~~NM: That's where our understanding becomes lame~~ How much

perhaps
~~of God is in every house fly? Something, maybe. (Something. The~~
~~point is...~~

JML: The soul is ~~something~~ special...

NM: You have to conceive of God as being [~~long pause~~] ^{yes} how to

put it? Immensely differentiated. So that the life we see in a fly,

those wonderful moves, ^{yes} that came from the Creator. He gave that

to the fly. Did he give the fly ^a conscience? Did he give the fly ^{it a} ~~the fly a~~

sense of proportion, [?] ~~give him the power to have interesting~~

~~conditions?~~ No, probably not. Probably not. The key to the

notion is ^{that} it's all been a huge experiment, an ongoing, developing

experiment with ^{countless good and bad, but} endless results, most of them good enough so that

evolution continued, ^{despite its} ~~with failures all over the place~~. God learns,

God learns, ~~God learns~~. And so God invests himself or herself in

all sorts of creatures en route. Not only animals but flora as well.

JML: So the creation of the soul was not ^a historic event?

NM: Who knows? It could have been ^{a moment in time,} The Bible seems to think so,

so.

JML: At a given moment God created human beings and gave them a soul.

NM: But that doesn't mean it's so.

JML: Well, if you believe in the soul . . .

^{Now, I do}
NM: ~~I~~ believe in the existence of the soul but I don't ^{subscribe to the} believe in the

iron authenticity of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Both,

~~They~~ were both written by committee. The Old Testament was

put together over a long period by a series of
written by a very talented committee, much more talented than

the latter-day Bible-builders,

~~people~~ who wrote the New Testament. On the other hand, the

composed

people who wrote the New Testament were ^{also} fine scholars and they

we're familiar with) knew the best remarks that had been made up to that point, ^{in the} And Old Testament and by many a sage, prophet and ~~and~~ mystic, and they used them, they used them all through. And they were attached to a concept (also)

that may or may not be true. May well be true. Which is ^{that} Jesus was

the son of God. And they were serious. Both committees were ^{most} ^{about that, but}

they were still a ^{so} immensely serious but they were committees. And as literary works, the Old Testament has some faults and the New Testament a great many, works they have their faults. And to accept them as the absolute therefore

^{spiritual} map of our universe is comparable to the kind of ^{using} ^{charts} maps Christopher

^{he for him,} Columbus had ^{our} when he set out for the West. So the idea that the ^{of the}

beginning as presented soul was created in the first three sentences of Genesis ^{is} ^{repels me as}

false
a concept.

studied classical before
In fact, once I started studying Hebrew and the first sentence

of Genesis—have we discussed that?

JML: No.

NM: Well, ^{as} you know: "In the beginning, God created the heavens

Or so it goes in English. Actually the
and the earth." The first word of the Old Testament—in Hebrew—

is "~~baraishit boraud~~" [sp???? CK] and "~~baraishit~~" is a ^{most} ~~very~~ odd

singular.

~~word in classical Hebrew.~~ The only place it exists in ^{of} ~~the entire~~ *all*

^{that} language is in the first word of the Old Testament, ^{"baraishit"} ~~And "boraud"~~
and the second is "bora". ^{"baraishit"} ~~"boraishit"~~
is "~~being~~." There are many interpretations of "~~baraishit~~" but I came

^{"Bora" is}
up with "out of the pits. . ." or "out of the depths. . ." ~~"God"~~
"being" or "creating". So the first two words
say "Being becoming," or "being coming out of the
created—it's not "the heavens and the earth," it's "the firmament pits,"
The next words are not "the heavens and
the earth" but "the firmament"
above" and "the firmament below," ~~Which is altogether different.~~

as it declares
~~The idea that there are these two species of existence from the~~

~~commencement~~ And then

word go, dualism. And what's the next sentence? "The breath of

God moved upon the waters. . ."

JML: "The breath of God upon the waters. . ."

NM: It's not "breath of God" at all. The word ^{used here for breath} is "ruach." In

classical Hebrew. And in classical Hebrew there are three ^{varieties} ~~species~~
of breath to signify

of God's presence in "breath." There's "ruach," "nefesh," and

"neshamah." ^a "Neshamah," if I recall correctly, is ~~the~~ gentle breath.

And ^{wind} "nefesh" is ^{a normal breath} the average breath, and "ruach" is the fierce breath,

^{only} the angry breath, the rage. So it's ^{the line really says, "and only} "and in the rage of God, he

^{vape}

So, to go back, the first two
roared over the waters." So the first sentence could well be

sentences can be translated as "Being born
translated, "Out of the pits, God created the firmament above and
becoming out of the pits

the firmament below. And ^{God's} his fierce breath roared over the waters."

JML: Much different.

NM: ^{Altogether} ~~Much different.~~ Totally different. And since I'm suspicious

^{I always assume they} of committees, ~~it might be they wanted~~ you know, ~~they were~~
^{are looking to make} ~~making soporifics and~~ pastel candies for people from the word go.

~~JML: Have you ever talked about this translation with anyone?~~

NM: ~~You know my work as well as anyone.~~ It's in my work, it's in
Ancient Evenings. Some of the Egyptians are talking about these
Hebrews. I've read about it several places. [tape off and back
again]

JML: We've spoken a bit about technology. I'd like to go ^{back to} at a

~~most~~ very basic level, ~~which you've led us down to, perhaps simplistic.~~

~~One, the simplistic: you talk to somebody who's not educated~~

~~about technology—it's simply a way of extending our muscles and~~

~~minds over greater distances and doing more work. I know there's~~

~~more to it than that—the deadening effect. But most of humanity~~

sees it as a way to free us from drudgery, ^{and give} giving us leisure time to

read and think and travel, ~~and~~ so forth. Why shouldn't it be seen

on balance—on balance—I understand all the bad things about it—

but why shouldn't technology be seen as largely salutary? Is

technology inherently evil or is it just misused? Misused by the

devil or misused by God? Is it inherently evil or is it something

God lost control of? Or the devil appropriated?

NM: I think God lost control of it. I have four words to describe

technology which I've used several times now: more power, less

pleasure. I think there's no getting around it: we can't pretend

~~there's more pleasure~~ ^{comes to us} from technology. It tends to crimp our

senses, ^{and} to reduce us to people who can live in a closed

environment. ~~The extensions we get from it~~

~~The real argument is: is it worth it?~~ My notion—it's a

sentimental notion, doubtless, ^{is that} ~~but it's that~~ God would have

preferred us to be able to do ~~all~~ the things we can do through

^{by means of} technology ~~through~~ our spirit. In other words, instead of having

television, we could ^{reach} ~~turn~~ into our dreamlife and ^{enjoy} ~~have~~ very

and ^{that} ~~we~~ organized marvelous dramas ^{for ourselves or ~~see~~ (include) by telepathy to our friends,} we could each create. The ultimate

aim was for every human being to be immensely creative. And ^{psychic}

~~(psychic) so that we would not have needed electronic~~
~~psychic.~~ If I wanted to talk to you, I could be able, in a certain ^{communication} ~~from~~

~~sense~~, to have my mind reach yours. We all have small intimations

of that. It seems to me they're ^{mental} ~~getting~~ reduced more and more and

~~more reduced~~ with every advance ~~more~~ in technology.

