

original 1
1st interview

NORMAN MAILER: We're going to try to do a provisional interview for a book on religion. This would be a general interview for it and, of course, the words here are hardly final. It will be a very rough interview but we'll take a whack. I'm on. . .

MICHAEL LENNON: I'm on too. I have a series of questions here and they move from the cosmological to the ethical. So if you feel I'm missing the ethical, it's coming later. And any one of these questions, you can go in different directions.

NM: I may spin in different directions if I feel this isn't a good forum for. . .

ML: If it's a bad question, say "next question," like you always do.

NM: OK.

ML: Scientists now believe that the expansion of the universe is accelerating. Does this circumstance fit in with your ideas of what you have called in "Of a Fire on the Moon," "a charged and libidinous nature of the universe?" I mean, is the ever-expanding and accelerating nature of the cosmos reflected in your idea of a god who can grow and develop?

NM: Let me say it's not opposed to it. I know very, very little about super-physics. It's not a topic I have a basic interest in for a variety of reasons—mainly because the instruments they use for measurements and the mathematical calculations change all the time; they're groping, they're fumbling, they have theories—it's an area of speculation. There's nothing to build on.

I start in another direction entirely. Having been a novelist all my life, what I start with is the one thing I know a little bit about, which is human beings. And from there, you might say all my theological ideas come out of the nature of who are we, what are we, how do we develop? Under which forces do we develop? How much is there a presence of a creator in what we do? And so forth.

And so, these huge speculations are of very little interest to me. I have nothing to contribute to them. All I would say in answer to your question is it doesn't counter anything I say. If the universe is expanding, yes, that's a logical outcome of what I'm talking about. But I would hate to rely on the present state of advanced physics and add astronomy to form some ideas on.

ML: It isn't just the expansion of the universe; it's the fact that the expansion is speeding up.

NM: Yes, but this is all—it's not in my compass.

ML: All right. In one interview you gave in the past, you said that you believed that God created the universe. In other places, you've said that perhaps God and the Devil were lesser divinities in liege to larger powers who might be the ultimate creators. Who or what do you feel is the ultimate power in the universe and who created the universe?

NM: I feel the same way about the ultimate creator as I feel about the expanding universe: it's out of my scope. It's altogether out of my scope. I don't see any inherent logical contradiction between saying God created the universe we know, the world we live in—what was the other part? Something about the devil?

ML: On the one hand, you said God created the universe. But in other places, you said: maybe I'm wrong. Maybe God and the Devil are lesser deities in liege to the—

NM: I subscribe to the second thought. I shouldn't have used the word "universe." God created the world, I believe, He also probably created the solar system—these are matters I have absolutely no competence in. As I say, no interest in. I think that kind of speculation is so wide, so open and so windy—that's not what draws me.

What does draw me is the war between god and the devil and also, it makes sense to me there may be a creator—or a war with giant creators—beyond the creativity of the sphere in which we live. Let's use "sphere" rather than "universe." I think that answers it.

ML: In "St. George and the Godfather," you say, "The world's more coherent if God exists, and twice coherent if he exists like us." Of course, you are right, there's no way to contest that, but I'm afraid this smacks of wish-fulfillment logic. God need not exist merely to satisfy your desire for order. Perhaps the world is incoherent, perhaps the cosmos is disordered. . .

NM: Look, I can answer that. I can say, where does my desire for order come from? In other words, if we as humans have a fundamental desire for order—and we also have an obvious tendency toward anarchy as well, toward disorder—one could say there's a conflict in all of this between order and disorder, and I say, where does all this come from? Did it come from the sheer accident of evolution, or is there a principle in the universe that seeks for some order? In any event, I think we're approaching this a little from the outside.

ML: We are.

NM: I'd say start from the inside. . .

ML: Maybe I started from the wrong end. I started from the macro and am moving in. Maybe. . .

NM: Well, from the outside, I have very little to say.

ML: OK. Let's move on. Here's another one: in most religious systems, all the ones I can think of, there's a relationship between cosmology and ethics, between the nature of the deity and humanity. The Puritans called it "God's Providence"--

NM: Wait a moment, did you skip some questions?

ML: No.

NM: OK.

ML: So, I'm getting to the relationship between the nature of the deity and codes for human living. In Judaism and Christianity, for example, God's nature is reflected in some way in the rules for living provided to humans by God. What is the relationship in your system between the nature and shape of the ruling forces in the sphere and how humans should conduct themselves?

NM: Oh, Christ, Mike, I don't really like these questions. I don't think in that direction. I don't think in these formulae. I think in other formulae.

ML: You want to get to the micro questions.

NM: What I want to get to is something that is basic to my thought, which is that everything in our cosmology, just about, comes from revelation. And revelation as such is a huge question mark. It's a question mark everywhere you look at it. For instance, while God would have a perfect ability to speak in our various tongues, why would God bother to speak in that fashion? In other words, there's no need. God could impart such thoughts directly to us without revelation. Revelation has always struck me as a fundamental problems with our working universe, our world, because people subscribe to it, they believe in it, if people have minds not that are too elevated they quote from

scripture all the time, they use that as their guide rail and they run into intolerable contradictions. And what I want to talk about today are the intolerable contradictions in organized religions.

I confess, I have very little interest in organized religion in terms of studying it. I confess when I do study it, I don't retain it very well because it makes no sense to me. All my life, I've always warred against this need to deal with revelation. I've always felt it's an imposture upon our condition. I see God as a creator, as an artist, as the greatest artist in our sphere and I see us as his artworks. I see the animals as his artworks, and I see us as his artworks. When I look at evolution, what appears to me is the fabulous study of possibilities that went on in God the creator, the artist—that is, all the errors that were made as well as the successes. If you study marine life at all, some of the fish have hideous eyes—the fish might be 8 inches long and the eyes are 10 inches long coming out from the head of it. You look at some of the animals of the past with their peculiar ugliness, their misshapen bodies, you look at some of the worm life, the frog life, the vermin life, you look at insects—all these are experiments. These are ways the artist was trying—the great artist, the divine artist—trying to find something that could better express something incredible in this artist. But it was not an easy process; it went on forever—we'll get to the devil in a bit—but I think evolution was also resisted by the devil. I think the devil—there were actions of the devil in evolution, false passages that God engaged in because the devil deluded him—or her. Forgive me if I keep speaking of God as "him," that's a habit that's come down to me from revelation. I have no idea—obviously, to speak of God as "him" or "her" is absurd, and to speak of him as "him/her" is worse.

But in any event, leaving gender out of it, because one doesn't want to call God "it" either—it makes sense to me that this war between God and the devil which I'll get into in a bit may even have been present in evolution. Whether God had a free hand or the devil was there all the while, nonetheless, what we can see in evolution are endless mistakes that were made. If I were a student of evolution, I could name 20, 30, fifty species that were badly conceived. It's like a young artist has to make terrible errors before they go further.

