

NM: Yes, but it's like saying, "I'm a Yale man," or "Loyal to Harvard."

The built-in pitfall of these conversations is how do you keep from *sounding* ~~sententious at one end and hollow at the other?~~ *Theological remarks tend to be pious and/or sounding hollow. I nevertheless presume to take this route because I am*

weary of the philosophical paradoxes and evasions that good Christians tie

"God's ways are mysterious" can be a ~~good~~ ^{resolutely} ~~out~~ themselves up in, those mutually exclusive conundrums, where they simply

they evade any reply that

~~don't have an answer they~~ can explore down to the root. The set of beliefs

offered)

And I would add: offer here makes sense at least to me. ~~Be it said:~~ Having a view of the

universe that makes sense to ~~yourself~~ *oneself* is, I think, Jung's finest prescription

for mental health. One of his ~~profound~~ conclusions was that nobody could

be cured of their neurosis until they found their own vision of God. That is

well (be a profoundly ~~fabulous~~ ^{fabulous} idea. I believed it before I could articulate it so I was naturally

set of remarks excited when I came across that ~~thought~~ in his work.

ML: Many people who believe in reincarnation would say they have

retained some sense of their previous life. You've always said that you don't

remember.

NM: My feeling is there's a very good reason why not—I believe there's a

psychic ~~psychic mechanism~~ *weath within* in us that shuts off recollections of any previous

existence. Think what your life would be if you knew about ~~year~~ *spent on 119-9801* three or

four previous lives. My memory is already failing for the one life I'm

aware of. How could I handle the confusion of other *existences* ~~lives~~ that were also

*presump-
tuous.
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mine? I do think, however, that we retain deep instincts about previous incarnations. Sometimes we have reactions to events ^{which} ~~that~~ are inexplicable.

Something inside says, "Don't take another step in this direction." Or "I will pursue this course even if it makes no sense to me whatsoever." Some

people are maniacs on motorcycles—what do they get from it? Something ~~not ordinary.~~ ^{not ordinary.} ~~profound.~~ Partly from this life—they're curing hostilities, aggressions and rages they can only solve on a motorcycle that is going fast on a wet road.

But maybe it derives from a previous life when they were terrified of any commitment to danger ~~and endeavor.~~ ^{Perhaps the soul is now turning over the soil of previous avid endeavor.}

ML: So many people who believe in reincarnation have self-aggrandizing memories of the past. "Oh, I was in Cleopatra's court."

NM: I can't ^{bear} ~~stand~~ that.

ML: It kind of put me off reincarnation.

NM: Yes, that particular vanity is atrocious. ~~Devil-driven, probably.~~

unpleasant in the same ^{manner that} ~~way~~ people who are devout Christians believe ^{are} they're going to heaven because they're steadfast in their belief. Either way, it is self-aggrandizement.

ML: At the end of Ancient Evenings, which I've been re-reading over 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."

Add to that 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. Especially in Harlot's Ghost. I can see the force of this idea, but couldn't it be argued that love can create strength just as courage generates love?

NM: Yes, it can be argued. It is still a question, however. Does love have as powerful and vital an effect as courage? There are any number of men and women who are full of love but are nonetheless timid and cowardly and hate themselves for being cowardly—it poisons the love in them, even if, essentially, they are loving creatures.

ML: In Christian belief, love can move mountains. But for you, love seems to be more of a passive quality, not active like courage—love comes as a "reward"—so it isn't seen as an active principle. It's the 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 love, ^{it would} ~~could~~ solve my problems."

Some years ago, however, I found myself saying to my children, "Don't go searching for love. Love is not a solution but a reward." So long as you go

searching for love directly, you will fail. Because love is a grace and you don't pursue grace.

Now, mind you, I'm not a macho maniac on courage. *More than once* ~~Many, many times~~

I've said that an old lady who crosses a busy street in terror, feeling she hardly has a 50/50 chance of making it safely across, is exhibiting courage that might be more intense than a professional soldier attacking a machine gun nest if through all his young manhood he's been ready to die in such an action. *that* Odds are *even on balance* such a soldier is braver than the average old lady, but we can't put *a* *concerning* an inflexible hierarchy *on the scale of* ~~on the scale of~~ courage.