As a specific example, I now use hearing aids and I can't hear

without them, most of the time, not with most people. But my ^{remaining}

^{ability to hear gets} ~~hearing gets worse all the time.~~ My sense of hearing ~~gets~~ more and

^{by using} more reduced ~~the more~~ I use my hearing aids. So I think

technology tends to curtail our possibilities ^{and accelerate} ~~ultimately.~~
 our dependencies

And ~~after~~^{have been} all, the great strides that ~~were~~^{made} in technology didn't come from these generations, they came from previous generations. Maxwell discovered some of the differences between electricity and magnetism. Farraday—some of the great scientists of the 19th century took imaginative, metaphorical leaps to produce the beginnings of technology. Now we're down to a series of ~~poles~~^{polls} and test tubes. Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill didn't have to study previous speeches to come up with the Gettysburg Address ~~and~~^{or} "I have nothing to offer you but blood, sweat, toil, and tears—" They came out of a past that depended on ^{individual} human beings ~~themselves to come up with~~^{rising to} marvelous solutions ~~to~~^{at} incredible moments. *They were not dependent upon curious machines they did not really understand*

As a small example,

~~I don't know anyone who has a computer who doesn't talk~~
with

about the glitches.

JML: But I don't see ¹ look, the first person to use a wheel after

the drudgery of dragging things—they must have felt great

pleasure. I don't see—

NM: Wait a moment, ~~wait a moment~~—look, look, look, there are

crucial turning points, ~~crucial turning points~~ in the advent of *modernity*

~~technology, and the center of it all is electronics. Now, when the~~

whereas the

first

~~wheel was made, it was made of wood and stones were used to~~

sharp

~~shape the first rough wheel. These are things people could~~

it

were

comprehend, they came out of the earth. Then people began to

learn how to smelt ore. Dangerous business, tricky, but they ~~could~~

found

~~make metal out of melting ore, ways to get fire to melt the ore, to~~
^{the means}
get slag ^{so could} and separate the slag from the molten metal. ~~And the~~ Iron
Age began.

~~But~~ I say there's a profound difference between early
technology and later technology. Early technology, ^{let us} which I say
~~went right~~ through to the 19th century, consisted of dealing with
very powerful and explosive elements in nature and mastering
them, so there was ^{awe and} a certain excitement ^{to it.} to it. There was ~~huge~~
^{on the railroad} excitement ~~to the~~ train when it was developed—people loved to
travel on ^{them,} trains. They might be ^{cramped and} uncomfortable, ~~it~~ could smell bad,
but they were exciting. ~~But~~ how traveling on airplanes is
disagreeable. Everyone thought it'd be immensely exciting but it

isn't. It's reductive. You don't feel like a voyager, ^{so much as} you feel like a

a piece of packaged goods. ~~So in that sense, it's electronics that's the~~

^{is the} great divide—the watershed between what I would call good

technology and bad. Because no one knows what electronics is. I

defy a ^{reach my mind with an} ~~fine~~ physicist to tell me what electronics is all about. We, ~~explanation I can comprehend. For that~~

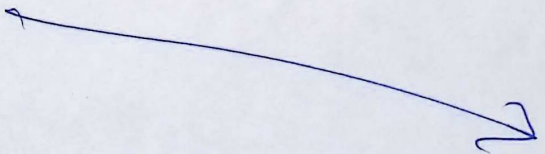
^{matter, we don't even} ~~don't~~ know what electricity is. It's a current. A current of

^{anything} ~~about the real inner~~ ^{yes,} ~~but do we know what an electron is?~~ ~~make up of an electron? Does it possess~~ ~~its own consciousness or not?~~

JML: So that's the pivot point, then? That's when technology

~~loses its ability to generate any pleasure or satisfaction and~~

becomes a miserable activity?



NM: ~~Well, if you want to take it that far. Obviously, certain~~
~~people really enjoy their technology but then, they may already be~~
~~in a state of misery without knowing it.~~

JML: But when you were a boy, the radio—you must remember

the radio—

NM: The radio was still something you could put together. [NB:
 people happily build their own computers for fun—not
 professionals, serious hobbyists.] I never was a kid who put radios
 together. . .

JML: The crystal set and all that.

NM: You had to do solder, ^{make wires} ~~connections~~, stuff like that—^{yes} now, who,

~~can build a computer?~~ ^{buy} [see above!] Even then, you had to ~~build~~

you
the vacuum tubes. I did model airplanes because they were made

People assemble computers today out of factory parts.

83

of balsa with glue. Then plastic came along. In my childhood,

plastic was not common. Bakelite was the nearest you got to *it*.

~~plastic~~. Now plastic is omnipresent. And it's inert. It doesn't bring

on any sense of the uncanny. I spoke about this ^{*in an interview*} ~~in an interview~~, I'm

an inkling
~~It offers a sense of non-existence,~~
~~doing for Playboy. But plastic is inert. It doesn't give you a sense~~

~~of the uncanny. If it gives you a sense of anything, it's non-~~

~~existence. And I'm just paranoid enough to believe it's the devil~~

who loves plastic because it's going to choke God's arteries, ~~it'll~~

deaden God's sensibilities before it's all over. God won't be able to

get to us through shields of plastic. About the time, oh, thirty years

when
ago women began to start wearing plastic clothing—the stuff

stank, you remember, the awful smell of plastic clothes? I began to

that think ~~this~~ may be the point where we're losing the ballgame. ^{was} This ~~lost~~. ~~If women with their finer~~ *sensibility were adopting* ~~is the bad inning.~~ *plastic.*

JML: Very good. My last question: Great religious ideas have

great followings and they last for millennia—some do fade, ~~they~~

some do die, but the greatest ~~ones~~ last for millennia. And I'm assuming

there's a reason for that. Your faith in the theological and

intellectual efficacy of your system is very strong, very powerful.

I've observed it for many years and it's deep-rooted inside you. But

you have also said your system is not going to be adopted by many

other people.

NM: Not in a hurry, not in a hurry. No.

*There's no immediate
solace for our fears. Only an appeal
to our human pride.*

JML: If anybody.

NM: If ever.

JML: Does this bother you?