Now, let me add to this the obvious rejoinder from anyone who's been following this up to now: it's: "Sure, there's Norman Mailer, an artist of medium rank who's got to give himself great honor and nobility and importance by speaking of God as an artist." I'm perfectly aware that that accusation could be laid against me. This could be just a projection of my own measly means.

ML: You've spoken of God as a novelist. . .

NM: No, I haven't spoken of God as a novelist. What I've said upon occasion is God is a better novelist than the novelist—that's not the same thing. God is a better novelist without having to write the novels. He sees them pay off before him; he's had a part in it because the actors are, to a great degree, his or her people.

The point I want to come back to here is I believe in God the Artist/Creator because it makes the most sense to me. Whether I have a private agenda in this, or whether I am being an objective philosopher to the extent that one can contend with that particular oxymoron, all right, so be it. Whether guilty or innocent, this is the argument I advance: God is an artist. And like an artist, God has successes, God has failures, and we're going to get into reincarnation in a bit?

ML: Oh, yeah. . .

NM: Well, the point is—I'll just anticipate it now—reincarnation is exactly the second, third, fourth and fifth drafts of the artist.

ML: Let's talk about evil a little.

NM: So soon?

ML: That's where I was moving.

NM: OK, if that's where you're moving. . .

ML: Evil, you've said more than once, especially in the last hundred years, is growing in power.

NM: Yes.

ML: Do you see there was ever a time in the past, a golden age, when good was in the ascendancy?

NM: I don't know. How would I know?

ML: Well, if you say things are getting worse. . .

NM: Things are getting worse from, let's say—let's say if we were to draw a line of departure, I would argue that if things have not gotten worse since the middle of the 19th century, then the nature of existence has changed so that certain things have gotten much better and other things have gotten MUCH worse. But the things that have gotten much worse stagger the imagination of the 19th century. You see, in a certain sense, if the flush toilet is an improvement in existence, and you can advance arguments against it which I won't get into—but if it is an improvement, if the automobile is an improvement—again, huge arguments—if technological progress is an improvement, then look at the price that was paid for it. It's not too hard to argue that the gulags and the concentration camps and

the atom bomb came out of technological improvement. So when I say things have been getting worse, it may be—and this is really of very little value—for the average person in the average developed country, the average or even poor person, life is somewhat better than it was in the middle of the 19th century. But for the elite, it's been a disaster. And the elite, after all, are the leaders.

I can't speak for other languages, but I know the English language has been debased in the last 30, 40 years of my life. Young, bright children no longer speak well; the literary artists of 50 and 100 years ago are superior to the literary artists of today. The philosophers have virtually disappeared—any philosophers who make a difference have disappeared. I mean, compare the names of philosophers you can hardly know the name of today to people like Hegel, and Schopenhauer and so forth. No need to get into that.

ML: This relates also to your views on reason and intellect. Intellect, you have said more than once, may be the devil's tool, but the authority of the senses, according to St. Augustine, seem to be in your scheme of things, divine or holy, or have some linkage to the divine. So I take it, in your view of history, the Enlightenment and the rise of science were not steps forward.

NM: They're mixed steps forward. In other words, they're forward and they're retrograde. It all depends on what God intended originally. I could give you a speculation—this is rank speculation: What God saw was the development of his or her greatest creation, the human being, would get to the point where they communicate, for instance, telepathically. And, so to the degree that one wished to reach certain people, small or large numbers, one could beam thoughts at them, one could create operas in one's mind—I'm talking now about what was seen as a vast but extraordinary possibility. One could create operas in

one's mind if one were musically talented, and beam them out to all who were willing to listen. So forth and so on. So all the means and modes we have of modern communication may be substitutes, rather ugly technological substitutes, for what was potentially there.

For, mind you, if you say to someone, the average person, myself included here, if you say to them, "How do we see the image in a television, how does it work?" It's an absolute mystery when you get down to it. The best engineers in the world can't tell you how it works. The best engineers can't tell you how sound, waves of sound, strike the auditory nerve and out of it comes specific pieces of hearing. No one, for instance, can tell you what sound is—they're still arguing over whether it's a wave or a pellet or both [jm note: particle is the usual term, not pellet.] I could go on and on with that. . .

ML: The Enlightenment—was it a pivot point, a fulcrum—was the Renaissance—

NM: That's a fundamental argument historians may have in the next couple of centuries. It certainly was a pivot point. The argument I have is whether the Enlightenment was for good or for ill. To assume automatically the Enlightenment was good means you automatically have to say, yes, the Enlightenment created marvelous things and marvelous freedom for many, many people. It also created the worst abuses of Marxism and fascism. It also created the subtle, insidious abuses of technology.

I've said before in other places, technology represents less pleasure and more power. It may be that we are supposed to arrive at our deepest achievements through pleasure and pain, rather than through static and interruption and mood disruption.

ML: What you said about Marxism and fascism—I can see Marxism as a fruit of the Enlightenment, but isn't fascism isn't kind of a reaction against it? The fact that it cites the blood, the blood-consciousness, all that?

NM: I could argue it this way: First of all, one of the cheats of Nazi-ism is they were going back to the blood when in fact they were abusing that principle totally. The concentration camps were an absolute violation of the premise that you go back to the blood, the instinct, the senses. They violated that completely by cheating people of their deaths. Why do you go back to the senses? You make your senses more acute so as you approach death, you have a better idea what's happening; you are better prepared to enter the next world. Another question we'll get to later. But let me finish this.

So how did the Nazis—in the end, what were they doing? They were telling their concentration camp folk they were going to have a shower. So, in they all marched, took off their clothes, happy to have a shower with all those lice on them, hoping the shower would be hot, so they go in and they're gassed. So their last reaction in life is, "you cheated me!" And they die in a panic. Now that's not going back to the blood, to instinct. It's a technological violation

One thing I fulminate against all the time is we're not able to think our thoughts any more because there's too much interference, too much static, if you will, in the atmosphere. [pause] What was our point of departure?

ML: Was the Enlightenment. . .

NM: Many of the errors of the Enlightenment helped to create Nazism. It was the excesses of the Enlightenment that helped create a tremendous reaction in the opposite direction.

ML: The excesses of reason. . .

NM: the excesses of reason without the notion there's a creator. Because the moment you have a society built on reason alone, without the presence of a creator, then you have to ask what substitutes for a creator, and the answer is individual power. What has characterized just about every revolution is that sooner or later the leaders take it over, become cannibalistic, and there's one leader. And that leader is an absolute dictator. And that is the ultimate tendency of the Enlightenment once you accept the notion that there's no god. Which, philosophically, is much more difficult to believe in than that there is a creator. Much harder to believe in something coming out of nothing than that there was something there in the very beginning at least that created it. And, I would go so far as to say, is still there.

ML: So the Enlightenment was probably a time of victory for the devil?

NM: Well, what we get into here, and it's very complicated which is why we have to go slowly, is the relation of God, the devil, and the human to one another. Because I think it is a three-way relationship.

