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Metaphysical Interview 6

Ready for final version
Dante's space

MICHAEL LENNON: March 20th, 2005, interview 6.

I know you've been thinking about Intelligent Design and I have, too.

But aren't you an unlikely person to find credence there?

NORMAN MAILER: Why?

ML: Because it's a pet theory of the fundamentalists.

NM: That's the last of my concerns—what fundamentalists think. I start as
Pro or con, a)

a novelist. A novelist cannot afford to be ideologically bound. It's
have to because there is a tendency
something we fight, even if we tend to tie ourselves up by way of our style.

are two good examples
Take Henry James and Hemingway. Both were fabulous stylists, but

They paid for the huge achievement of their separate styles by being able to
write only about certain kinds of things. They were bound to
looked into their style.

Picasso, as I've said before, had a huge influence on me because for him,
as he gave it
style was not a part of one's person, not necessarily. I think he saw style as

but a tool with which you could attack reality. First from one direction, then
on different occasions
from another.

Judith - You are saying, see p 23
have to be in total
with each

As far as ~~this idea of Intelligent Design~~, let me say I come to it ~~superficially~~. On the other hand, the premise behind these interviews, is that I won't be embarrassed by my lack of knowledge. Theologians ~~not~~ ^{also intellectually} matter what high level they celebrate ~~they~~ ^{are} trapped by their ideas. They are obliged to do their thinking with received ideas, ~~that is~~, ideas they are not free to change. (As, for example, God is All-Good and All-Powerful.)

So theologians build their philosophies by way of ~~unstable~~ ^{acrobatics, go} mental gymnastics. ~~So~~ ^{So} there are many questions they cannot begin to confront.

I must say ~~the~~ ^T tsunami comes to mind. All they can offer for explanation is that God is a great mystery and His ways are unfathomable. It was as if they delighted in the fact ^{we're hiding} they could hide behind the "mystery" one more time—for the twenty-eighth thousandth time.

My feeling has always been that ^{we are created in God's} God created us in His image or in ~~His~~ ^{Her} image. That seems reasonable to me. God, by my notion, is always laboring, to find a better, more well-adapted creation than His ^{last} ~~latest~~ design.

Remember my remark that the dinosaurs, at one point, must have been a huge part of God's beliefs. He had dared to create this immense animal ^{who} might be able to rule the jungles, the mountains, and the plains. ^{Then} ~~They~~ He discovered that He had misdesigned it. Had to go back to the drawing

board. God, like us, makes mistakes. I must say that I had no idea Intelligent Design has been given to us by fundamentalists.

ML: Well, I don't want to say they invented the idea. It's been around since the 18th century when the world was conceived to be virtually a clock, it was so perfectly designed. Intelligent Design grows out of the Enlightenment.

NM: Perhaps I have a misunderstanding of what is meant by Intelligent Design. I can only speak of it on the basis of reading one good article in the

New York Times, which spoke of ^(it as) a concept that was at odds with evolution.

It offered the notion that ^{because there might well be} there may be a force in existence that brings a

^{adds to} (sense of design ^{to Evolution,} into Creation itself. I thought this ^{was} perfect for what I am

talking about. Because I do think, yes, that God is always looking to make

existence ^{and survival of} ~~(better and better)~~ more finely designed, God also makes errors.

^{the Rarest may be too rough and ready a method} ~~God is an artist. As an artist. He doesn't always succeed, He can fail as~~

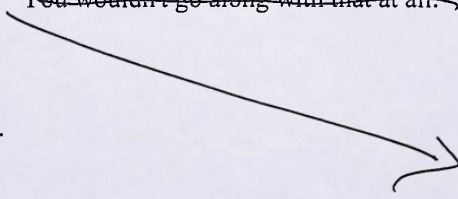
~~well.~~

ML: You understood the article, but can't you see how it would lend support to people who are opposed to evolution? Intelligent Design, by contrast, shows the hand of the Creator.

NM: ~~It is only people like~~ fundamentalists ~~who~~ have no understanding of an artist, ^{so they} ~~who~~ are able to speak that way. As they ^{present} ~~see~~, the Creator saw it all at once, did it perfectly and brought it ^{all out in six days} ~~out~~. Lo and behold, it's been perfect ever since. He never failed once. The design was extraordinary from the start. He even gave us an Old and New Testament to bolster our understand^{ing} of His immaculate design.

ML: Let me say what I understand to be the position of present-day Intelligent Design. It would say: we don't know exactly which processes of natural selection, mutation, evolution, are directly related to the Intelligence used to create the world, but we are saying that what does exist out there in nature speaks of the presence of an Intelligence behind it at some level—maybe at some removes back, but it is certainly opposed to those fundamentalists who would say God created the world in ^{an} ~~one~~ instant six thousand years ago. ~~You wouldn't go along with that at all.~~

NM: ~~Of course not.~~



ML: Intelligent Design ^{proposes} ~~people do say~~ that evolution cannot explain ^{every} all the appearance of design that we see in natural life. Intelligence had also to be involved. ~~Whereas Darwin said: Here's the process; I don't know if there~~
~~was anything behind it.~~

NM: It certainly makes ~~great~~ sense to me that Intelligent Design is one of the elements in evolution. What I find ~~comfortable, even~~ agreeable about it as a notion, is that if we do have a God who created a universe as manifold as ours—how indeed could it have been done without Intelligent Design, [?]