Still, my own experience tells me that to the degree one is brave, one finds more love than when one is cowardly.

ML: But I'm not talking about romantic love, rather about what Christianity calls "charity."

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

ML: It's a question of precedence. You always put courage as the more active, the more powerful—

NM: I often find when I'm feeling weak that 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 nourishing. It can be just another form of emptiness traveling back and

forth. Whereas when I'm feeling strong and also feel compassion or charity—on those rare occasions—there's real goodness present. It's of real use to the other person.

ML: Well, to get down to basic ethics: when someone does something that's an act of real generosity done at a cost to themselves, it's because they love the other person. I don't mean in a romantic or sexual way.

NM: I'm not putting that down but I'm not ready to elevate it. Because as a novelist, I know better. Forgive me for putting it this way, but most often when you have an act of great generosity, there's a tangled skein behind it of good and bad motive. ^{skein} ~~Not to ignore the possible presence of God and the~~ ^{skein} ~~Devil.~~ Contemplate the compromises, relations, treaties, surprises and ^(large personnel) rebellions within any act. People are also perfectly capable of rebelling against both God and the Devil, shutting them both out of one's existence as far as possible. There is the human ego—the notion that neither God nor the Devil know what they now want of me as well as I know. So I do call it a tripartite relationship, and by that I certainly don't mean that the humans are subservient in it. What terrifies me at times is that humans may become dominant over the others. I just don't trust us to go traveling across the universe on our own.

ML: You mean there may have been some individuals in history who were so powerful at a certain moment in time, they equaled God and the Devil? Churchill, Napoleon—

NM: Napoleon, yeah. I think certain humans can free themselves to the point where both God and the Devil are ~~both~~ ^{again} working for them for a brief period. But, ~~again~~, please take us back to speculations I feel closer to.

ML: You've eliminated heaven and hell from the Four Last Things.

NM: As absolutes. But hell can be very real—take some proud society lady who is unpleasant to her servants. She is all caught up in money and her jewels—we all know people like that—she's willing to sell herself to the Devil but even the Devil rejects her because at bottom she's a silly ass. He doesn't need her. So there she is, ready for judgment, and God's judgment is: "You'll be a scrubwoman in your next existence. And if you complain once, you'll clean latrines—provided you still have any soul left."

Most conservatives believe that the poor man has as good a chance or better of getting to heaven as the rich man because the temptations among the rich are so awful that they can easily go to hell. And that's what enables conservatives to function. They can put up with inequity for others in this life because they feel there's a better existence waiting for those poor who are patient and good in horrible circumstances.

Well, I believe there's an element of truth in that, just as there's an element of truth in the implicit liberal faith that every soul, every human, is terribly important and must be protected in this life. These are not only warring notions, but may be warring notions within God. Because where is the artist who does not have such profound disputes within? The Creation may have come out of these warring notions in the Creator.

It isn't that God is only fighting the Devil. He's also debating within Himself or Herself what the next proper course might be. I wish to suggest that it is in experiencing the play of this complexity that future theology could find its nourishment rather than the churchly insistence that God's final intentions are all in the Book. No, I do not see the laws of existence as etched in stone—with no deviation permitted. No absolute heaven or absolute hell. Such concepts are devilish ways to confuse ourselves *thoroughly*, *profoundly*. Because they don't add up. In terms of our experience, they *don't* make *much* sense. Our experience is that everything in life is more or less shaded. On certain days, certain things are better. Certain of our acts give us more pleasure than on others.

Sometimes evil acts—what we see as evil acts if we believe in Revelation—give us pleasure that we find ungodly, devilish. Yet acts that we think are evil may have been inspired by God who decides, "This poor

^{watch} soul is going to expire unless there's a breakout. This poor soul has to do something unpleasant before ^{it} ~~this soul~~ can feel any life again." In this sense, God's compassion can also be present in an ugly or even ^{an} evil act.

Never forget Frederick Engels' immortal three words: "Quantity changes quality." Petty evil is one thing. Massive evil is another. I'd never use an argument like this to arrive at a justification of Hitler or Stalin. They embodied massive evil.

ML: Considering your belief in various states of grace and the idea of dying in a state of grace, it seems to me that if there's any pathway to formal religion open in your mind, it's to Catholicism.