NM: No. ~~Because years ago I used to be~~ ^{I suppose that if I had} oh, I lived with much

~~ambition for my possibilities. And so it was possible if I had~~

~~developed these ideas when I was 30 or 40~~ ^{I would!} I have wanted to

become a ^{religious} ~~great world~~ leader. But that's ^{is} not in my capacity. And

~~for me the feeling I have is that if~~ there's any validity to any of

~~these ideas, if it takes root in any people to a great extent, then, yes,~~ ^{thoughts, if they take} ^{some}
~~some of these notions,~~ ^{these ideas, if it takes root in any people to a great extent, then, yes,}
~~they may yet be adopted by many,~~ ^{some of these notions,}
~~it may take over. Because I do believe that in organized religion,~~ ^{they may yet be adopted by many,}

~~there are~~ ^{there are} two elements now on the horizon ^{that} that can yet destroy the

world as we know it. One of them is technology and the other is

~~The second~~
 organized religion. Because I think organized religion is what

~~intelligent children~~
 drives people into stupidity. It can take the brightest people and

~~and~~
 (deprive them of their ability to think and to look at what their

~~obliged~~
 existence is. They're ~~forever trying~~ to force their thought to fit a

mold that may never have existed. And certainly doesn't exist

now. ~~And that~~ drives people to extremes. I can point to our

~~president. He's obviously incapable of subtle thinking. And, so,~~

~~So, I do feel that my existential sense~~
~~my feeling is this religion that I have could make for a better~~

~~of God as a Being who needs us as~~
 universe 50 years from now, 100 years from now. I have no
 much as we need him could yet
 reach man, But I feel no ~~great~~ immediate inner
directive to get this out right away and try to convince

~~I'm content to see these~~
 people with it. I don't care to travel around the country trying to
 interviews published eventually. But
 sell this as such. When I get into conversations with people I bring

~~it up—it isn't that I won't bring it up. If we do enough of these~~

~~interviews and they're good enough, we can print it as a book and~~

~~see what happens. But my feeling is that it's down the road, very~~

That's far
~~far~~ down the road. I think, *wish we do* if you want, you could make the next

the theme "the"
interview we do on ~~how~~ how do you see this religion functioning in *a*

future
(society?" That might be interesting. *IT'S* ~~it would be~~ uncharted ground

for you and me
~~for me and you—~~ we might have ~~some~~ fun with it.

This
JML: That might be a good way to *finish the interviews,* ~~cinch it off.~~ I think we've

most of the areas,
moved through ~~almost every area~~ you wanted to talk about.

Yes, we could call the book,
NM: That would be the last one—the last lecture. Hubris. Why

"Theological Hubris."
~~don't we call this Teleological Hubris?~~

JML: I think what you said before—God learns. That ~~is~~

encompasses the previous
~~encompassing the statement for all the conversations.~~ Everything *you*

say
~~(relates back to that. It's the answer at the end of every road of~~

~~—questions.~~

NM: God learns.

JML: I like that ~~very much. That's it. I asked them all. [tape ends]~~

IV

No. 4 conducted¹
8-17-04

JML: I want to begin by talking about saints. In most religions, they play a tremendous role. They intercede for lesser humans, they give witness to God's greatness, they are models for humanity by their ability to withstand suffering. Indeed, some of their suffering is self-imposed. Do you see saints in the same way as in the traditional religions?

NM: You reach me on ^a ~~my~~ weak point. I don't know that I have ^{a good deal} ~~much~~ to say on the subject. It does make sense to me that there would be certain people whom God would feel close to. I suppose the subtext to such a remark is that God may not feel equally near to each one of us. ^{In truth,} ~~In fact,~~ I would doubt that He does. After all, the devil is always doing his best to obfuscate the divine venture, ~~to muddy God's vision of us,~~ Most human beings are by now a complex mixture of good and evil. ^{Let's up} ~~They're~~ devil-infested, ^{and} ~~they're~~ God-illuminated. ~~Most of us are both and~~ [⇒] so it's not easy to reach us.

~~What characterizes humanity today is that~~ Very few of us ever get a message directly from God or the Devil. (Of course, ~~many~~

hysteries receive several messages a day.) For ~~most~~ of us,

are obliged to live with however, we live *over* in a subtle smudge to our senses. *Sensually speaking,* We live in a *we inhabit a* (complex and contradictory environment—~~sensually speaking,~~

we may not be theologically speaking, spiritually speaking, we're not as near to *as near to* ultimates as *perhaps we were* we may have been a few centuries ago.

Now there are people who succeed, one way or another, of divesting themselves of most of the devil. It's hard for me to believe, however, that a saint can exist with nothing of the Satanic still residing in him or her. I *can* ~~have to~~ assume that saints are

but free relatively pure ~~(at least after they have skinned themselves)~~. The *so* notion that they are absolutely pure—well, given my temperament, *it* I find that concept near to offensive. It begs too many questions.

It makes everything too easy. Because if a saint is perfect, why the hell do they fail so often? Does the devil overtake them? Or—let me advance an essentially medieval arguments—is the saint so

NM: Not limited but finite. Certainly not infinite.

JML: I assume that human perfection is truly impossible for you, as you just said. If there were a human being who was all-good, she or he would be better than God. And if we found an absolutely perfect human being, your theology would be hard-pressed to account for that person.

NM: I don't think I'm in any danger of having my theology, such as it is, overthrown by that premise. Of course, there will never be a perfect human being. It's not in the range of our thinking. ~~I'm~~ *After all,*

I am
going so far as to say there's no such thing as a perfect divinity.

The nature of the universe is provisional, existential, ~~certainly~~ not finally determined. That is at the core of everything I present here.

Good's
~~The divine~~ future is as open as our own.

~~JML: Ergo, there can never be a perfect human being.~~

~~NM: We don't need reasoning to justify that conclusion.~~

Let me return to saints
JML: I can admit that Saint Peter was not perfect. But think of St. Francis of Assisi. . .

JML: Then I assume both sides have enlisted them. What about the other animals? Are you ready to say that some are on God's side? Are the eagles and the doves? The vultures and the snakes?

NM: For me to speak ~~with presumptive authority~~ ^{is equal to philosophical free-fall} on these matters ~~is come~~ I would rather rely on the sort of instinctive verdicts that

humans come up with after centuries of dealing with certain problems. For instance, my belief in God and ~~the~~ ^{the} devil comes to a good extent from the fact that the majority of people, through all of recorded time, have believed in both evil spirits and good ones and,

finally, in a god and a devil ~~with~~ ^{accompanied by} angels and demons. If the majority believe that, ~~one~~ ^{have such beliefs, one does well} has to pay a certain attention. One can't ~~to keep some respect for such notions~~ get so puffed up with our modern egotism that we scorn such ~~Error is our human signature, but~~ ^{not} a constant ongoing human sentiments. ~~Our capacity to perceive anything beyond ourselves is~~ ^{is a capacity to perceive}

All right, then. By that rule of thumb, I might say dogs tend to be closer to God than cats. Dogs have loyalty, they have affection, they exhibit the need to love, whereas cats strike me often as creatures of the devil. Now, mind you—they were all

created by God. It's just that the devil may have preempted some of those creations earlier than others.

JML: Snakes and crocodiles and. . .

NM: ~~It's totally beyond me. I'm an ignorant man concerning most animals.~~ If I knew more about their positive functions, I could talk about snakes and crocodiles, but I confess to abysmal incompetence at declaring what the positive functions of toads, rats, cockroaches, lice might be.