^(with that) ~~Without~~ having notions that this is where to go here, ~~this is how to do that,~~
 this is how to develop this species, here's what's wrong with ^{this} species,

^{and} there, ^{did I} ~~didn't~~ conceive of enough? The other element present, which I ^{am}
^{really to} must emphasize over and over is that God is not all-powerful. These

creations go out into an existence that doesn't necessarily receive them with generosity. ^{In the face of} They change under external circumstances ~~but~~ God as the
 designing artist has to say to Himself or Herself, "I didn't ^{fully} anticipate this."

ML: Tectonic plates. . .

NM: Exactly. Tectonic plates are an example of God's incapacity to design

the world so well that ^{these plates wouldn't shift and cause} there wouldn't be shifting tectonic plates and ensuing

hideous earthquakes, incommensurable loss, and whole failures of

explanation as to why God permitted ^{it or, worse,} or willed it. How much simpler to

assume He didn't ^{anticipate it and so} ~~indeed~~ just like us, He was aghast.

ML: ^{can't it be said that} ~~So~~ to engage the argument, (the tectonic plates are just another example of the randomness and the chaos of the universe.

NM: But, the artist works to extract order from chaos. I would not even say

that chaos is a lack of order. Chaos ^{may often be a} ~~is the~~ mix of sets of orders that are too

complex and too disparate to be ordered within the consciousness of

^{the observer,} ~~whoever would order it.~~ If you will, each element in chaos can have its

own set of laws and processes, ^{when sense of} but that organization within a particular

chaos comes into conflict with another set of orders ^{they prove} and they are

^{At the worst, then we might also have to} incompatible. They ~~tear~~ ^{tear} each apart. I also would postulate Malign Design,

ⁱⁿ through our universe. ^{There may be} ~~By~~ which I mean there are forces not at all congenial

to God's concepts of creativity. How ^{does one} ~~can~~ arrive at this? ^{By the} Because nowhere

^{inevitable observation that nowhere} in existence can you find a free ride. Anything that comes along which

appears to be
~~seems~~ wonderful in the beginning, meets opposition, enjambments. Sooner
 or later a forward motion is paralyzed, or stunned, or hindered.

ML: Do you then espouse a theory of Intelligent Design that has imperfect design?

NM: The design can be excellent until it runs into chaotic elements that
 could not be ~~comprehended~~ *anticipated* in advance. *In their*
conception, however, they are beautiful.

~~ML: That's imperfection.~~

~~NM: No. Perfection may not be the best word here.~~ Sometimes you see
 creatures in the universe who are so exquisitely designed that the moment
 one speaks of Intelligent Design, you say, of course! Orchids, snow flakes,
 tigers. Evolution, trial and error, could not have produced some of the
 beautiful forms we see in the animal world. Race horses. Certain dogs.

Even if we find most insect forms repellent, nonetheless, when we look at
 them under the *a magnifying lens,* ~~microscope~~, we can see the extraordinary work that went

into them. It becomes harder to believe that evolution said, "yes, the ~~one~~ *myriad*

hooks and
 (feelers on this particular leg will have ~~these~~ *obtained* wonderful curves *remains out of* ~~like~~ *file*

scimitars," and this ^{same evolution came} will come about because it is the only way to do it for the survival of the species. It is ^{literally} easier to believe that ^{these insects} it was ^(egg were) designed for beauty as well as function.

ML: You know the old cliché. You put a million monkeys in a room with a million typewriters—or a billion, whatever it is—eventually one of them will produce War and Peace or Hamlet.

^{Get thee to a computer, Satan!}
NM: That's the sort of thing you go to a computer for. I forget the

~~incredible number but it's too vast to be interesting.~~

~~ML: Let me give you the criticism of Intelligent Design.~~

~~NM: I'm listening.~~

ML: In the vastness of the universe, there are billions and billions of stars, ~~and~~ solar systems and galaxies. So far, by our limited knowledge, of the ones we've looked at, not one comes close to having the basics to design a universe. The water and rain, the flora and fauna that went into creating this amazing, organic system that has been able to work together over a period

of time. There's nothing like that anywhere else ^{that} we can see in the universe.
 , Couldn't it be we're just a fluke of the cosmos? In a universe so vast and
 with so many possibilities, finally there is one planet that came to us out of
 the equivalent of mega-billions of monkeys ^{pounding} who pounds out Hamlet ^{by}
 hit or miss.

NM: ~~But~~ I would call that an argument for Intelligent Design. ~~Because we~~
~~find nothing that works remotely like anything on earth.~~ All that fineness of
 detail—I see that precisely as the powerful argument for Intelligent Design.

ML: What then is the function of all the other stars and galaxies?

NM: All we can say with any authority is that in our solar system, the earth
 seems to be the only planet that is now alive with creatures. So it may be
 that other gods—conceivably gods more powerful than ours—have had
 even larger failures. It is possible that the earth succeeded in accomplishing
 something other planets were unable to do. Given the limited powers of
 astronomy today, there seem to be no near galaxies that are comparable.

But there may be. There very well may be. There are so many stars. So
 many possibilities. ^{So many UFOs.} (All we can begin to say is that it seems reasonable to
 posit a god for our universe.

ML: For our solar system.

NM: For our solar system. It may be that this God failed with other planets.