To begin with, let me assume that there's a devil that is always present in human affairs, very much present. Why? Because the devil is another god who wishes to preempt the god who exists. The devil has other notions of existence. I'd go so as to assume the devil may well be a technological devil—that is, technology is the devil's invention. Because what the devil's interested—like god, the devil wants to have power in the universe. God wants power in the universe because God has a vision of what the universe could be and this vision may come from notions—again, we'll have to hook into this from another angle.

For example, for all those who love Jesus Christ, it may well be that there's no need to dispense with Christ. Christ may well indeed be God's son in the sense of an entity, a physical and spiritual entity that God decided was necessary for humanity. In other words, rather than going into gospel and revelation and recorded fact as such, what I would argue here is that Jesus may well have been real. And the notion of Jesus being real may be legitimate. We don't have to dispense with the notion of Jesus. What I wish to argue is against revealed dogma, but that doesn't mean it all has to go. Jesus makes a kind of sense that the rest doesn't.

For example, Jesus as a principle of love, compassion, forgiveness and mercy is something we all comprehend. We feel it in ourselves. We feel it's the best part of ourselves, the gentlest, richest, most generous part of ourselves. [pause] I lost my—now—

ML: You were talking about—

NM: I've got it now—The part of revelation and organized religion that repels me entirely is the philosophical inconsistency of God as the almighty, God the all-powerful. I think that's where all the trouble starts. All the trouble starts with the idea that god is all-good and all-powerful. And the twentieth century demonstrated to us—so dramatically to us that you end up feeling stupid not to face up to the fact that if God is all-powerful, then he cannot be all-good. Or She cannot be all-good. Or is God IS all-good, then God is not all-powerful.

Now, to answer that—and if you want to, you can certainly attack me on this because you know more about this than I do—to answer this, theologians for the last ten centuries have been tying themselves into philosophical knots to answer this—and what

I'd like at this point is to have you attack, and I will try to counter attack, and we can advance the arguments how God could be all-good and all-powerful in the face of this tremendous evil, because this is really the core of what we're talking about.

ML: One of my questions—and I think that's an excellent way to proceed, but one of my questions: so much of your thinking seems to be premised on the event of the Holocaust and I wonder if there had never been Hitler, would your notion of a limited, embattled god have been conceived? Is Hitler the final thing that pushed you into that belief? What if there had never been. . .

NM: Being Jewish, the fair answer to that is probably yes. Because obviously, if you're Jewish, you take that very personally. But there still would have been the gulags. And the Soviet concentration camps. And the failure—the failure of Bolshevism. The noblest social idea to come along, the intense form of socialism, proved to be a monstrosity. So that alone would be enough— Then the atom bomb on top of that, the fact that 100,000 people could be wiped out at a stroke. So if you eliminated all three of those then maybe you could say I couldn't have quite have come to these ideas. But if you eliminate all three of those—historically speaking, you can't do it. That's what history IS. Those three horrors dominate the 20th century.

ML: Yes. Absolutely. But let me be very—

NM: The trench warfare in the First World War—

ML: The whole problem of evil—Voltaire heard about the earthquakes in Lisbon in 1711 and that's when he stopped believing in God for exactly that reason. So all throughout our history humans have questioned God whenever there was an earthquake, a disaster— of course, many of these were natural disasters. That was bad enough. But, of course

why would God allow a natural disaster? You can't blame any of that on humans. That was Voltaire's point: at least we can blame the Holocaust on human evil or the devil. In part, at least. We can't blame an earthquake in Lisbon in which 50,000 people were killed—we can't blame that on human beings.

NM: No.

ML: So that forced many philosophical thinkers of the Enlightenment into their—they said, "That's it. God can't possibly exist. This is ridiculous."

NM: Yes.

ML: But if you take a step back from that, you can say: Maybe we're looking at too small a scale. Sure, 6 million people killed, untold suffering. The suffering is so great it's impossible for us to conceive of it. It's horrifying to an extreme degree to anyone who's ever looked at this photographs or read those accounts. But maybe, in the larger scheme of things, God was allowing this to happen to send a message to humanity on how far it had slipped, and he was even willing to sacrifice his Chosen People, or a great number of them, in order to send a message to humanity that it was time to embrace Christianity, embrace love, do whatever had to be done.

NM: But—let me interrupt here--

ML: Let me finish—strong medicine, I'm saying.

NM: But wouldn't God be quite a dolt if he kept doing that and doing that if it didn't work? They embraced Christianity for a little bit and then revert.

ML But He's increasing it. It seems like things are getting worse. More and more—the earthquake in Lisbon doesn't do it—OK, we'll have the trench warfare. And then we'll have the gulags, then the Holocaust, then we'll pose the threat of the atomic bomb. And

indeed, the atomic bomb was dropped but after all, we have not had a nuclear holocaust—we backed away. Maybe we've learned and we've backed away from the brink of a nuclear disaster and spared the world.

NM: I think we have. It's possible that even the devil was appalled by the bombs.

ML: So maybe it worked.

NM: Wait. Let's go back to the earthquake. Let me give you my notion of God as the artist—Lord knows—especially if you're using my idea of God being limited in power—that is, God is the Almighty of this sphere, the semi-almighty of this sphere—it may be when the universe was formed, higher gods were forming it, and maybe in the course of establishing the laws of the earthly—and whether God was present or not was obviously beyond our compass—but there may have been imperfections in that design that we can attribute to God the Artist. In other words, why are there volcanoes? Because God was not a perfect engineer. That makes as much sense to me as God punishing and punishing and punishing and punishing without good result. It's very hard to argue that these acts of nature do any more than put a temporary frisson of religiosity into any people who are not religious in the form of orthodox religion.

ML: So—back to this triangle of God, the devil and the human being. You've talked about god but you haven't talked much about the devil.

NM: No, we haven't yet. The notion I have of the devil really could depend almost upon Milton. In other words, I think that is a wonderful approximation to what the likelihood was. In one way or another, there was a profound argument between God and very high angels—or between Gods and Gods, and the result was finally that one won—the God we speak of as our creator, God won, but it was a Pyrrhic victory. Because Lucifer, if you

will, did very well indeed. He retained a great deal of power and the war was on. And the war has gone on ever since, and it has gone on in us.

When I think of human nature these days, you know I have these other theories we can only touch upon briefly, the notion of Alpha and Omega, that we all contain two wholly separate personalities within—their superego, ego, and id, if you will—but that stuff of mine all belongs to another interview. All I will say at the moment is: if we have these two personalities within us—and our sanity depends on the fact not that we're divided—we're all divided by these two personalities—but on how well these two personalities collaborate with one another—well, in that sense, every human being is in that sense a marriage of the two halves within oneself. And a healthy human being has a good marriage within the psyche. A disturbed human being has a bad marriage within himself.