Do you relate any of your ideas
JML: Are there parts of existence in your view that are unclaimed *to modern concepts of disease?*
by either side? I'm thinking of microbes, uninhabited planets, the

bottom of the Pacific Ocean, neutral territory, so to speak, that God and the devil have not contested. Or is everything polarized?

NM: I'd say it's more a matter of *whether* divine investment *is* in part *or* in full. ~~In other words,~~ I keep going back to the notion that God is not all-powerful but the Creator. ~~So in~~ the course of evolving certain creatures, their future possibilities *became* ~~were~~ directly interesting to God, *and* ~~were~~ pursued further. Other elements may have been *tried* ~~tried~~

as interesting possibilities for the future. And so, very often, they have

live relatively unchanged for ~~millennia, for~~ aeons. When we come

to such matters as bacteria, where my knowledge is close to a ~~blank~~ ^{zero}

slate, I would venture the guess that these may have been virtually

passive experiments by God. Yes, I made it, but it seems not to

arouse My first interest! Or, does the devil dip his toe into the

water to churn up some particularly evil bacteria? Counter to that,

~~I have to add that~~ I hardly subscribe to the modern notion that all

disease is evil, and is to be eradicated at all cost, so that we can all

live for centuries and populate the globe with ten trillion people.

Life and death, I will repeat, do have an intimate relation to each

other. ~~Death is as great a test and as great an adventure as life.~~

Just as we cannot ^{conceive} of an existence where there is only daylight and

never night, so I can't comprehend ^{don't care to think/word of} of life without (death and

rebirth. ^{Since} I think ~~we~~, all, or most of us, ^{come} or some of us, ~~go~~ back again,

~~go in and come out.~~ I will say that I don't have the remotest clue ^{who}

^{what we} what we may become ~~in~~ in our next existence. It's possible, it's

a day before he went. He was a marvelous fellow, ^{set} and you'll see ~~from the conversation what his positive qualities were~~

set
line

We were talking on the phone and he knew death was close. At a given moment, I said to him, "Eddie, are you scared?" He said, "Yeah, Norman, I am."

I said, "Eddie, it seems to me you have less reason to be afraid than anyone I know. Because you're the loyalest guy I've ever met. You never turned your back on a friend, no matter how much it cost you. I really can't believe that something bad is waiting for you."

He said, "You really believe that, Norman?"

I said, "I think so, I really do."

And the woman he was living with at the time told me he did die later that day with a smile. Which ^{gave me heart} pleased me immensely

because I loved the guy and ^{so am} ~~if I was any use to him then, well, I'm~~ tempted, naturally, to hope that my words had a little to do with his peace.

So, yes, I can believe that Extreme Unction can be wonderful for some. I will say I ~~think~~^{expect} it's a human creation rather than a divine fact. There were no miracles announcing it, no revelation from God. This was a human attempt, if you will, to understand how God's mind works. Now it was brought into being as a sacrament, which is to say it had powerful backing, huge culture, much tradition, many decisions, synods debating over it, coming up with their sacraments one by one, developing them, using them, ~~keeping~~^{maintaining} the ones that worked best.

So, all right, yes, I can believe Extreme Unction is there for a devout Catholic. It might not work for someone like myself. If someone came in and said, "You're going to die in peace," I'd probably say, "Let me go. If you don't mind, I'll fine-tune my own end—you don't need to do it for me."

Certain theologians would say, "Well, this is vanity. This is precisely why you're not going to have a good end." And my feeling is, "Hey, pal, it's open. None of us know. It doesn't matter

how much tradition is behind it. Tradition suggests there may well be something powerful behind it, but can hardly ^{fit} ~~it. Certainly not~~ ~~for~~ every human case."

JML: Why is the state of mind at death so very important to you?

NM: Because I think it's our point of departure.

JML: So what? Everybody has a bad day. You could happen to have a bad day on the day you die.

NM: No, no—whenever you have a bad day, there's a lot of reason for the bad day. I can give you 20 causes for an ugly hour. Some are serious, some are passing. But, no, I won't let you hide behind

the notion ^{that} of a bad day, ^{no more than} is a slot on the roulette wheel.

JML: But there are also days when we have false euphoria. We can feel good for no accountable reason and then the next day, say, "Why did I feel so good? I still have all these problems!"

NM: Whenever we have an emotion we can't account for, good or bad, I expect that the root is karmic. That may be the only visitation we receive from previous lives. By the laws of the game,

which may well be basic and necessary, we can't know who we were and where we were in previous lives. Nonetheless, intense and unaccountable emotions can come from one's karmic past.

But I'm not answering your question. I think at the moment we die, we are the sum of all the good and bad we've done, all the courage and cowardice we've exercised. And so, for example, if we die with a desire to be reborn, I think it means a great deal to God. If you will, it's almost like we reach into a litter to select a pup, and the one who catches our eye ^{is the one} we choose to take home. Using that crude analogy, I think if we die ^{would say that it's important} ~~Eliot's wonderful line, "not with~~

~~a bang but a whimper"~~ ² ~~(which parenthetically obsessed Eliot)~~ ~~Eliot's writing is so often based on how we meet our death. If you approach his poetry with that in mind, The Wasteland becomes a study of people who don't have a clue how to perish. And yet it is~~

~~so important~~ to be ready. After all, that is the one situation we can't simulate, can't preempt. We can pretend to a huge number of emotions in our lives, we may well spend three-quarters of our

lives ~~acting~~, being what we are not. I would go so far as to say that

one of the reasons people get married is so ^{that} ~~(they can be themselves~~ ^{stop acting}

just a bit. They don't have to present a face to the world. People

who live alone are always ~~so~~ ^{to put on a face when} obliged ~~once~~ ^{when} they leave their room.

~~They have to depend so much upon the opinion of others.~~

So, I would say that ~~at the moment~~ when one is close to

death, that is, if one knows one's going to die, there can be a ^{desire} ~~desire~~

for another life, or a yearning toward peace or—and this is the

worst condition—a wish to pass away ^{from a (together)} ~~in stupor~~. (The largest urge

of the soul becomes, "I don't want to feel pain, ^{let} ~~let me~~ feel nothing.

~~So~~ I will accept nothingness." ~~These are all choices, I would say.~~

And really, suppose you're on high, looking people over,

wondering which ones you'll refashion. Suppose there's a

particular human ^{that} ~~being~~ God is most interested in, but at the last

moment that person is pleading for stupor. God says, "Do I really

want to go through this again? ^{Or is this?} ~~This person is,~~ finally, a great

disappointment?"

You see, I believe our final judgment in this life is given by the form of our rebirth. ~~I believe we've spoken of this before.~~ The only divine judgment we receive is our placement in the next life. Often, ^{God's} decision may be, "No. No need to be reborn. Off the board." True death. End of existence. ~~So if~~ you have no desire to live again, that could be determinative.