NM: I probably do feel more connection ^{to} ~~with~~ elements of Catholicism than ~~to~~ any of the other formal religions. But that's as far as it goes. I was talking once with a Catholic theologian who said, "well, so much of what you say seems ~~almost~~ Catholic."

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

He asked, "Why? Would it be the transubstantiation in the Mass?"

I said, "No. I could believe that. 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 various hurdles and obstacles and finally he asked again, "Why, then, can't you be a Catholic?"

"Because," 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: All right. Let's return one more time to reincarnation. I feel that you have more to say on that.

NM: Yes. One matter we've not gotten into is my supposition that the atom bomb, the concentration camps and the gulags were mighty efforts by the Devil to foul up reincarnation, to choke off the subtlety of the divine judgment within reincarnation. I hope I've suggested the delicate dispositions of God, the care with which the question is asked: "What shall I do with this soul?" That is at the core of reincarnation—delicate, responsible, artful, deliberate judgment. If the process is overloaded, it can break down.

ML: So mass slaughter fouls up the divine bureaucracy?

NM: Contemplate the mess in eternity when so many human creatures were ~~being~~ ^{at once and} slaughtered en masse.

ML: Not if you can go back to an omnipotent god. Most people believe God can handle anything and everything

NM: No, God's energies are also limited. Everything I say is based on ~~that~~ *such a premise*

We may live in a universe that is expanding but there is not always endless energy available. No. No.

ML: Are you saying that the Devil does have a purchase on the process of reincarnation?

NM: Through marring it, mainly. Or overloading it.

ML: It was Herman Melville who said—in a line I could never forget—when he was, if I recall, writing Moby-Dick—he said, "Lord, when shall we stop growing?" In 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: 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 it mean that because the old family store gave way to the corporate

chain, that ~~it~~ *the family store* was inferior ~~humanly~~? Not necessarily. *Not humanly.*

ML: Let me ask you about evolution. You accept evolution. You know, the traditional Catholic belief ~~in evolution~~ *hence*—the Catholics were quick to

embrace evolution even as many Protestants—at least 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, ^{I will say in} just as a parenthesis, that makes a great deal of sense to me because so many dogs, I find, are closer to the human than humans.

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

NM: I don't think it's answerable.

ML: Well, what doesn't have a soul?

NM: It makes more 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: God may have been developing along with evolution. Why must a god be independent of time?

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

NM: Wait: we create our children. That doesn't mean one is able to create children on the day one is born. I'm not talking about an omnipotent, all-powerful God, but one who grows with us.

ML: I'm assuming that in the course of human history, God at some point began the process of creating souls.

NM: These souls also developed. The soul of an amoeba would be primitive, but still a soul that gave the amoeba some intimation of direction, some sense that it must do its best under its own limited circumstances.

doubtless,
God, ~~obviously~~, was superior to the amoeba from the beginning, but God was also developing *even* as the Creation went from the amoeba to the paramecium to the multi-celled creature.

ML: Here's where I have a problem with your notion of reincarnation—when did God create such a process? .

NM: ~~There is no quick reply.~~ Perhaps at a point after God had endowed a great many higher animals and people with souls, He or She then decided, *improve on this.*
~~"This is wasteful."~~ I, as an artist, can ~~do better.~~ Certain of my creations

~~would~~ ^{if they had not} have turned out a lot better ^{but they} lived their lives under the ~~most~~ ^{most} grievous circumstances." So, God said, "Let's ^{us} give them another chance to exercise their free will. Maybe they will be wiser."

ML: Best deprive them of all memories of the past?

NM: Who knows? Was it worked out in discussion with the angels? Or in argument with the Devil? Did the Devil say, "No, they must remember every last thing they've ever done," and God said "No. That's messy. I want a tidy universe."

→ It comes down to something basic. God's notion ~~is~~ Let's make the Creation better. The Devil's ~~is~~ ^{main} let's ~~weak~~ ^{weaken} the Creation. I have, says the Devil, something ~~also~~ ^{it} in mind that will supplant and replace ~~the~~ ^{it} Creation.

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

NM: For the sake of argument, let's say the Devil would want to fashion a universe on His or Her terms.