Prior to the earth. I ^{way it} don't even begin to approach that. It's ~~all~~ too easy ~~and~~ too fanciful. I would say it is far more difficult to conceive of our existence if there is no God. Because then we are back to the trillions of monkeys writing Hamlet and that is hard to believe. It is much easier for me to suppose that Hamlet is a part of human design. And if it's not, if it took a nano-trillion of monkeys to produce an equivalent of Hamlet, what a waste. There has to be the assumption, along with everything else, that existence is moving toward a goal. It is certainly possible that existence itself in the deepest, most cosmic, sense, is in peril, ^{so} it is moving forward of necessity. ^{existence itself} It is as if ~~we~~ will have a rendezvous with disaster if we do not reach a certain period or place at a certain time, as if indefinables have to be achieved in order to protect the continuation of existence.

This is what I would term reasonable paranoia. By which I mean one can think about it without undergoing dire declines or manic outbursts. But if there is some reason to this last assumption, then Intelligent Design is a crucial part of it. ~~had a great deal of Intelligent Design in their work~~

In effect you are saying)
 ML: Fine. I want to take a chance with this discussion. I want to take a
~~flyer, so to speak. You tell us that~~ if you think at all like a philosopher, it is
 because you have been a novelist all your life. Splendid! I want to see what
 you can do with a parallel that's apparent to me. Novelists, after all, create
 worlds.

NM: Yes, ~~we~~ we certainly try to, at times.

Can you apply)
 ML: Good. Let's take the notion of Intelligent Design in relation to the
 novel.

NM: ~~It's true.~~ You are right. As I said at the beginning, true artisans like

Henry James ~~and Hemingway~~ were given over entirely to design. It's as if

his ~~their~~ works had to live entirely by *their designs / be* themselves, as if they felt less need *than*
some of us) ~~creators~~ to come in contact with the raw breath of existence.

ML: All right. Let me take another leap. Is there any relation between your
 assumption that Intelligent Design is confronted and altered by existence
 and your disdain for plot in your novels?

Well, good! That is a
NM: That's a good and challenging question. Before I get into it, let me say
a word or two about James Joyce. Unlike Hemingway and Henry James
who are not only great novelists ~~and~~ *but* avatars of Intelligent Design so pure
that their works tend to live by themselves, ~~once it is designed, if you will,~~
Joyce, to the contrary, is playing at the very edges of chaos. He's saying,
"Look how much you can do with what would be chaos in anyone else's
hands." Which is why it is ~~very~~ hard to get near to Joyce. We have an
instinctive sense that we want to avoid chaos, and so it's very hard to
understand him. But he did undertake to organize *the tower of Babel,* ~~whole areas of chaos.~~

ML: I don't want to lose my point. In many essays, many interviews, you
have said in effect, I don't worry about plot. Plot is much less important to
me than character. You always have a storyline, but your plots are not. . .

NM: They're not clockwork.

ML: No. So I've wondered if for you to have a plot that is neat and tight
and ordered would run counter to your ideas of metaphysics.

Agree very good!
 NM: ~~Good~~ Plot, if you will, is Intelligent Design. It is interesting to me—
 and I thought about it a lot in the years I wrote Harlot's Ghost because the
 CIA is a perfect example of plot, that is, Intelligent Design, coming into
 contact and conflict with the world. The reason I don't like plots to prevail
 is that they don't allow the figures in the book, the characters, to push the
 limits of ~~wholly~~ ^{fully} pre-designed plot to the point where life rejects the plot,
~~because life finds the plot too unacceptable, and so throws the design into~~
~~another set of conditions no longer as definable.~~
L. E. feels finds plot to be
clearly delineated
analysis

Borges is the brilliant ~~model~~ ^{analyst} of this process. Borges wrote five and
 six page short stories that start with incredible plots. Then the plots get
 shattered. All in five or six pages. Incredible stories. He, like Joyce, was
 fascinated with making attacks on the nature of chaos. Borges showed us
 for all time—talk about a novelist's novelist! He said to us: "Look at what
 you're all doing. You take yourselves too seriously. You miss the fact that
 once a plot is shattered, life still goes on. Another species of life begins
 and you have to deal with it."

Take this back to Intelligent Design. God looks for Intelligent
 Design. Then that Intelligent Design gets worked upon by existence.
 Orville Wright designed an airplane. Don't we know that! And after he
 designed it, he got it up in the air for the first time, and it flew a few

hundred feet. He went back to the drawing board to refine the knowledge received. Intelligent Design cannot exist without experience. So long as it remains Intelligent Design, pure but untested, it remains analogous to any number of very talented young novelists who never publish because they never get their book to the point where they want it to be seen. They will not put their book out on the waters. Whereas God, I will obviously argue, ~~will launch each~~ ^{with leumhan} Intelligent Design to see what happens to it. That's how God learns, how God gets to the next ^{and better} Intelligent Design.

Let me enjoy ^{an extreme} ~~a wild~~ ^{pastulation} aspect of this ~~notion~~. (In my book about Henry Miller, I spoke of three men coming into a hostess's living room, Henry James, Hemingway, and Henry Miller. Each takes off his hat and behold! There's a ^{big} ~~cow~~ turd on each head. James, I then go on to say, might have perished from an experience that awful. Hemingway would have gone into a depression—he would have seen it as emblematic of the nature of life. Just when life seemed something you could enjoy, unexpected ^{even odious} disasters shattered your mood. ^{But} And Miller would have said, "Good Lord, how did that shit get on my head? And look at the hostess. Are her nostrils quivering or is it her twat? She is so excited and perturbed—what a wonderful moment!" Miller is an example of someone who couldn't stay with a plot for five minutes because he wanted to smash into the world and

reveal something new about himself and the world. He's one extreme, Henry James is the other. And between them lies the effective use of Intelligent Design.