JML: I want to explore this more. A nurse told me this recently, a ~~nurse who was a~~ hospice nurse, who cared for the dying, three times a week she went through this, and she had great experience—told me that the end, often, because people were taking drugs, they'd be on morphine to cut the pain, and their personality, as she put it, "dissolves." That they were ^{alive} ~~live~~, they were functioning, but their soul was already gone. And so, for them, the death was before they died—the body was still breathing, the automatic systems were working but—but indeed, the people I have seen die, they revert to powerful impulses, powerful atavistic impulses. The desire to keep oneself clean—they get on the toilet

when they're dying. The desire to remember one's mother or grandmother. Or when someone touches you, the desire to reach out, ~~on to the reverse~~ afraid you're going to be violated when you're lying on your bed. And I've seen that, the few deaths I've seen.

So people don't ordinarily die in moments of clarity like Eddie Bonetti, ~~presumably thinking happy thoughts, ready to die~~ ~~and ready to choose a new life~~ A lot of time when they die, they don't know who they are.

NM: I can't answer that. ~~The real question is when do you die~~ ~~spiritually?~~ You can ~~pass away~~ ^{die} spiritually an hour, a day, a month

or five years before your death. ~~That may be when the question of~~ ~~rebirth is considered and decided.~~ I think as a ~~harsh, practical~~

~~matter~~ the closer your soul can remain intact up to the extinction of your body, the finer candidate you are for reincarnation. ~~That's~~ ^{But that's} just my notion.

JML: So risky. . . You mean someone who really wants to be reborn but goes into a coma loses their shot?

NM: Look, the soul can fight the body right down to the very end.

The soul can say, "all right, I don't feel anything in my legs any more. Nothing in my fingers. I can't find my thoughts, but I know what I want. That way is more life. I want to be reborn." Or, to the contrary, the soul can feel it isn't worth it. "Let the body have its day. I've abused this body all my life, it's now demanding a
— let me tell the truth to myself —
 cruel payment and I'm bankrupt. . ."

But I do think that the soul—taking this intelligence from your lady at the hospice—if the soul leaves a week or two before the body, I think, speaking in terms of the transmigration of souls, it could make for a *few complexities in the* ~~complex~~ travel schedule. You know, I have this feeling—so many talk about death as a vision: There's this wonderful white light, and relatives come out to meet you. I'm ^a~~not~~ touch dubious about that. For some people, yes. They were close to their relatives and their relatives do come out.

But there's an awful lot of spirit travel involved. The logistics of the hereafter interest me because God's energies, as I

see it, are immense but, to repeat, not infinite. So there are all sorts of procedures to be followed after you die. Economic procedures, if you will, involving the energies available to the ~~hereafter~~. It may be much more complex and less adaptable than we assume. The more flaming ~~religions~~ *fiery flamboyant sects* (the ones that promise everything in the hereafter, bring out my cynicism (which, *after all, is my goal* ~~I consider my shield~~ against wishful thinking). Often, I expect, in the immediate hours or days after our death there can be *pauses,* long waits. You may hang around in a vast hall—somewhat like the first day in the Army, when nobody knew what to do with you and you were *not yet* ~~waiting to~~ ~~get~~ assigned to some sort of temporary training platoon. We can talk about limbo a little later ~~or~~ if you wish. Limbo may be an absolutely realistic station for most people when they die. That is, they hang around for quite a while.

JML: Limbo can be for years.

NM: Well, I don't know. In the Catholic religion, there could be an eternity to limbo, but I think it could also be a matter of divine

bureaucratic—dare I say it?—mismanagement. Because
 bureaucratic mismanagement on earth—I don't ~~we~~ know ^{that} we
 necessarily have to assume all ^{that's} ~~that~~ changes in the hereafter. I don't
 think angels are perfect any more than I believe demons are totally
 evil. I think the rarest condition in existence is absolute purity of
 any variety ~~living or cut by glaciers into stone.~~

If God is a Creator, then God cannot be absolutely pure
 because creation consists in part of improving upon one's errors,
 and offering less purchase to one's vices.

JML: What about people—we've all heard about people who die
 after living lives of greed and misery, ~~they're~~ rotten people,
 detestable in every way, but at the last minute, the last few weeks,
 they call in the priest, they get a seraphic smile on their face, they
 have money, perhaps, they're surrounded by servants, and they go
 off into the hereafter feeling very good about themselves.

Deluded, perhaps, about their ultimate worth, but nonetheless,

smiling, saying their prayers. They haven't gone to a church or done anything decent—

NM: Well, you're creating an imaginary person. . .

JML: There are people like that who die happy after living a miserable life.

NM: Who says they died happy? They could be acting right until the end.

JML: That's the moment you said you don't act.

NM: No. No. I said people who are serious about their death don't act. They may be acting for others, but not before eternity.

I'll give you an explanation why a truly rotten person can die happy, which is they were so rotten in their previous existence, the life before this one, that this life, bad as it was, proved to be a spiritual improvement over the previous one. They die happy because they feel, everything considered, considering how bad were their beginnings, and how absolutely loathesome the initial impulses they were born with, they have gotten better under the

circumstances. We all know people who were total pricks their entire lives who mellow a little bit at the end. That's another human quality.

JML: But you said all the good and evil in one's life is summed up in death. I'm thinking of those who are miserable people for the first 95% of their lives and then they're sweet old people at the end—doesn't seem very just that they should have a happy death. You'd think somehow they should have a miserable death. Where's the fairness in things?

NM: I think you're speaking too hypothetically. ~~Speculations of the sort I go in for make me most uneasy when others indulge themselves. I mean,~~ this person you're talking about—as a novelist

I find him impossible to conceive ~~in my head~~. People who are rotten all their lives rarely end up sweet at the end. If they do—there is such a thing as truly evil and ugly impulses wearing out, ~~and~~ burning out. Just as good people ^{can} sour, ugly people ^{may sometimes} ~~can~~ die in a more benign state. They've used up the ugliness in themselves.

Of course, it's a wonderful metaphor, we all use it. What is your idea of purgatory as a metaphor?

NM: Well, as a metaphor—tell me, purgatory is a temporary station?

JML: It may last for a millennia, but it's temporary.

NM: I confess I don't ~~begin to~~ know these concepts ~~as~~ well as I ~~should~~. Does limbo have any relation to purgatory?

JML: No. Limbo is the place for those people on whom God can't make a judgment. They died before they were baptized ~~of~~ something like that.

NM: Absolutely meaningless and silly. ~~When you get into that.~~ . .

JML: I agree. The Church doesn't even talk about limbo any more. They've almost dropped it as a concept. But purgatory. . .

NM: Now purgatory. . .yes.

JML: Purgatory is not endless. There is an end to your suffering. The amount of time you're there and what kind of suffering you

procedures. Who can speak interestingly of heaven, after all?

Shaw made the best single attempt and decided heaven was boring.

And there is always the uneasy little feeling that people s have that

it could be like Club Med, a gated little ~~community in Florida.~~ ^{tropical island}

~~That's divine heaven, a gated community.~~ ^{That's} Whereas on earth, ~~we~~ ^{in life,}

~~know heaven, we~~ ^{we do} experience heaven. We ~~may~~ experience it two,

three, or four times in a long life, maybe for a minute, no more, but

we know what heaven is. There's a kind of luminousness to the joy.