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

NM: Well, given my taste for ~~rank~~ ^{rank} speculation, it could be an immensely technological universe where the need for existence—individual existence—and the concomitant need for soul would be less. That would be more to the Devil's taste: Individual units that function in relation to other more or less individual units. More spiritually mechanized. That seems to

be the prevailing tendency in the 20th and early 21st century—more and more interchangeable units, ready to serve 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 approach that it all has to be destroyed, and don't ask questions. The Koran has all the answers. Once again we are at a point in history between the rock and the hard place.

MICHAEL LANSBORN: I want to ask a question about purgatory. Do you feel some sympathy for that idea?

a fair portion of
NORMAN MAILER: Some—and bewilderment. I will say that I expect there may be some sizable difficulties present after death, a universal hell of waiting ^{perhaps} as only all have to go through before we are born again—those of us who will be born again. I will add that there's an automatic assumption in most people who are religious that God is not only all-powerful but instantaneous in His action. There's an Irish saying: "When God made time, He made a lot of it." So God ~~could~~ be instantaneous—but why would He want to be? Nevertheless, this expectation of quick reception and quick disposition for one's afterlife is at odds with our own experience—which is

INTERVIEW III

MICHAEL LENNON: I want to ask a question about purgatory. Do you feel some sympathy for that idea?

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that everything takes longer than we think it will, *which amounts to* ~~That is~~ the accrued wisdom of

most men and women after many decades of life. In the economy of human experience, there are always time-consuming episodes you didn't anticipate.

To assume that once you pass into another realm of existence things will be

faster and responsive - that is ~~perfect and more instantaneous~~ is no small assumption. It's as ungrounded

as to expect that there are no *other* possible destinations in the hereafter *other* than

purgatory, limbo, or hell. Another, after all, might be God's need to judge

whether a particular soul should be reborn, or might as well expire. So

purgatory might sit there as a *set of possibilities with many a* species of possibility, an unhappy holding

set of tank. God may look at three-quarters of us and say, "I don't want to make

up my mind just yet," and drop us into purgatory, *slow so to speak* ~~Temporarily, that is~~

different but still

Now, what the form of this purgatory might be—whether it bears resemblance to a Palestinian refugee camp—I have no idea.

One of the beliefs I hold is that the hereafter is less different than we assume. We may have the same frustrations and difficulties in the after-

life, overcrowding, for example, even, conceivably, waste. After the Holocaust, we were forced to recognize there was something absolutely

murderous in our species—obviously, it was not just reserved for the

Germans, there was something vastly destructive in our nature. We

received this knowledge over and over again, in Russia, in China, in Africa,

in some of our own actions, indeed, in Vietnam. The point I want to make is that the Holocaust may have exacted a great price from God, even greater than from us. At the core of karma is the notion that it is composed of wise judgment. What if that is not always true? In the godly assessment of each life, in the reading of the soul, so to speak, that takes place after one dies, can it be that God sometimes says, "I'm too weary to think about this now?" After all, if God is an artist, is it always necessary to make instantaneous judgments? Under certain conditions of overcrowding, literal overcrowding in eternity of the sort caused by the Holocaust or Hiroshima, purgatory *can* become a vast way-station.

Let me try to expatiate ~~a little~~ on that. Given the number of people exterminated in a day during the Holocaust, the number of souls arriving in tumult, is it possible they became too great in number for God to measure with calm and justice? It may be that karma has been in a species of uproar ever since the Holocaust, the atom bomb, and the gulags.

The moment you postulate that God is striving to promulgate His vision across the stars, you are also postulating that the nature of the Beyond—to use another word than the Hereafter—is existential. Not fixed, but changing with cosmic circumstances.

ML: Well, you have certainly touched on my next question. You see God as an artist. I think all too often your visions of the Hereafter or the Beyond are built on your own experience of this life. Couldn't God just as well be an engineer ~~or~~?

NM: Absolutely.

ML: Or a general?

NM: Yes.

ML: A public administrator? Or a diplomat?

NM: Yes, yes.

ML: Those are all human occupations.