What I would argue is that there is a tendency for God to inhabit one of the two personalities more than the devil, and vice versa in the other half. But the fact is, whatever the form this takes in us, my deepest understanding of this for myself, to comprehend it, is that God and the devil are very close and intertwined in all our actions. So even as I'm speaking along now, I could have the best of motives and the worst of motives working at the same time. As I've said many times over the years, when we work with great energy, it's because our best motive and our worst motive, or to put it another way, God and the devil, are equally engaged in the outcome, and so they're collaborating. And so like all enemies, all antagonists, there is also always present a collaboration. It doesn't dominate the contest or else there's no contest, but there's also collaboration between opposites, as well as the war itself. And this collaboration consists of certain necessary agreements—"The rules of war will be . . ." And of course, the rules can be

broken. The Devil can betray God. Once in a while, God breaks the rules too—with a miracle. But this argument I've had is when we do things with great energy, it's because God and the devil both have an interest in the outcome. Whereas when we work with very little energy it's because they're totally at odds.

ML: What if God happens to be dominating us? Wouldn't that be better? Couldn't we argue that it would be better to have God motivating us more than the devil? I mean, so many heroes in history have been motivated by the good and have gone on to achieve great things. Like Constantine—"in this sign, conquer—in hoc signo, vinces!" and goes on to—

NM: Oh, look, you can't argue that way. That's not a good way to argue. Constantine is a perfect example. You could argue Constantine was a fabulous person who helped to create Christianity—indeed, he did. You could also say he destroyed something much greater than Christianity which was the great richness of pagan belief. And because of him, all our troubles start from the fact that Constantine decided to become a Christian. So, in other words, I'm not going to get into these arguments where we're going to depend—there are going to be no rocks in the stream on which you can moor a boat while we're talking.

ML: Let me put it this way: if schizophrenia is on the rise—I don't know that it is—but if it is on the rise in human affairs—

NM: I'd be surprised if it weren't. Schizophrenia is the protection against cancer, remember?

ML: I understand. But if schizophrenia were on the rise, would that be an indication that the collaboration between God and the devil wasn't going well?

NM: Let's not emphasize a "collaboration" between god and the devil. I've spoken of it as "the rules of the game." Take football—an average game in professional football. You have two teams that are fighting each other tooth and claw on the field with great skill and great bestiality and each side is fighting to win. Nonetheless, there's a whole set of laws that prevail. They tackle a guy but they don't stand up and kick him in the head—that's a law. So forth and so forth and so forth.

What I'm saying is that to keep it flowing, God and the devil have certain understandings with one another. What they are, I'm not going to try to say in a hurry—I don't have a clue three-fourths of the time. The only clue I have is when there's great energy going—if we have god and the devil within us, and I say every human being does in varying degrees. And when I say "in varying degrees" I don't mean that a person is 90% is good and 10% evil. I think maybe the best you can be is—I'm just guessing—70% good and 30% evil. And the most evil you can be, with the notable exception of a couple of people, might be the reverse, 70% evil and 30% good. But 90/10 is not there—maybe once in a great while there's a saint, but generally, 90/10 is not there.

But generally speaking, we are mired in good and evil. Mired because we spend most of our time in trade-offs, in draws, exhaustion, exhaustion of efforts because one part of us wants to do something and the other part's opposed.

Very often good fights an offensive battle against evil—we know all that. The Christian churches are built on that: fight the evil in yourself.

ML: St Michael the Archangel.

NM: Yeah. But my argument is that it has become a three-way situation. It isn't that we're passive—God and the devil are at war within human beings and we have nothing to do with it. We're the third force and we don't know which side we're on.

If you'll accept my notion that technology may be the most advanced, extreme, brilliant and dazzling artistic creation of the devil—for technology, of course, does incredible things—then you get a real sense of why some people would be more for the devil than for God. Half the universe by now, the human universe, must be on the side of technology by now if you had to vote. Maybe more than half, maybe three-quarters. Maybe nine-tenths, I don't know.

ML: Let me push your idea a little further, than when you have the most energy, when you're moving forward, it's because your good and your bad motives are in synch—wouldn't that argue, then, that when God and the devil—let's say that everyone felt like that more and more and more and we had this great sense of energy—I assume you feel that when you have this sense of energy, you're moving forward; you're accomplishing things; there are positive results, happiness results—

NM: War also results. It's not simple.

What I want to get rid of, if nothing else, is the whole notion that theology will simplify our existence. What I'm getting at is the human being has to take one step forward into complexity, into living with the notion that there are no answers, there are only questions, and that that is ennobling. It is ennobling to face existence with the recognition that you're not going to have answers.

Wait until we get into reincarnation. . .

ML: That's coming. You know, the Manichean, their view of this, which is not completely dissimilar to yours. . . it's different, but. . .

NM: I've been called a Manichean—

ML: You've been called a Manichean. . .

NM: Inaccurately.

ML: The universe is divided between a good brother and—they're brothers. An interesting concept—god and the devil are brothers. And they're going to fight until the end of time and at the end of time, good will defeat evil. And that's where you depart from them.

NM: Absolutely. It's existentialism, essentially. We don't know the end—the end could be awful. The whole thing is a stage show if the end—if good is certified to win at the end, then it's a stage show, a wrestling match. "Do I win tonight or do I lose? Where are we, what city? Atlantic City or Pittsburgh? Pittsburgh? Oh, then I win tonight." In other words, it's a comedy, and it's a very ugly comedy if that's what it is.

To go back to football—no great football team ever assumes that it is written they will win a big game.

ML: The Giants, the other day—

NM: Exactly.

Anyway, the notion that is implicit, and the joy that a victory brings is that it was NOT predetermined in advance—it was achieved. And I'm saying existence consists of a set of achievements and defeats, achievements and defeats,

ML: Forever and ever with no. . .?

NM: Forever and ever, but the point is it can go into a transmogrification of existence.

In other words, starting with the notion that God is not the most powerful deity in the universe, if we become better and better and better, it may be that our mission, our vision will become God's vision and maybe as human beings we'll collaborate with God's vision yet—our mission will be to travel out across the stars—not necessarily in space ships, but our spirits, whatever—and to make a better universe all over. Who knows what the other forces are out there? Has anyone really considered the meaning of black holes in space in terms of visions of the universe?

ML: Wonderful. OK, here's a good one for you and then I want to go to reincarnation—these two things are actually linked.

Of the "four last things" of Christian eschatology—death, judgment, heaven, hell—you have commented, at least obliquely, on all but one, heaven. It occurred to me that the open-ended conclusions of many of your novels—all of your novels, really—the lack of conclusiveness for your protagonists is an obvious reflection of your metaphysics. Why have you given heaven such short shrift?

NM: Because I don't believe in it.

ML: It's also occurred to me that without a vision of heaven, your belief system is unlikely to have many adherents.

NM: I'm not engaged in trying to postulate a belief system, that is, found a religion and have a body of adherents. I think if these ideas of mine have any value, a great deal of time will go by before there are any adherents. First of all, the child-like notion of heaven has to be relinquished.

ML: But not hell?