Most of us, unfortunately, come closest to heaven through drugs.

But, all right—we know what it is.

^{certainly}
We know what hell is. Hell can be as simple as having a bad
case of gout. Or a screamer of a drug trip.

JML: There's conscience. . .

^{Yes.}
NM: (Purgatory, for me, is a sense of temporary but immense
living conflict between one's temptations and one's responsibility.

When we feel dread, we're not that far from purgatory. We feel

something very important could be taking place in our soul but we

call it, right here in a room you rented for a week one winter on Commercial Street in Provincetown. Would it be worthwhile to say anything about that experience?

NM: I won't get into it, Mike, because it takes too long to tell and there's no real point. I can certainly speak of succubi and incubi in the abstract sense. I think they would be ^{useful} instruments of the devil, ~~and most~~ useful. I only felt such a presence once in my life and it

seemed to come out of nowhere, which is why I don't rush to talk about it because I don't understand why it was there. But I really felt as if there were some intangible creature fastened to my chest.

I do have a story that may be worth telling about a poetess named Mina Loy. Something like seventy or seventy-five years ago, she was ^{staying} in a small hotel in the Left Bank in Paris and one night in her

room, she felt this hideous oppression, this monstrous, intangible creature, ^{which} ~~yet~~ seemed nonetheless most alive and ^{had} fastened to her

chest. She lived in horror through the night and felt abominably

wretched in the morning, ^{to recover, she} ~~she~~ went downstairs to drink some coffee

on the terrace of this little hotel she was staying at, just across the street from the Seine. Alastair Crowley, the famous and notorious magician, was there, a table or two away, and was talking about a man he detested who was also staying at the hotel. And Crowley said, "You know, last night I sent an incubus to invade him, yet ~~when I~~ ^{him} saw ^(this morning) ~~that~~ he looked perfectly all right. I don't understand it." Mina Loy's comment was, "Let no one say Alastair Crowley has no powers. It's just that they ^{are} ~~are~~ misdirected."

The story is amusing but it also establishes my incapacity to talk intelligently about incubi and succubi. I would just assume they're tools of the devils and used rarely. It's possible God employs them also to scare the very life out of certain people whom God feels can use some shaking-up. *But then,*

~~If you're sailing through seas you hardly comprehend, you tend to hold to the few things you know about sailing. So, here, I'm ready to ^{let} drop my sails. These are confusing and uncharted waters for me.~~

JML: Let me shift then to talk about wealth and poverty. I've listened to the last interview we did and you never addressed this at all.

~~NM: Wealth and poverty?~~

~~JML: Wealth and poverty.~~ Are they predetermined by God as karmic agents? How much of wealth and poverty is a result of what God gives you when you're born and how much comes from the accidents of the economic jungle?

NM: The poor believe they're going to be rewarded in the next life. The wealthy also believe—a good many of them at any rate—that they're going to be rewarded in the next life. The Egyptians, for example, believed you had no chance whatsoever in the hereafter unless you were truly wealthy. You had to be buried in such a way that you were prepared to travel through the underworld. The Egyptians believed that when you died you had to pass through the underworld in order to reach their heaven, the Elysian fields. And for that you needed all sorts of protection.

I think that belief carries over. People who are abstemious might look with horror on rich people who have gold plates under the serving dishes for dinner. But the rich obviously believe that the afterworld is structured to enable people who are rich to have more of a purchase on eternity. Not all rich people. Some rich people feel guilty. Late in life, they pursue philanthropy—they're terrified of the hereafter. They know what they did to get that wealth and they are in terror.

Then ^{some of} the poor—some ^{who} of whom are ~~just~~ bitter and furious—feel they were absolutely denied any kind of chance at any existence at all. They are very angry at God. You also have the poor who believe that it's ^{and fair} all right, I've lived a clean life, a good life, I've raised my children, done my best, I've never despaired and I'm going to go to a good place.

We have these separate outlooks, and we have an ongoing question for those who believe in a continuance after death. At a guess—my guess—I would think there's an ongoing negotiation

between God and the devil over who travels where. I'm assuming that not only is God not all-powerful but the devil is not all-conquering either. The two systems are in deep contest with one another. The devil, therefore, would not wish to be excluded completely from the possibility of rebirth. The devil might desire to have some of his rich people taken care of. Of course, there are rich people who are close to saintly, who manage to live with their wealth in such a way that it hasn't corrupted them. I think that's rare—but it does occur, we've all known a few. They are lovely people sometimes. Not all rich people are awful, but a great many rich people are certainly in no shape to ^{pass through} look at the eye of the needle. Nonetheless, you can find a lively energy in some of the rich. Some of them made their money, after all, through their huge energy. Not all people who gain power arrive just through foul means. ~~So, the hereafter is a complex matter as seen by and for the~~

~~rich.~~ I expect God to be perfectly willing to discriminate. Certain

of the rich, yes, absolutely, let's send them out to be born again.

They're interesting.

JML: Are you saying that God will endow some to be born again into great wealth? Or into poverty?

NM: Yes. Why not? It's a species of testing. People who were born in rich and favorable circumstances in one life and grew

spoiled and had lives that were disappointing might be reborn as poor people. Others who were poor never got it through their

~~felt~~ ^{turned bitter or} heads that they were deprived. ^{Some had} They have a touch of aristocracy

innate in them. And there are rich people who have the modesty of poor people. ~~I think you find that all the time — these are not only~~

~~spiritual tests but can be your spiritual hereafter.~~ One function of

reincarnation ^{maybe} is ~~to~~ give God further insights into the ^{us,} ~~people~~ He or

~~She is dealing with.~~ I go back to the fundamental premise: God

does not understand us completely any more than we understand

our children. We can know them quite well in terms of their habits

(some of their virtues and some of their faults,
and attitudes, but we certainly don't understand them in all ways.

So God wants to know more about His Creation, ^{whereas} ~~and~~ the devil,
~~many times~~, is attempting ~~(precisely)~~ to muck up such clarity.

JML: I don't have any disputes on the individual level, but when I think of that phrase of Adam Smith's, "the wealth of nations," there are some peoples, some nations, who have lived in terrible, terrible misery. Take one nation I know a little about, the Irish. For 500, 600 years they lived under British wealth and power and now it seems almost just that the Irish are richer than the English.

~~NM: Are they? I didn't know that.~~

~~JML: Yes. They have surpassed them. In per capita income now,~~
~~the Irish passed the British~~ ^{now} ~~—~~ they're the wealthiest nation in the European Union.

NM: I'll give you another example. For a thousand years and more, the Jews lived in the ghetto. They weren't allowed to hunt or fish or farm in most parts, they were allowed to be money-lenders or inn-keepers or own shops in their own communities. So what did they do? They gave everything they had to their schools. I

would say that the results got into the gene stream—those ghetto Jews put their emphasis on learning and intelligence because their own books, particularly the Talmud, was ^{all that was} ~~still~~ open to them.