NM: How can God not be all those things? God is certainly an engineer. An engineer would see it all in terms of future construction. How do you organize the Hereafter? How do you arrive at the best levels of spiritual sanitation? Yes! Heavenly comfort stations for psychic waste are not necessarily to be taken for granted. When I speak of God as an artist, I don't pretend to mean that God might be a novelist, as if that is all God is up to. Finally, the word "artist" has hegemony over other professions because whatever else, it is creative. God is a creator. A Creator. I don't like the word "mega," it's been used too often, but God is, all right, at the least, a mega-artist. All the faculties of engineering, war, social building, art,

music, sport, painting, science, philosophy, medicine, herbology, are His or Hers, and at a level more highly developed than we can begin to conceive. But God is still an artist. A great engineer is an artist. So is a great general like Clausewitz or Robert E. Lee. So are the best in all human categories. We point to that in our own speech. We do speak of ~~Clausewitz as an artist~~ at war. That is the sense in which I want to use the word. I don't want to diminish this projection of what God might be. Let's think of the size of the Creation. Even if God is not all-powerful, we have only to contemplate the vast extent of flora and fauna, the painterly touches—to offer one example—revealed in the scales of a butterfly's wing.

ML: Well, the thing that did appeal to me about your notion of God as an artist, and indeed, as a novelist, is that novelists have to conceive of the destinies and the forked paths that people take through their lives, and so create the second phase, the third phase—in a sense, that's very much like God presiding over reincarnation—the second, third, fourth phase. God as an artist is portraying his or her conception of the metamorphoses in each character's destiny.

NM: Well, we are parts of God's vision certainly. I believe that, yes, lively but seriously ^{skewed} ~~tainted~~ parts of God's vision. That, I would add quickly, is because the Devil is also present. I don't presume to say exactly what part

he plays in cosmic affairs, or local earthly matters—but in any event, we are not pure representations of God. We are tainted, warped, even treacherous *in relation* to the divine projects offered us. We are torn between God and the Devil and our own vanity can be counter to both of them. Across the centuries, human vanity has become a ~~factor~~ *prodigious factor*. The human ego, which has always been fearful of God's power, and ~~fearful of~~ *same human* the Devil's ~~power~~ *still*—that ego can ~~even~~ *separate* itself into a simulacrum of omnipotent confidence. There's nothing more irritating to most of us than the feeling that we are not completely under our own power, that other forces are pushing us, external forces which are stronger than we are. "Oh, God, here comes that awful compulsion starting up again." Whatever it is. Some impulse we consider unworthy of ourselves or too risky for our adventurous capacities, or opposed too magnetically to our spiritual inclinations.

ML: In Advertisements for Myself, you take sides. You say that humankind is roughly more good than evil.

NM: No. That was my assumption about the faith some of us have in democracy, our belief that it will work because there's more good than bad in us as a human multitude. That still remains to be proven.

ML: Still, if we are roughly more good than evil, wouldn't that signal the ultimate victory of good?

NM: There is no guarantee. This is an existential question—which is to say, a not-yet-determined answer. To say existential means you are in the midst of an activity to which you do not yet have a final result. Rather, you are living in the midst of an intense question. I think existentialism can only be understood in that manner.

ML: It becomes more and more clear to me all the time why courage must be the cardinal virtue in your cosmic scheme. If the forces of good are brave, strong, and daring, then there's a chance that evil will be defeated. Would the pacifism of a Gandhi or a Martin Luther King play into the Devil's hands, then? Would he applaud its use?

NM: Everything plays into the Devil's hands. We live in an immensely complicated mesh of cause and effect. I can make an argument for Gandhi and against him—that's no problem. One can also take either side for some great general: pro-Napoleon, let's say, or anti-Napoleon. Gandhi, finally, was a man of significant courage. He did something no one else had ever done before. He was a genius. So in that sense, he was searching for the answer to the same question I'm searching for, but at a much higher and much more dangerous level: are we more good than bad?

In India, the answer that came back to him before he died was ^{that} we may be more bad than good. The immense riots as he came to power ^{those events} —that

had to be a spiritual disaster for him. So I certainly don't sneer at Gandhi nor would I wish to systematize him by declaring, "Oh, he brought on so much that was bad because he advocated passivity." After all, ^{his} ~~this~~ kind of passivity demanded huge courage. And discipline. Heroic passivity. One of the things we might do well to begin to try to understand as humans will be our future need to reconstruct the essential energy contained in oxymorons. Certain oxymorons are absurdities, so many indeed that we feel free to dismiss all of them by saying, "It's an oxymoron." But there are a few which are vital and valuable. One of them is "heroic passivity." There, one's experience must serve as the arbiter. There can be heroic passivity, or quasi- heroic passivity. The latter can be a disaster. And we've all seen that. Stubborn, frantic passivity—certain pacifists we'd like to throw down the stairs.