ML: But what would Joyce have done?

NM: Joyce is so much of a genius I don't want to hang onto his coattails.

Id?
~~He~~ fall off. I don't know what he would have done with the cow turd.

ML: I think he would have appreciated it.

NM: He might have looked for the twenty-two words in fifteen languages that were closest to the sound of shit. What would be the wonderful sound he would come up with? On the other hand, he would have been removed from the situation. It was not life he was interested in so much as language.

ML: I disagree. The first person to wipe his ass in a novel is Leopold Bloom.

NM: Your point.. You are ad-in.

ML: You recently criticized Sartre's existentialism for being "floorless."

Without floor.

NM: Without a foundation.

ML: Because, as you put it, "It is, after all, near to impossible for a philosopher to explore into why we are here without entertaining some notion of what the prior force might have been." Therefore, if we grant your limited God as that prior force, then I'm compelled to ask what force preceded your God? I assume you would choose infinite regress rather than a Prime Mover?

NM: Again, I refuse to be trapped in such questions. That's the atheist's last line of defense. There's a story you're probably familiar with, of Bertrand Russell and an old lady—Russell is talking about how the origin of the universe is not knowable. And an old lady in the audience speaks up and says, "On the contrary, Professor Russell. I know the basis of the universe." He says, "What is it, Madam?" She replies, "The universe is

resting upon a turtle." "Madam, that's very helpful, but what is the turtle resting upon?" And she says, "It's turtles all the way down!"

ML: I do remember that.

NM: I'm not going to get trapped in arguments that ask me to explain what came behind the God I'm talking about.

ML: But you beat Sartre over the head because he won't allow for a force behind humanity. Why can't we then try to find out—I'm not trying to refute you, but—

NM: Let me put it this way: we first have to become close enough to God and helpful enough to God—large questions we haven't even entered—the relationship of humankind to God is something we haven't even touched upon—~~and~~ ^{until then,} until we're a great help to God, ^(why should God trust us?) You remember, at the end of Harlot's Ghost, Hugh Montague goes off on this—to me—intriguing speech that God, having decided man was wholly untrustworthy, created the illusion of evolution, that indeed, the universe ^{actually} was created ~~entire~~, ex nihilo, by God in six days, but He then laid in

evidence all over the place that evolution had done it over millions of years so that we could not get near to God's roots. So, implied in all that is that *only* when we get close enough to God to feel we are in some kind of *active* alliance with ~~God~~ *him* ~~which I think has always been implicit in the relationship, why,~~ *when we begin* ~~then we might begin~~ to have some knowledge of who is behind God. But that won't happen until we get nearer ~~to God~~.

ML: But you do see that as a possibility.

NM: ~~Ultimately~~. If things go far better than I expect they will.

ML: I don't know if you're familiar with the philosopher David Hume—

NM: Vaguely. I had him in college.

ML: Well, he got into the *argument for* Intelligent Design ~~argument~~ way back. One of the proofs of St. Thomas Aquinas for the existence of God is the argument from design. It goes back that far, a thousand years. Aquinas has many proofs of God's existence but the fifth one was that design is so perfect in the universe—he didn't even see beyond the solar system—

NM: Right there, you run smack into the ugliest aspect of Catholicism, the insistence of Catholicism on God's perfection. What characterizes

Intelligent Design is that it is partial. We do well to grasp the notion that

these are ~~partial~~ ^{at best, the best available,} attempts. I'm so glad I have the novel to fall back upon; ~~it's~~ ^{Thanks}

^{to you, it's} a metaphor for this. When I write a novel, it's an attempt to come up with a

piece of intelligent design, but it's never perfect. Some parts are better than

others and ~~there~~ ^{then} you find out ^{more} by publishing. ~~It~~ ^{Your little creation} goes into existence, and then

the returns come back. Very often the returns have no relation to what you had written. Occasionally, they do. Slowly, over the years, you learn more.

By the end of your life, you may be wiser as a novelist than when you

started. So, the heart of one of my notions is that God is always looking to

become wiser. God the Father does not always necessarily understand ~~the~~ ^{his}

children all that well. That is also in the nature of existence. What you

create, you do not necessarily understand all too well.

ML: Listen to this collision between Aquinas and David Hume: Hume criticized the argument from design. In particular, he emphasized there is no legitimate way to infer the properties of God from the qualities of the world, His creation. For instance, Hume questioned, how can we be sure

the world was not created by a team? Or this may be but only one of many attempts at creation, the first few having been botched? Or, on the other hand, our world could be the puerile first attempt of an infant deity who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance.

NM: I think it's a little weak to say it was a lame performance and He moved on. That doesn't fulfill my notion of the passion implicit in the artistry of God. I can't conceive of a great artist ever junking a work and moving on because it's lame, if that has been ^{intended as a} ~~his~~ major opus. I do lean to the notion that our world is God's major opus. But Hume did put it well.