NM: No, no, I don't believe in hell any more than I believe in heaven. I don't believe in hell as a place of eternal punishment. It strikes me as being prodigiously wasteful. I remember once a lovely religious lady named Anne Freemantle, a fine writer, was talking to me and said, "You see, I think God looks for a very tidy universe." [jm note—was this in her poem? I remember the line "God is a very tidy person"—that's how you quoted her to me years and years ago.] I don't know if she was Scotch or not, but it sounded as if she were saying it with a Scot's burr. And I thought about that for a long, long time—it was her way of saying—wait—

ML: Mine's still going. . .

NM: Mine's not. Let me stop for a moment and turn mine over. END SIDE ONE

ML: You set *The Deer Park: a Play*, in hell. Hell is something you refer to all the time. It's a constant reference. Heaven is absent. You talk about judgment. You talk about death, of course.

NM: All right, but. . .

ML: These are the Four Last Things.

NM: It was perfectly legitimate, I felt, to put people in hell because hell's a point of reference for everyone. Everyone believes in hell. They believe in hell much more quickly and more readily than they do in heaven. Heaven is harder to conceive. Because what we all know is the most perfect moments in our life don't last long. They're more perishable than the most delicate flowers, those extraordinary moments that we feel. We can be in hell for months, years, we can live in towering depressions for long periods. Hell is much more available to human beings as a notion. So it was very easy for me to put *The Deer Park* in hell. It gave me a springboard for the entire play.

But I don't believe in hell as eternal punishment. I've always felt that Dante is the most overrated great writer of them all, because he's Johnny One-Note. Hell has dimensions. So does heaven have dimensions—we'll get into it when we talk about reincarnation. But my notion of heaven is not that you—that the only heaven and hell we ever receive in terms of judgment is in our reincarnation. To wit, we're given a better shot the next time we're born, or a worse shot.

In other words, I'm not interested in making moral judgments—quite the contrary. I'd like to see an ethical system built on something that makes sense. Because after all, we take our lives—take a good guy and a bad guy and what is the difference between them? The good guy may be 65% good and 35% bad—that's a very good guy. The average good guy is 58% good, 42% bad—and the bad guy is the reverse. So for that—say, I'm 57% bad and 43% good—for that, I go for eternal punishment?

OK, you as a Catholic may come back to me and say there's such a thing as purgatory and limbo—we'll get into that if you wish.

The argument I advance is heaven and hell make no sense under these circumstances. There's no reason to receive such a reward if you're 57/43—you sit around forever in a place that no one can conceive because it's so hard to contemplate? You remember the fun Bernard Shaw had with the whole notion of heaven as a prodigiously boring place which nonetheless Don Juan wanted to go there because at least you can think there. That was the best he could come up with for heaven—at least you can think well and carefully in heaven. But leaving that to the side, my notion is that your reward or punishment, which I do believe exists—I believe that feeling of conscience we have is not for too little—it's there for good cause; conscience is vital—but it's there because it gives us a

clue to what our reincarnation, if we get it, is likely to be. Do we—are we reborn in a situation which offers more opportunities? Or fewer?

Now, this notion is very simple for some and very difficult for others. People who are fixed entirely on the notion of eternal hell and eternal heaven can't get near it. They simply can't comprehend what I'm talking about. But for people who don't know, or are wondering is there a scheme to the universe, or isn't there, this strikes me as being simple on the one hand, and meaningful. Why do I strive to be a better person than I am by my own lights? (Which can be in error.) Because what I want is to have an even better life the next time out. I want to be re-born. If I'm going to be reborn, I want to be able to more with my next life than this last one.

I have a joke I ought to tell at this point: give an example of it. I die. I go before the Monitoring Angel. He says, "Oh, Mr. Mailer, we're so glad to see you. We've been waiting for you. Let me tell you in passing I really consider it an agreeable moment to be able to serve as your Monitor. Now what would be your idea of where you'd like to be reincarnated? Because you've been passed for reincarnation. Which is very nice—not everyone gets passed, not everyone receives such a judgment. So, you're going to be reincarnated. What would you like to be?"

And I say, "Well, you know, everything considered, I think I'd like to be a black athlete in my next life. I don't care where you have me born—it can be very poor, ugly circumstances, I'm willing to take that on—but I would like to be a black athlete."

The Monitor's face clouds up. "Oh, Mr. Mailer," he says, "everyone these days wants to be a black athlete. We're over-subscribed dreadfully there. Let me see where we have

you. . ." He looks it up. He says, "We've got you down for cockroach. But—here's the good news—you'll be the fastest cockroach on the block."

All right—we're going to be reincarnated. Whether we know what our reincarnation will be, I doubt. It will be full of surprises.

ML: OK, let me ask my reincarnation question which comes perfectly at this point: whenever you've spoken about reincarnation, you've done so in an ironic manner, or a novelistic one. You talk about directives in the Bureau of Karmic Reassignment. For example, you've said many times that they would respond to a soul who requested to be a great black athlete by making the person a cockroach, but the fastest one on the block. I don't recall your ever talking about more routine reassignments. So how does reincarnation work? Who controls the process? How does it—

NM: [interrupting] God controls the process.

ML: How does it tie in for God's need for humans as soldiers in the cosmic war? Is an operation run totally by God? Are all souls recycled? Are new ones created?

NM: Let's work through these one by one.

ML: OK. Is this operation run totally by God?

NM: In a way. I don't presume to say how operations are run by God but I would assume that finally God has ultimate hegemony. I am sure there are any number of monitoring angels. It's a bureaucracy, if you will. We don't have to be terribly fancy about it. Where did bureaucracy come from? I feel most of our social forms come from heavenly forms, if you will. In other words, they are human—not facsimiles—human representations of the notion of how it might work in the heaven. We can't stand bureaucracy because of the boredom and repetition and slowness. But it may be that there are elements in heaven

that work more efficiently. Heavenly bureaucracies may work better than earthly ones.

But all right, I would see it as a bureaucracy.

ML: You said not all souls are recycled. What happens to them?

NM: I think that when we're given a soul, it's a gift. So being given a soul is a great gift and you can abuse it to the point where it just does not survive. Any number of people say, "All I want is a little peace. My idea of death is I'll be buried forever and sleep forever." They may be right.

ML: So it isn't necessarily a function of evil. . .

NM: No, not of evil—if you give up. If the complications of life and the exhaustion of contending with the gods and devils in yourself burn you out, there comes a point where the soul ceases to exist. I think this explains many suicides, for example. I think people commit suicide because they feel they're in danger that if they don't commit suicide, their soul will expire before their body. Gary Gilmore was a perfect example of that. Why he did want to be executed? Because he knew his soul would expire in prison and he was a great believer in the intensity of his own soul.

ML: So when a soul expires, it doesn't go to heaven, doesn't go to hell, just ceases to exist.

NM: It's buried. It's in a cemetery.

ML: So there must be an equal creation aspect of new souls being created.