ML: What came first in your scheme of things? Belief in courage as the cardinal virtue? Or, does your vision of the divided universe require courage to be the cardinal virtue?

NM: I would rather go back to God's experience as He or She was creating the flora and fauna of existence, all those incredible biological experiments that went on over millions of years. Plus, most crucially, the percipience gathered from the failures. Think of the excitement of God when the

dinosaur came into being, the immense excitement that He had something pretty big and pretty formidable. Then it proved too big—badly designed. The record of bad design in evolution could stuff the shelves of many a library. Yet what became obvious was that animals who had courage, or ~~and~~ those plants which had a kind of odd integrity, if you will, in terms of their environment, seemed to do better for the most part than those who didn't. Of course, there are animals—we can see this directly—there are animals who had too much courage. This notion of balance underwriting courage is what God began to search for.

ML: Let me shift a little bit over to the dark side, to the Devil. If things are indeed getting worse, if Satan, as you seem to fear, could be winning—why would the Devil wish to destroy the world, rather than run the world as an ultimate tyrant? Wouldn't he wish to rule humans, convert them to his evil slaves and minions, rather than destroy them?

NM: Let's start with the Devil's point of view—the word evil is not even present for him.

ML: Evil is his good as in Paradise Lost?

NM: He might see it that way. It's such a blatant speculation, let's have a little fun with it. My guess is that the Devil sees God as incompetent. After all, the Devil is a fallen angel, that I assume. Why? Because certain

geniuses have come along who had intimations of what our origins might be. Milton was certainly one. I think Milton is as good a rule of thumb for approaching this matter of God and the Devil as anything I've come across. Homage to Milton. So, I propose that the Devil's belief is that He or She could end up with a better world, a better form of existence, a more sophisticated, more intelligent, well-run notion of things. Now, what are the Devil's means? Well, our fear is that he could destroy the whole world in order to start over again. There, I'm out on the end of my mental belay—does the Devil have the same creative powers that God does to create animals, plants, humans, a system? Or is the Devil a parasite, essentially, upon God? That's a question I wouldn't presume to answer.

That's why I have more trouble dealing with the notion of the Devil than with God. It's relatively more direct to deal with the notion of God as the Creator.

ML: But if you see the Devil as capable of defeating God, he must have equal powers.

NM: Well, even at the highest level, there is such a matter as mindless destruction. When you can't win, you destroy the game. The spoiled kid who picks up the marbles comes in all forms. *But such a kid hardly has to be the best player.* (If the Devil feels that He or

She cannot gain those powers that are needed to form a new universe, the

rage generated may be so intense that the next move is to destroy the ~~whole~~^{works,} ~~thing.~~ Talk about "rank speculation," let's suppose the Devil is treacherous and has sold his birthright to some other god in the cosmos, and will do His or Her best to turn over a paralyzed, inane, stupid, mainly-destroyed world to someone who can build it up. The Devil could be a lieutenant, rather than a major-domo. In that case, the game starts all over again.

These notions of what the Devil might be are not nearly so comfortable as assuming that God is an imperfect creator. That makes sense to me. But the Devil could be this, that, anything—I don't know. One guess: ~~Is technology~~^{is an} ~~the arm of the Devil?~~ Which I think is probably true, ~~by now I think I believe that.~~ Still, technology could be a third force, ready to destroy both God and the Devil. ~~Is technology man's special development?~~^{man's} ~~Man's assertion against God and the Devil?~~

The questions are wide open. There is ~~no way to propose answers to~~^{the questions} ~~them~~ yet, but perhaps ~~they~~^{will} become somewhat more focused as the new century goes on. As of now, for example, I would assume technology is indeed the Devil's force. Why? I feel it viscerally. That's the best I can offer. I think of all the things I've detested for all these years, starting with plastic. It seems to me plastic is a perfect weapon in the Devil's armory. For it desensitizes human beings. Living in and with plastic, we are subtly