JML: If you look at all the plusses and minuses of all the nations—great wealth in some and great poverty in others—how does that mesh in with the individual decisions God and the devil express with reincarnation? It seems God may have to give up a whole country or a whole nation or whole race of people for long periods.

NM: I don't want to get carried away with understanding God's motives. I'm looking to find a few general principles. . .

JML: You're looking at individuals. I'm asking you to look at it from a national point of view.

NM: That means first, you have to believe in races. I do, to a certain extent. It's completely incorrect these days to talk about such matters, but I think no, the ^{specific} ~~very~~ mixture of climate and language ^{over} ~~through~~ many centuries does produce one kind of person

as opposed to another. That may now be part of God's interest in us as individuals. "Will this particular man or woman turn out better or worse than I think he or she will?" God's also interested in races—how will they turn out?

JML: In nations.

NM: Yes. And also in nations—which, obviously, are not races. Far more complicated.

JML: God must be thinking a lot about China, with one billion people. . .

NM: ~~God must be wondering if China is going to take over the~~
~~world.~~ God learns ~~from that.~~ I keep coming back to my fundamental mnemonic—God learns. This is why I'm so opposed to those religions which assume that God knows everything, ~~so get~~
~~down on your knees as fast as you can.~~

JML: Last time we spoke, ~~you got into evolution.~~ At one point you said that God was learning about evolution as He went along.

NM: Yes. God learns.

JML: Then in those early periods of time, ~~with slime covering the oceans~~ when land had just been created, you indicated that God was in the slime of early creation, yes, in there evolving with everything else. Yet you also said with great assurance that God is the creator of the world and the solar system. I ~~was~~ ^{have} having trouble reconciling God in the slime and God as the creator—

NM: I lean to the notion God is the Creator—or, what's the word I'm looking for—the factotum of the solar system. The notion that God is something we can conceive in unified form is—I don't necessarily adhere to that.

Suppose God is the lord of the solar system but at the same time, had to learn how to develop the system from the slime on up. Most people, myself included, have no great trouble believing Jesus was the son of God—but God was many things and looked to become more and He searched and He learned. God learned.

JML: Yes, but when did God put the souls into creation?

NM: Why would I know? Our understanding has to become lame ~~at this point~~ ^{here}. How much of God is in every house fly? Something, perhaps. Something.

JML: The soul is special. . .

NM: You have to conceive of God as being . . . How to put it? Immensely differentiated. So that the life we see in a fly, those wonderful moves, yes, that came from the Creator. He gave that to the fly. Did He give the fly a conscience? Did He give the fly a sense of proportion? Probably not. The key to the notion is that it's all been a huge experiment, an ongoing, developing experiment with countless results, good and bad, but most of them were good enough so that evolution continued despite its failures. God learns, ~~God learns~~. And so God invests Himself or Herself in all sorts of creatures en route. Not only animals but flora as well.

JML: So the creation of the soul was not an historic event?

NM: ~~Who knows?~~ ^{Can't} It could have been a moment in time. ~~The Bible seems to think so.~~ Now, I do believe in the existence of the

For instance, even our present
 West. ~~So our~~ idea of the beginning as presented in the first three sentences of Genesis is a false concept.

~~In fact~~, I studied Classical Hebrew at one time and the first sentence of Genesis—have we discussed that?

JML: No.

NM: Well, as you know: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Or so it goes in English. Actually, the first word of the Old Testament—in Hebrew—is most singular. The only place it exists in all of the language is in that first word of the Old Testament, "barashith," and the second is "bora." There are many interpretations of "barashith" but I came up with "out of the pits. . ." or "out of the depths. . ." "Bora" is "being" or "creating" So the first two words say, "being becoming," or "being coming out of the pits." The next words are not "the heavens and the earth," but "the firmament above" and "the firmament below," as ^{if} to declare that there are two species of existence from the

commencement. And then the next sentence? "The breath of God moved upon the waters. . ."

JML: "The breath of God upon the waters. . ."

NM: It's not "breath of God" at all. The word used here for breath is "ruach." In Classical Hebrew there are three varieties of breath to signify God's presence. There's "ruach," "nefesh," and

"neshamah." "Neshamah," if I recall correctly, is the gentle breath.

And "nefesh" is a normal wind. "Ruach" is the fierce breath, the angry breath, God's rage. So the line really says, "and the rage *of God* roared over the waters." So to go back, the first two sentences can be translated ~~as sentence could~~ ^{can} well be translated ^{as} "Being

becoming, out of the pits, God created the firmament above and the firmament below. And God's fierce breath roared over the waters."

JML: Much different.

NM: Altogether different. I'm suspicious of committees. ~~I always assume they are looking to make pastel candies for people from the~~
~~word go.~~

JML: We've spoken a bit about technology. I'd like to go back to a basic level. Most of humanity sees it as a way to free us from drudgery, and give us leisure time to read and think and travel, so forth. Why shouldn't it be seen on balance—on balance—I understand all the bad things about it—but why shouldn't technology be seen as largely salutary? ~~Is technology inherently evil or is it just misused? Misused by the devil or misused by God? Is it inherently evil or is it something God lost control of? Or the devil appropriated?~~

too much?

NM: I ~~think God lost control of it~~ I have four words to describe technology which I've used several times now: more power, less pleasure. I think there's no getting around it: we can't pretend more pleasure comes to us from technology. It tends to crimp our senses and reduce us to people who can live in a closed environment. My notion—it's a sentimental notion, doubtless, is that God would have preferred us to be able to do the things we ~~can do~~ *now achieve* through technology by means of our spirit, *a lone* (In other words,

instead of having television, we could reach into our dreamlife and enjoy organized and marvelous dramas that we could create for ourselves or send by telepathy to our friends. The ultimate aim was for every human being to be immensely creative. ^{Being} ~~And~~ ^{psychic as well}

~~so that~~ we would not have needed electronic communications. If I

wanted to talk to you, I would be able to ^{put} have my mind ^{in contact} reach

^{with} ~~even if you were in a far-off place,~~ ^{yours} We all have small intimations of that. It seems to me such possibilities

mental powers become more reduced with every advance in technology.

As a specific example, I now use hearing aids and I can't hear

without them, most of the time, not with most people. But my ^{own}

^{small} remaining ability to hear gets ~~more and more~~ ^{further} reduced by using my

hearing aids. ^{I suppose} ~~So~~ I think technology tends to curtail our

possibilities and accelerate our dependencies.

After all, the great strides that have been made in technology came from previous generations. Maxwell discovered some of the differences between electricity and magnetism. ^{It ends} ~~Farraday~~ ~~some~~

~~of the great scientists of the 19th century~~ took imaginative,
metaphorical leaps to ~~produce the beginnings of technology.~~

Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill didn't have to study
previous speeches to come up with the Gettysburg Address or "I
have nothing to offer you but blood, sweat, toil, and tears—"

They came out of a past that depended on independent human
beings rising up to ^{exceptional} marvelous solutions at incredible moments.

They were not dependent on ^{electronic} ~~curious~~ machines they did not really
understand

As a small example, I don't know anyone with a computer
who doesn't talk about the glitches.