NM: Well, in reincarnation—well, I don't talk to people who believe in reincarnation much because I don't like the jargon. But, yes, people who believe in reincarnation talk about new souls or "young souls"—yes, God creates new souls, absolutely. I think God is an artist. That doesn't mean the new soul is an angel who comes down to earth—on the

contrary. God may say, "I've been studying the devil. The devil has these terrible propensities. Let me see if I can conceive of a soul that will be able to war with the devil effectively. Who will have many of the qualities of the devil but transmuted, transformed, elevated, elevated in the dirtiest, ugliest, foulest places. You get into Dostoyevsky at that point. That iota of goodness in an evil soul can be immensely important.

ML: The process could be as endless as the war between God and the devil.

NM: It is. Probably not in the sense that when you get into reincarnation, I really subscribe—at least a little bit—to the notion of wear and tear. In other words, I think the soul is a being which is obviously separate from the body, but the soul also has its period of existence, and I think you can have a soul that expires after one earthly existence and you can have a soul that is reincarnated any number of times—who knows how many times? I think there's a limit to it—I think finally souls expire also.

ML: Wear and tear?

NM: Wear and tear. Indeed. Just as God may finally expire, or the devil. This is a tremendous war. There are forces out completely beyond us—I wouldn't mind seeing the total collapse of both. There may be a force out there of nothingness—Nothingness may be a huge power out in the great cosmic universe that desires the extinction of the universe.

ML: You've always said you're on the side of being.

NM: Yes, but I hate that. It's like saying, "I'm a Yale man," or "I'm a Harvard man." Or "I root for the Nets." It's sort of fatuous to talk that way. The danger in talking about these things is that you're always on the verge of sounding absurd. Nonetheless, the

reason I dare, the reason I presume to talk this way is I am so sick of the philosophical conundrums that good Christians tie them selves up into, where they simply don't have a good answer they can believe in right down to the core. This set of beliefs I have means I can believe them all the way down—it makes sense to me.

Having a view of the universe that makes sense to yourself—is Jung's notion, which was indeed just that. That nobody could ever be cured of their neurosis until they found their own vision of God. Which is a fabulous idea. I already believed in that without articulating it so I had great excitement when I read it in Jung.

ML:: Many people who believe in reincarnation believe they have some sense—traces of the previous life retained—what you call wear and tear on the soul—the dings in the soul. As I remember, you've always said no, you don't come from it from an experiential thing, you don't remember—you don't have this vague memory of—

NM: Let me not be authoritative about it. My feeling is there's a very good reason why there's a valve there, if you will—as you go from one existence to the next on earth, there's a valve that shuts off recollections of the past. Because of the wear and tear on the soul—think what your life would be—or mine—if you knew about your previous three existences and ALL the things that went right and wrong. My memory is failing for the one I'm aware of. What would it be if I had 2 or 3 or 4 previous existences to contend with?

ML: Well, it's always been. . .

NM: I think there are deep instincts in us, very deep instincts, about previous incarnations. They're in us when we have reactions to things that are completely inexplicable. Something inside says, "Don't take another step in that direction." Or "I

will pursue this course even if it makes no sense whatsoever." You get people who are maniacs on motorcycles—what are they getting from it? Something profound. Partly from this life—they're curing hostilities, aggressions and rages they can solve on a motorcycle. But maybe it comes from previous existences when they were terrified of a commitment to speed and endeavor, whatever.

ML: All these—so many people I've talked about or read who believe in reincarnation have these very self-aggrandizing memories of the past. "Oh, I was in Cleopatra's court—"

NM: I can't stand that. Can't stand it.

ML: And it kind of put me off reincarnation.

NM: That's why I tell the cockroach story all the time. No, that's atrocious. It's really unpleasant. It's unpleasant in the same way people who are devout Christians believe they're going to heaven because they're pure and they believe. It's self-aggrandizement. And the notion that in our relation to God we're seeking for self-aggrandizement is odious to me.

ML: I've got a couple of questions. . .

Years ago, you wrote the essence of biology seems to be challenge and response, risk and survival, war and the lessons of war. And this, of course, is the basis of your whole cosmic vision. Do you see any problem with using evolutionary biology as the ultimate way to understand the nature of metaphysics? I mean, the nature of Being with a capital "B"?

NM: I can't follow your question.

ML: Let me ask another related question which is more direct. At the end of *Ancient Evenings*, which I've been reading for the last few days, Meni the Second, the young Meni, says, "Purity and goodness are less to Osiris than strength." Which is a restatement of what Cherry says in *An American Dream*: "God is weaker because I didn't turn out well," and Rojack's belief that "God was not love but courage; love came as a reward." You return to this idea many times in your books. But while seeing the force of this idea, I've always wondered about it. Couldn't it be argued that love creates strength just as courage generates love?

NM: Yes, it can be argued. It just tends to be question of which tends to have the most powerful and vital effect. There are any number of people who are full of love but are timid, very cowardly, hate themselves for being cowardly—it poisons the amount of love in them, but essentially they're loving creatures.

ML: But you make love—you know, in Christian belief, love can move mountains. But for you, love seems to be more of a passive thing. It isn't an active thing like courage—it comes as a "reward"—it isn't even seen as an active principle. It's an emolument you get for being courageous.

NM: Let me tell you how I got to that point.

It struck me that everyone I knew, including myself, was always looking for love. "Ah, if I could find, I could solve my problems." And about ten, 15, 20 years ago, I started saying to my children, "Don't go searching for love. Love is a reward; love is not a solution." And what I meant by that is as long as you go searching for love directly, you will fail. Because love is a grace; you don't achieve a grace—OK, in Christianity there's a

notion that God disposes a grace upon you by—well, yes, from time to time, but generally speaking, I'd say you earn love through one form of courage or another.

Now, mind you, I'm not a macho maniac on courage. Many, many times I've said that an old lady who crosses a busy street in terror, feeling she has a 50/50 chance of making it across, is exhibiting courage that might be more intense than a soldier attacking a machine gun nest if his entire life he's been ready to die attacking a machine-gun nest. Odds are the soldier is braver than the average old lady, you see, but we can't put an inflexible ladder, a hierarchy, of courages.

But, yes, my own personal experience tells me that to the degree one's brave one gets more love than when one's cowardly.

ML: But the kind of love you're talking about—you say you give advice to your children—"don't go looking for love"—I guess I'm not talking about romantic love, being in love with some other person. I guess I'm talking about what Christianity calls "charity." There's good—

NM: Let me interrupt you there. Charity comes when you're brave. How many cowards are full of charity? Cowardice is a poison.

ML: I guess it's a question of precedence. You see the relation between love and courage but you always put courage as the more active, the more powerful—

NM: It's the more difficult to find. I often find when I'm feeling weak I'm also very nice, and when I'm weak I feel the weakness in others and am sympathetic to it. But it's not terribly nourishing back and forth. Whereas when I'm feeling strong and feel compassion or charity—on those rare occasions—there's real goodness in it. It's of real use to the other person.

ML: Well, to get right down to basic ethics: when someone does something that's an act of great generosity and they do it at a cost—they do something because they love a person. I don't mean necessarily in a romantic way—it could be totally devoid of sex.