The argument for a perfect universe is near to intolerable. It scrambles people's brains. ^{I believe that good} ~~Even the~~ (priests suffer prodigiously) ^[from that] I really think an absolutely great novel could be written about the Catholic Church and the people who work in it. ~~Men, what~~ ^{! what material!} ~~what material is there, what material!~~ But the training is such that it's almost impossible for a priest to become a great novelist.

ML: It's a fabulously successful institution—and probably because of that.

NM: Fabulously successful, yes, but you could also say the Jewish religion has been fabulously successful in that the Jews didn't perish—but what a price they paid. And I'd say what a price Catholics have paid. To have created a Church that brought so much architectural beauty to the world, so much musical beauty, so much ritual beauty—and then be locked into a set of notions they can't let go of, notions that explain nothing clearly and magnify spiritual and moral confusion.

You know, the services of organized religion when they are beautiful move me. I feel "How tragic. How painful." All this pondering, all this devotion, all this loyalty, and it all goes into ~~a sump~~ an intellectual sump. It explains nothing. All you are finally asked to believe is that God will be there to hear your prayers if your nose is clean enough. God will welcome us when we die—as if that's all God has to do, as if God is a couch potato ^{who} sighs when He has to get up to answer the doorbell to welcome a new devotee.

ML: What about Hume's idea the universe might have been created by a team?

NM: Not impossible. Not impossible. It explains one of my basic notions.

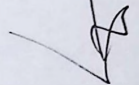
The team ~~soon~~ fell out of sorts with one another and we ended up with God and the Devil.

ML: A joint endeavor—

NM: Like those South Seas Companies in the 1700s, the 1800s. They→

~~started to fight and have been at odds ever since.~~

*Note - Juliette stuff
should be inserted
earlier -*



JMcN: If, as you say, the Creator is an artist, and not all creative works are equally successful, wouldn't this lead quite easily to racism—i.e., the "inferior race"—however one's defining it, whether the non-Aryans scapegoated by the Nazis, or the "ice people" of the Afro-centric extremists, wouldn't that "inferior" group simply be one of God's early, inferior drafts?

NM: Well, I reject the language of the question. One of the absolute disasters that Hitler brought to human understanding was an abuse of the concept of race. Because race offers us great clues. It is perfectly possible—and here again, one can only speculate—but it is perfectly possible that races, in the beginning, were ^{products of} Intelligent Design for different situations. In other words, ^{For people in the tropics, we all have been} for people in the tropics, God was saying, "well, ^{cooling tropical men and women} how can I design the heating system of their bodies so they can bear the heat ^{And warmth with them} a little more easily?" Ditto ^{Contradictions} for the north. We're discovering that living in separate climates produces different relaxations and strictures of the throat.

Languages reflect that. Mind you, God as the artist, is discovering within the material itself, where the continuation might be. Certain sculptors talk about how they do not know ~~exactly~~ what the work will become until they

begin to cut into the marble. The marble ^{suggests} reveals to them what they ^{must} do with the next stroke. The same thing may be true ^{for} with human designs, ~~or~~
 or animal designs. The environment plays a great role.

JMcN: Your conception of God as artist assumes that God is both vastly ^{powerful} ~~good~~ but not all-good, and vastly ~~powerful~~ but not all-powerful. But why couldn't God be not very compassionate at all and instead immensely curious? In other words, He is fascinated by, but not especially compassionate toward creation, much like a child who winds up toys and watches them slam into each other and chortles at the smashup. You say, "In other words, why are there volcanoes? Because God was not a perfect engineer" Or because like a two-year-old, God found the noise and fury fascinating and amusing. Maybe even the shrieks of the dying fascinating and amusing. You keep assuming God is a nice person, so to speak, but that seems a bit arbitrary. Your reaction?

NM: It is arbitrary, and it could be my conditioning. I grew up in a household that was as religious as the next—it wasn't a dogma-driven household, but I remember my mother on Friday night praying before a lit candle, praying to the Shekhina, who is, of course, the wife of God, and

sp? Schechina? Shachinah?

See if you can find
 better info on this
 →

there were tears in my mother's eyes and a feeling of great tenderness came from her. I think I always took it for granted that God is compassionate in relation to us.

Now, the arguments raised above cannot be refuted. I cannot say, "No, God is not going in for capers." Of course, God could ^{understand} ~~go in for~~ mean acts. But to me—maybe because I, too, am searching for an orderly existence to some degree—the notion that God and the devil are in conflict with one another makes more sense to me. ~~We've got this one God who is more good than not.~~

ML: Well, your mother's father was a rabbi.

NM: Yes. He studied to be a rabbi in Lithuania but by the time he came over here, the only way he could make his living was as a peddler^{sp?}. Then he moved to small town called Long Branch, New Jersey, where he opened a butcher shop. There he worked as a butcher, but there was only one synagogue in Long Branch—and so when the rabbi was ill or off on vacation, my grandfather stood in for him. And my mother was very proud of this. The fundamental snobbery of the Jews—it was much better to be a

rabbi than a butcher. I was delighted, it gave me two different sets of inherited strains to develop.

ML: Well, I'm thinking of your mother's devotion and the tear in her eye—obviously, she must have come from a pretty religious household.