JML: Look, the first person to use a wheel after the drudgery of
dragging things—they must have felt great pleasure. I don't see—

NM: Wait a moment, there are crucial turning points in the advent
of modern technology. The center of all that ^{now is} ~~now is~~ electronics.

Whereas the first wheel was made of wood, and sharp stones were
used to shape it. These were things people could comprehend, they

came out of the earth. Then people began to learn how to smelt ore. Dangerous business, tricky, but they found the means to get fire to melt the ore and so could separate the slag from the molten metal. The Iron Age began.

I say there's a profound difference between early and later technology. Early technology, lasting through to the 19th century, consisted of dealing with very powerful and explosive elements in nature and mastering them, so there was awe and excitement to it. Huge excitement for the railroad when it was developed—people loved to travel on them. They might be cramped and could smell bad, but they were exciting. Now, traveling on airplanes is disagreeable. Everyone thought it'd be immensely exciting but it isn't. It's reductive. You don't feel like a voyager so much as a piece of packaged goods. ~~Plastic~~ ^{makes up} Electronics is the great divide—the watershed between what I would call good technology and bad. Because no one knows what electronics is. I defy a physicist to reach my mind with an explanation I can comprehend. For that

matter, we don't even know what electricity is. A current of electrons, yes, but do we know anything about the ~~real inner~~ makeup of an electron? Does it possess its own consciousness or *does* it not?

JML: So that's the pivot point, then? That's when technology becomes a miserable activity? But when you were a boy, the radio—you must remember the radio—the crystal set and all that.

NM: You had to ~~be able to~~ solder, make wire connections, yes, ~~But~~ Even then, you had to buy your vacuum tubes. People assemble computers today out of factory parts. I did model airplanes when they were made of balsa with glue. Then plastic came along. ~~In~~

In my childhood, plastic was not common. Bakelite was the nearest you got to it. Now plastic is omnipresent. And it's inert. It doesn't bring on any sense of the uncanny. It offers an inkling of non-existence. I'm just paranoid enough to believe it's the devil who loves plastic because it's going ~~to~~ ^{to} deaden God's sensibilities before it's all over. God won't be able to get to us through shields of plastic.

About the time, oh, thirty years ago when women began to wear plastic clothing—the stuff stank, you remember, the awful smell of plastic clothes? I began to think that may be the point where the ballgame was lost. If women with their finer sensibilities were adopting plastic.

JML: Very good. My last question: Great religious ideas have great followings and they last for millennia—some do fade, some die, but the greatest last for millennia. And I'm assuming there's a reason for that. Your faith in the theological and intellectual efficacy of your system is ~~very strong, very powerful~~. I've observed it for many years and it's deep-rooted inside you. But you have also said your system is not going to be adopted by many other people.

NM: Not in a hurry. No. There's no immediate solace for our fears. Only an appeal to our human pride.

JML: Does this bother you?

NM: No. I suppose that if I had developed these ideas when I was 30 or 40, I would have wanted to become a religious leader. But that is not in my capacity. If there's any validity to any of these thoughts, if they take root in people to some extent, then, yes, some of these notions may yet be adopted by many. Because I do believe that there are two elements now on the horizon that can yet destroy the world as we know it. One of them is technology and the other is organized religion. The second drives people into stupidity. It can take intelligent children and deprive them of their ability to look at existence. They're obliged to force their thought to fit a mold that may never have existed. And certainly doesn't exist now. That drives people to extremes. So I do feel that my existential sense of God as a Being who needs us as much as we need Him could yet reach many. But I feel no inner directive ~~to get this out right away to convince people.~~ I'm content to see these ~~interviews published eventually. But that's far down the road. If you wish, we could do the next interview on the theme, "How do~~

you see this religion functioning in a future society?" That might be interesting. It's uncharted ground for you and me—we might have fun with it.

JML: This might be a good way to finish the interview. I think we've moved through most of the areas you wanted to talk about.

NM: Yes. We could call the book "Theological Hubris."

JML: I think what you said before—God learns. That encompasses the previous conversations. Everything you say relates back to that.

NM: God learns.

JML: I like that.

Some thoughts on limbo

To get you caught up on limbo, we have to go all the way back to Adam, Eve and original sin. "In Adam's fall, we sinned all," says the old poem which summarizes the Church's teaching on original sin. Once they had been disobedient and were expelled from the Garden, every human being born thereafter not only had original sin but, far worse, no way to get rid of it.

The Old Testament stories of Noah guided by God to preserve humanity from the flood, the covenant of God with Abraham, Moses' receiving the commandments and the minutiae of Judaic law--all of this was simply preparatory to the birth of Jesus. The Catholic teaching is that prior to the crucifixion that redeemed humanity from original sin, nobody who died could go to heaven. Not Noah, not Moses, not Abraham, not a saint, prophet, or holy man.

Through the Middle Ages, the Church had a belief that as soon as Jesus died on the cross, he gathered up the righteous deceased and took them to heaven. (It coincidentally explained to a linear-thinking humanity why Jesus didn't resurrect for 3 days--he was busy, you see.) This was a popular artistic subject and was always called "The Harrowing of Hell."

Except, of course, hell was a place of eternal torment and the idea of the patriarchs and prophets, St. John the Baptist, Sts. Anne and Joachim, the parents of Mary, roasting to a turn while waiting for Jesus to get crucified didn't quite compute. So enter the idea of limbo, a place of perfect natural happiness where the holy like Anne and John the Baptist are longing for the beatific vision but are not suffering beyond that.

Then as the world grew more cosmopolitan, the Church felt a need to account for the fate of righteous souls like Aristotle, Confucius, Lao Tse, Gautama Buddha and the uncounted numbers of virtuous pagans. OK, then, they were in limbo too. Since they weren't baptized and were without supernatural grace, they couldn't go to heaven. But either they had been born before Jesus and never encountered a Jew either, or had never come near a missionary so their lack of baptism could hardly be held against them. No, they had natural virtues and would therefore have perfect natural happiness--no illness, no sadness, no suffering.

This concept satisfies the Church's determination to be the sole "gatekeeper" of heaven and ultimate appointment's secretary for the Almighty. "Outside the Church there is no salvation." (Of course, some Christians who aren't Catholic have valid baptisms even though they belong to the "wrong" denominations since the clergy can trace their ordinations back to the Pope of Rome in an unbroken line. But that's another complicated topic.) It also maintains the important concept of God as just and not sending to hell those who never committed a serious sin and never had an opportunity to hear about the Church. There had to be someplace between salvation and damnation and it's limbo. But it's only for the virtuous. Hell is open to the seriously evil of all persuasions.

Naturally, unless you believe in original sin, none of this makes much sense so, ironically, many of those reported to be in limbo would probably chuckle politely at the concept. However, it keeps Catholics happy and probably is some real consolation to devout Catholic parents mourning a miscarriage or stillbirth. The child-who-wasn't may have missed heaven, but is eternally safe from damnation and happy.