NM: I'm not putting it down but I'm not elevating it. Because as a novelist I know, every time you have an act of great generosity, there's such a tangled skein behind it of good and bad motives. And do remember I believe in this tripartite base to human nature: God and the devil on either side, and ourselves in the center. And the number of compromises and relations and treaties and surprises and rebellions—people are perfectly capable of rebelling against both god and the devil, shutting them both out of one's existence as far as possible. Sort of an attitude of: Damn their eyes, I'm doing what I want to do! There is an ego—not just a devilish ego but the notion that neither god nor the devil know what they're doing quite as well as I know.

When I see this as a tripartite relationship, I don't mean the humans are subservient in it. What terrifies me at times is that humans may become so predominant in this that God and the devil may weaken. That I just don't trust us to go traveling across the universe.

ML: You mean there may have been some individuals in history who were so powerful that in this tripartite relationship in a certain moment in time, they equalled God and the devil in—

NM: In their immediate environment.

ML: Constantine or Charlemagne—

NM: Constantine, again!

ML: Churchill, Napoleon—

NM: Napoleon, yeah. I think certain humans can free themselves to the point where both God and the devil are both working for them for a brief period.

Did I answer all those individual questions about heaven?

ML: Yes. Basically you said you don't have any belief in heaven and hell.

NM: I have no belief in heaven and hell as absolute entities, as pure, pristine and complete in and of themselves.

ML: You've eliminated two of the four things from the Four Last Things. The Four Last Things Christians talk about—death, judgment—

NM: Judgment is there.

ML: You haven't eliminated death and judgment—you keep death and judgment but you've eliminated heaven and hell as absolutes—

NM: As absolutes. But hell can be very real—take some proud society lady who becomes bigger than herself and is very unpleasant to her servants—she's all caught up in her money and her jewels and this and that—we all know people like that—she's willing to sell herself to the devil but finally the devil rejects her too because at bottom she's really a silly ass and even the devil doesn't need her, so there she goes—she goes into judgment and the judgment is: "You'll be a scrubwoman all your life in your next existence. And if you complain once, you'll be a scrubwoman in the existence after that if you still have any soul left."

I make a huge exaggeration there but most conservatives believe that the poor man has as a good a chance or better of getting to heaven as the rich man because the temptations among the rich are so awful that they easily can go to hell. And that's what

enables conservatives to function. They can put up with inequity in this life because they feel there's a better existence waiting for those who are good in horrible places.

Well, I think there's an element of truth in that, just as there's an element of truth in what Rickle[??????--name????] believed, that every soul, every human is terribly important and must be protected. These are warring notions—and they may be warring notions within God. Because whoever said that the artist does not have warring notions in a creation? The creation comes out of warring notions in oneself.

It isn't just that God's fighting the devil, but he's also debating within himself or herself what the proper course might be at any given moment. It's this complexity that I wish to suggest is the appropriate foundation, the appropriate seat, for theology. Not revelation. Not the laws of existence etched in stone and no deviation from them. No absolute heaven. No absolute hell. These are all ways to confuse ourselves profoundly because they don't add up; they make no sense in terms of our experience. Our experience is that everything in life seems to be partial—on certain days, certain things are better than others. Certain of our acts give us more pleasure than others.

Sometimes evil acts—what we see as evil acts if we believe in revelation—give us pleasure that we find ungodly, devilish. Acts we think are evil may have been inspired by god who thinks "This poor soul is going to expire unless there's a breakout. This poor soul has to do something unpleasant before this soul can be pleasant again." In that sense, God's compassion can be present in an evil act.

Now never forget Engels' immortal three words: quantity changes quality. Petty evil is one thing. Massive evil is another. I'd never use an argument like this one to get to a justification of Hitler or Stalin.

ML: Thinking of some things you've said lately about Catholicism and some of its problems and remembering your belief in various states of grace and the idea of grace and the importance of dying in a state—perhaps in a state of grace. It seems to me in some ways you're closer to Catholicism—you're close to no religion [jm note: wrong! You've arrived on your own at a lot of Buddhist concepts] but if there's any pathway to a religion open in your mind, it's to Catholicism. The Church's problems seem to have troubled you. I mean, you're not worried about the shrinking of the Episcopalian Church and the Jews—they're always wringing their hands: "we're losing all the Jews"—you're not worried about any of that.

NM: No, I probably feel more in contention with elements of Catholicism than any of the other religions. But I was talking once with a Catholic theologian who'll be nameless and he said, "well, so much of what you say seems almost Catholic."

I said, "Yes, but I could never be a Catholic."

They said, "Why? Would it be the transubstantiation in the Mass?"

I said, "No. I could believe that. I could certainly believe. Why can't God be present in a wafer? That would not bother me. Why can't wine become the blood of Christ? I wouldn't believe it in a hurry but that wouldn't keep me from becoming a Catholic."

So we went through the various elements and finally he said again, "So why can't you be a Catholic?"

And I said, "I don't believe in the omnipotence of God."

And he said, "In that case, I can understand why you're not a Catholic."

ML: But the notions of—

NM: I'm concerned about God, I believe God suffers more than we do when things go humanly wrong in a bad way.

One thing we've not gotten into which I think is important in terms of reincarnation: I think the atom bomb and the concentration camps and the gulags were mighty efforts by the devil to mess up reincarnation. To mess up the judgments of reincarnation. We're talking about the delicate acts of God: "what shall I do with this soul?" It has no meaning at all if it's a mechanical process, if it's a mechanical bureaucracy. If it's a sensitive, alive delicate bureaucracy—a bureaucracy we can't even conceive of because it's heavenly—then if it's overloaded it breaks down.

ML: So killing all these people at once overloaded the bureaucracy?

NM: Just think of the mess in eternity—there they are trying to deal in rush cases, you see.

ML: Well, only if you don't have an omnipotent god. Most people say, God can handle anything.

NM: No. God cannot handle anything. God's energies are also limited. We live in a universe that finally—it may be expanding. Maybe there's more energy each decade than there was the previous decade. Or maybe more energy each nanosecond than there was in the previous one. But the rate is not necessarily so large that there's always endless energy available. No. No.

ML: So the devil, then, by—

NM: Beings can also die in an expanding universe. An expanding universe doesn't mean life is eternal. It may just mean they go on longer.

ML: The devil does have a purchase on the reincarnation process—

NM: Through marring it, mainly. Exploding it.

ML: It was Herman Melville who said—in a line I could never, ever forget when he was writing *Moby Dick*—he said it while he was writing it or sometime after—he said, "Lord, when shall we stop growing?"

NM: All right.

ML: In your system, your theological belief, there's a paradox, to me at least, in that on the one hand, growth is something you're always seeking and it is the summum bonum—

NM: Not all growth is good.

ML: But good growth is good, positive growth, growth of some kind is better than stasis.

NM: No. Good growth is good; bad growth is bad. The growth of suburban shopping malls has been prodigious in America—does that mean it's good? Does that mean the old family store being removed by the corporate chain store is better? Not necessarily at all. No, no, growth is as much—when you start talking about growth, you also start talking about divinity. The nature of expanding divinity.