NM: My grandfather was very religious—he began studying the Talmud when he was four years old. The best thing to be said about the Talmud is it's very hard to become a fundamentalist while studying it. It's all too easy to go fundamentalist when living with the Bible but difficult when reading

the Talmud. It is the opposite of the Old Testament. It inquires into the

nuances of things. *(there are numerous passages in)* For instance, *in the Talmud, people brought animals to, against what happens when people bring animals to* the temple to be sacrificed. Very often there were small disasters—a poor

man might have decided to sacrifice his prize heifer because his child was

ill. But on his way with his heifer into the synagogue, the animal *snapping* would

what was up, miracle

defecate. Well, the Talmud does focus on where *where* did it defecate? Did it do

it outside? On the patio? *Or did* Did it defecate on the steps? *Or in* In the vestibule? *release* In

the aisle? At the altar approach? Was it *actually in full proximity to* on the altar? For all these are

situations, and call for different proximities, there are different punishments. In certain cases the

animal can still be sacrificed. At other sites, the animal is lost completely—

if it defecates too close to ^{god, mess,} the altar, it has to be disposed of completely. It
 can't even be eaten. In the Talmud, there are all these ^{shadings, all these} efforts to find zones
 of relative compatibility between God and humans. ^{it is laid out} so it is the exact
 opposite of the Old Testament, or the New Testament where ^{both lay it out.}

^{See never!} "This is the way it is. Don't argue with it." Then, of course, ^{both} they contradict
^{Testaments are always ready to contradict} themselves two pages later.

ML: Well—there is a certain measure of Orphic ambiguity in the utterances
 of Christ.

NM: I wouldn't call it ambiguity. I see it as the ^{and negotiations} wars of the committees.

"I'll give you Cleaver to your family if you'll
 Analogous to what's going on between the Sunnis and the Shiites in Iraq, to
 give me, Leave your family for me." ^{After}
~~wit, if I give you this, you must give me that.~~

ML: Did your mother talk much about her father?

NM: With a kind of gentle reverence. She adored him, and he was a very
 kind man. One story I loved when I was a kid. She once said, "My mother
 worked so hard in the butcher shop, and we as children worked hard, too. I
 worked hard—we'd get angry at my father because whenever a poor woman

would come in and he'd be weighing the meat she bought, he'd put his finger under the scale so it cost less. And we thought, That's all very well, but you're taking the money away from us."

ML: So he was a compassionate man.

NM: Most people seemed to think he was a lovely man. I was only four when he died. But I like to think so too.

JMcN: Here's a question on ritual: All your ideas have an underlying assumption that God has a continuing, even a profound interest in at least some individuals, and certainly in the ultimate fate of the human species and the rest of His creation. This is completely at odds with some of the earliest recorded religious expression, namely from the Sumerians, whose prayers were always begging the gods to "Remember!" Prayer and ritual were a constant attempt to engage the attention of forgetful and indifferent gods who had created and abandoned humanity. This, by the way, wasn't a notion emerging from disasters and dislocations but could be found even as their civilization flourished. Can you comment?

NM: It's the other half of the equation. The obverse side of prayer is that it rarely gets answered. So rarely that people at religious meetings cite such events as miracles. [in a southern accent] "I prayed to God and I didn't know if I was answered or not, but then, to my astonishment, I fell to me knees and I began to weep, I began to weep for the sores of Christ because my prayer had been answered." Prayers are not answered. I always felt the Lord has enough to take care of without having to listen to all that. Think of God wading through those prayers: "Oh, God, let my team win the game!" "Oh, God, let me get some money. Let me sell this old heap that's no good and get something better," all that, all that.

I don't think God listens to prayer. The Sumerians—I ^{can't say that I} ~~don't~~ know anything about them. As you describe them, they were relatively sophisticated people who recognized that they prayed and prayed ~~and~~ ~~prayed~~ and answers did not come very often.

Now let me say some people have a child who's ill, and they pray to God with great sincerity for their child to live, and usually the child does live—I'm willing to accept the idea that that's not something to sneer at. I'm not saying it helps or it works but humanly speaking, we can certainly feel for the parent.

JMcN: When you were talking about Gandhi, you said: "But there are a few ~~oxymorons~~ ^{oxymorons} that are vital and immensely valuable. One of them is heroic passivity. One's wisdom has to become the arbiter then. We can be encountering heroic passivity, or only the quasi- heroic variety and the latter might be a disaster." Along that line, what would you say about the contemplative life? By that I mean the cloistered orders who don't run hospitals or schools, just pray for the world. This is a strong Christian tradition, ditto for the Buddhists and some Hindus, and probably the Jews have some variant of that.

NM: The Twelve Just Men. . .

ML: Do you see a value in this kind of passivity?

NM: I would answer yes. I'm not opposed to that. If we're going to get nearer to God to find the God behind the God, it's perfectly conceivable to me that the God of which I speak does pay attention to transcendental sincerity. I have a crude analogy to offer. Occasionally, after having worked on a novel, you come across a review that's so intelligently written and gets to close to what you were attempting to do, or, even better, shows

ways you never saw for the book, but it does illuminate the work, well, I can esteem that critic and I do feel better about the act of writing. Raise that up through many orders of magnitude—I do think there are people who contemplate existence, who pray in depth to God and are qualified to do so. They are not petty greed-bags. What I hate about prayer is most of the time it is so greedy, always looking for an undeserved advantage. I'm a mediocrity, I'm kind of stupid, God, but maybe you'll help me because I'm praying to You.