ML: Well, you've given a little hint of that. Maybe we're destined to grow and go out into the stars in some way to tackle larger problems, larger forces, the black holes—whatever, out there—without being specific about it, that's a very interesting notion. That kind of growth is a positive thing for you.

NM: Yes, but—what I'm saying, at present we're locked in a battle that's been going on—I don't know if it's been for centuries, millennia or aeons—I have no idea—but that battle is far from reaching its conclusion at this point. We're in the midst of it. And before we can begin to do things like that that will really make sense, there may have to be some

resolution of this battle. Some peace, perhaps, between God and the devil. Maybe a qualified peace.

ML: A truce.

NM: More than a truce perhaps. Let's say something like the Americans and the Russians got to. Not that the Russians are evil and the devil and we're God and good. In other words, to use examples from way—no, this is a lame set of arguments to advance.

ML: Let me ask you about evolution a little bit. You accept evolution. You know, the traditional Catholic belief in evolution—you know, the Catholics were quick to embrace evolution as many Protestants—at least the fundamentalist protestants—were not. The Catholics were among the earliest to embrace the notion of evolution and they didn't have any trouble with it. They said: People coming from monkeys—no trouble at all, that's how the body was created. And at a certain point God put the soul in. Is that--?

NM: I happen to believe that dogs have souls.

ML: Well. . .

NM: Mind you, in reincarnation you may not come back as a human. You could come back as a dog, and, just as parenthesis, that makes a great deal of sense to me because so many dogs, I find, are more human than humans.

ML: We can stretch evolution back—people from monkeys is no trouble at all. That's just 3 million years. But going back—40, 50, 60, 100 million years—when the creatures were coming out of the slime, do you see that a certain point God puts—

NM: I don't go for that. I don't think it's answerable.

ML: Well, if dogs have souls— wait, what doesn't have a soul?

NM: It makes as much sense for me to believe that God was in the slime from the beginning and god was less in those days. God has grown with us. God has grown with evolution.

ML: Well, God created the world—

NM: there's such a thing as a God developing. Why must a god be independent of time.

ML: Well, if God created the world—at that point, he wasn't slime.

NM: Wait: at a certain point one creates one's children. That doesn't mean one's ready to create one's children on the day one's born. One's potentiality to create children was there on the day you were born. The potentiality to create children was there when you were five years old. But you weren't creating children then. Why is this notion--? You see, we're NOT talking about an omnipotent, all-powerful God.

ML: Well, with God's growing and developing, I'm assuming in the course of human history, God at some point began the process of creating souls, of creating human beings.

NM: These souls also were developed. The soul of an amoeba would be of a very primitive sort. Very primitive sort. A soul that gave the amoeba some sense of direction, that it must do its best under certain circumstances, very limited circumstances. But it was there.

ML: But . . .

NM: God was superior to the amoeba, obviously, from the beginning. As God's creations, she went from the amoeba to the paramecium to the multi-celled—in that course, God was also developing.

ML: Here's where I have the problem with reincarnation—you do have God creating new souls.

NM: At that point—that's beyond me. I'm not going to say when God decided reincarnation was necessary. I would assume at a point when God had given souls to a great many creatures, many animals, a great many people—God decided, "This as wasteful. I as an artist can do better with—certain of my creations could have been a lot better but they had bad circumstances." God at that point was a liberal. God said, "Let's give them another shot..."

ML: But with no memories of the past except maybe—

NM: Well, that could have been worked out in discussion with the angels. Or argument with the devil. The devil said, "And they'll remember every last thing they've ever done," and God said "No. That's messy. I want a tidy universe."

ML: But we have these deep instincts that you pointed out earlier. I'm not going there—this is a bad man—this is a good person—this person I trust—those kinds of deep feelings about people. Donna will have these deep instincts about people and I'll go, "How do you know that? You don't know that!" But she's usually right. I've found out over the years she's told me not to trust someone and then found out she was right.

NM: Well, that doesn't necessarily—that doesn't need reincarnation for that. But there are moments when it does seem deep instincts from the past come through. But when we speak of a new soul, generally we mean someone who makes large errors because they don't have the benefit of previous existences.

ML: Well, it's very interesting to see—you're speculating on things I've never heard you talk about before. The relationship between evolution, reincarnation, the expiration of souls and the creation of souls—I think there's a lot to be worked out in that—

NM: It's fertile ground.

ML: Some you can go back to The Political Economy of Time—talking about the jellyfish—you make a distinction between a spirit and a soul which I've never been able to quite grasp.

NM: Yes, that—I haven't read that over in years but there I thought I was getting into something special.

ML: You were. Absolutely. The notion of the paramecium trying to become a better paramecium or having some direction in it—that was discussed in those two long dialogues.

NM: It comes down to something very simple in what I'm saying. God's notion is: let's make the creation better and better. The devil's attitude is: let's wreck the creation. I have something else in mind that will supplant and replace the creation.

ML: What would the devil want? Total destruction? Nihilism?

NM: It may be—no, no, I don't presume to know what the devil would want. But let's say for the sake of argument what the devil would want is to fashion a universe on his or her terms as opposed to God's terms.

ML: Have we any idea what those terms would be?

NM: Well, again, rank speculation: it could be an immensely technological universe where the need for existence—individual existence—and soul would be much less. That would be more to the devil's taste than individual units that function in relation to other units. That seems to be the tendency in the 20th and early 21st century—that is, some of us become more and more interchangeable units that fit a corporate machine. At the other end of it, you have the maniacal intensity of the most extreme Muslims whose only

feeling is there's something so wrong with this it all has to be destroyed, and don't ask questions.

ML: So, really, heaven and hell are God's vision of what their own sense of what the universe should be.

NM: God's. . . ?

ML: Well, Lucifer wants to create his own version of the universe and that might be a hellish version and God's—

NM: I'd say first what Lucifer wants to do is destroy existence.

ML: As it stands now.

NM: Destroy it. Let the world blow up, even. Because at that point, Lucifer would have the materials to rebuild. Now this is at the very edge of—

ML: The edge of the world system.

NM: --of speculation. What do you call that curve again?

ML: Parabola?

NM: No, the curve of possibilities.

ML: The bell-shaped curve.

NM: Yes. Half of the things I've been saying today are at the extreme ends of the bell curve. But what's there in the middle is the core of it: reincarnation, God is not all-powerful.

ML: I've gone through all my questions.

NM: It's solid. Something to build on. If I go tomorrow, at least it's there.

ML: If you read it—

NM: I'm worried about reading it because then I'll start reworking it.

ML: You should.

NM: But that's a six-month job to do it properly and that's not the next book.

ML: Put it on a shelf—

NM: I'm not going to show it—if you run into someone where you absolutely feel you have to show it—

ML: The only person I might show it to would be Bob Lucid and I don't think he'd be particularly interested.

NM: Might be very distracting to him at this point. When he's further along, if he is.

[tape ends]