JMcN: This is about Buddhism: what's your take on the Buddhist notion of the bodhisatva vow? Reaching nirvana is a catch-22—if you have achieved a level of deep compassion, enough to reach nirvana, you can't go happily off into it while other sentient beings are still here struggling and suffering. So, even though you personally have a free-pass out of this far from perfect world, you voluntarily reincarnate as a "bodhisatva"—a helper, a teacher, a way-shower—and keep reincarnating until everyone has achieved nirvana. Devout Buddhists of many persuasions—and all the monks and nuns, take the "bodhisatva vow" at an advanced stage of their training.

NM: Well, I think it's a beautiful notion. I subscribe to it—not personally.

I wouldn't make it; I don't have that kind of compassion. The difficulty I've

always had with Buddhism is nirvana—that the point of existence is not to

— as the Buddhists see it — to
rise above all petty feeling, but on the contrary, the point is to be able to

struggle with those petty feelings in such a way that we alter them into

we look to becoming
~~some~~ what more vigorous feelings. So we're more able to contribute to the

best of existence. Nirvana always struck me as a place I had no interest in.

If it existed or not—I had no idea—it didn't appeal to me. I remember

talking to a friend of mine who's a good Buddhist and scolding him, getting

into a polite rage over drinks: "You bastards always talk about nothingness,

about
getting to nothingness. I'm a writer, I live with nothingness every minute

I'm working. I sit at my desk and for the first half-hour there's nothing—I

have to pass through that nothingness in order to *reach* get a few ideas. I said,

you're not even talking about nothingness. Nothingness is an awful state!

It's an empty state. Why don't you talk about what it really is, which is the

ineffable? When you get *to* into the ineffable, then you have something to talk about!"

I like to think he was struck with the thought, even a little.

an illuminating
Back to the boddhisatva: I think it's a beautiful conception. Whether

true or not, I have no idea. In other words, how can any human choose to

reincarnate rather than going into Nirvana? I think the Lord might say, "Reincarnation is not your choice, it's Mine." In that sense, I'm obviously beyond my range. But it is a ^{gorgeous} beautiful notion.

JMcN: At the end of your last interview, you said that in many ways the Creator was like a Greek god—strong yet not all powerful, flawed but noble, well, you know Greek myths are full of incidents where the gods took human form, or animal form. Apart from the well-known stories of Zeus turning up as this or that to impregnate some human woman, there are also stories of Zeus turning up as a beggar. In one story, peasants take in a wretched beggar overnight, share their far-from abundant meal with him, treat him very well, and next morning, find his bed empty and a sack of gold in his place—Zeus came calling—and rewarded them for their kindness to the poor! God showing up on earth is an idea embraced long before

Christian theology, [but I see nothing in your writings of God as a swan, a river, or anything as possibly Jesus.—jm note: I never wrote that last part!! And it isn't logical!! Or even correct. Ancient Evenings is chock-full of the Pharaoh as a divine presence.]

NM: I don't see any need to answer the question. I just take it for granted.

If God wants to appear as a human, why not? And indeed, He would. But I

think actually what's more interesting is the belief if you're good when you

don't have to be good, something wonderful happens. Which I think is also

part of human nature. Humans live for revenge—but they also live for ^{the} ~~a~~
sentiment that we are capable of goodness. So the brunt of those stories, ^{for} ~~the~~

impact ^{me is to} ~~they have on me~~, is look at the human desire involved. One, that I

can be capable of goodness, ^{is} ~~is~~ and two, that there's something in the universe

^{what} ~~that~~ rewards you for ^{that} ~~goodness~~. Prayer is the ugly stepchild of ^{such an} ~~that~~ emotion.

What makes it interesting is the pot of gold—they weren't praying for the

gold. That's far better than saying, "Hey, I was good—now reward me!"

Judith -

Make Sure Nothing is missing
around pages 12-15.

Faxie got greedy.

D.

Metaphysical Interview 6

VI

No. 6¹
conducted
3-20-05

MICHAEL LENNON: March 20th, 2005, interview 6.

I know you've been thinking about Intelligent Design and I have, too.

But aren't you an unlikely person to find credence there?

NORMAN MAILER: Why?

ML: Because it's a pet theory of the fundamentalists.

NM: ~~That's~~ ^{is} the last of my concerns ~~what~~ ^{is} what fundamentalists think. I start as
a novelist, ~~A novelist cannot afford to be ideologically bound,~~ ^{and we can't} ~~it's~~ ^{although}
~~in practice~~ ^{something we fight, even if} we tend to tie ourselves up ~~by way of~~ ^{through} our style.

Take Henry James ~~and~~ ^{on} Hemingway. Both were fabulous stylists, but
they paid for the huge achievement of their separate styles by being able to
write only about certain kinds of things. They were locked into ~~their style~~ ^{self-limiting modes}
~~of perception.~~ ^{often enough, Picasso}
~~Picasso, as I've said before,~~ ^{but could serve as} had a huge influence on me, because for him,
style was not a part of one's person, ~~not necessarily.~~ I think he saw style as
a tool with which you could attack reality. ^{Different styles for} ~~First from one direction, then~~
~~different kinds of obscure or complex reality,~~ ^{from another.}

This prelude to the side, let me admit that
 As far as this idea of Intelligent Design, let me say I come to it ~~the~~
 question of Intelligent Design with almost no cognizance
 superficially. *On the other hand, the premise behind these interviews, is*
of the subject,

that I won't be embarrassed by my lack of knowledge. Theologians—no
 matter what high level they celebrate—they are trapped *into their philosophy*
received religious systems. They
 are obliged to do their thinking with ~~received ideas~~, *that is,* ideas they are

not free to change. (As, for example, God is All-Good and All-Powerful.)

in innovations in
 So theologians build their philosophies by way of ~~unstable~~ mental
And, no surprise—
 gymnastics. So, *there are* many questions they cannot begin to confront.

I must say the tsunami comes to mind. All they ~~can~~ offer for
here
 explanation is that God is a great mystery and His ways are unfathomable.

It was as if they delighted in the fact *they are hiding*
 they could hide behind the "mystery"

one more time—*let us say* for the twenty-eighth thousandth time.

(as is obvious from these interviews is that God
 My feeling has always been that God created us in His image, or in

Her image. That seems reasonable to me. God, by my notion, is always
strives
 laboring to find a better, more well-adapted creation than His latest design.

Remember my remark that the dinosaurs, at one point, *may* must have been a
large
 huge part of God's ~~benefit~~ *Élan.* He had dared to create this immense animal

who might be able to rule the jungles, the mountains, and the plains. *Then, he*
came to
 discovered that He had misdesigned it. ~~Had to go back to the drawing~~
3

board. God, like us, makes mistakes. I must say that ^{if} ~~I had no idea~~

Intelligent Design ^{is being welcomed} ~~has been given to us~~ by fundamentalists, ^{they} ~~are asking for considerable~~ ^{are asking for considerable} ~~in the future.~~

ML: Well, I don't want to say they invented the idea. It's been around since the 18th century when the world was conceived to be virtually a clock, it was so perfectly designed. Intelligent Design grows out of the Enlightenment.

NM: Perhaps I have a misunderstanding of what is meant by Intelligent

Design. I can only speak of it on the basis of ^{a little} ~~reading one good article in the~~

~~New York Times, which spoke of a concept that was at odds with evolution~~ ^{Does it not speak} ~~offers~~

~~It offered the notion that there may be a force in existence that brings a~~ ^{is a presence} ~~more advanced~~ ^{which introduces}

^a ~~sense of~~ ^{more advanced} ~~design into Creation itself.~~ ^{evolution. I deem to be} ~~I thought this is perfect for what I am~~

^{I do think} ~~talking about.~~ ^{I do think} ~~Because I do think, yes,~~ ^{I do think} ~~(that God is always looking to make~~

~~existence better and better, more finely designed.~~ ^{And in conollary} ~~God also makes errors.~~

~~to that, God looks to improve on his errors~~ ^{God is an artist. As an artist, He doesn't always succeed. He can fail as}

~~well.~~

ML: ~~You understood the article, but can't you see how it would lend~~ ^{such ideas can}

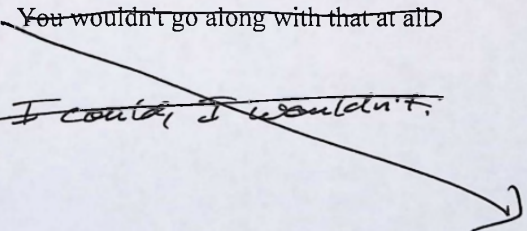
support to people who ~~are~~ ^{are} opposed to evolution? Intelligent Design, ~~by~~

~~contrast,~~ shows the hand of the Creator.

NM: ~~It is only people like fundamentalists who~~ [≡] have no understanding of an artist, ~~who are able to speak that way.~~ As they see it, the Creator saw it all at once, did it perfectly ^(in a week) and brought it out. Lo and behold, it's been perfect ever since. He never failed once. The design was extraordinary from the start. ~~He even gave us an Old and New Testament to bolster our understand of His immaculate design.~~

^{Here is}
ML: ~~Let me say~~ what I understand to be the position of present-day Intelligent Design. It would say: we don't know exactly which processes of natural selection, mutation, evolution, are directly related to the Intelligence used to create the world, but we are saying that what does exist out there in nature speaks of the presence of an Intelligence behind it at some level—maybe at some removes back, but it is certainly opposed to those fundamentalists who would say God created the world in one instant six thousand years ago. ~~You wouldn't go along with that at all~~

~~Even if I could, I wouldn't.~~
NM: ~~Of course not.~~



ML: Intelligent Design people do say that evolution cannot explain all the appearance of design that we see in natural life. Intelligence had also to be involved. Whereas Darwin said: Here's the process; I don't know if there was anything behind it.

NM: It certainly makes great sense to me that Intelligent Design is one of the elements in evolution. What I find comfortable, even agreeable about it as a notion, is that if we do have a God who created a universe as manifold as ours—how indeed could it have been done without Intelligent Design, without having notions that this is where to go here, this is how to ^{do} that, ^{here we can} this is how to develop this species, here's what's wrong with ^{that} this species.

~~and~~ there I didn't conceive of enough? The other element present, which I must emphasize over and over is that ^(R) God is not all-powerful, ^{He's} ~~These~~ creations ^{went} out into an existence that ^{didn't} necessarily receive them with generosity. ^{In many circumstances, God might} They change under external circumstances but God as the ^{well have to} ~~designing artist has to~~ say to Himself or Herself, "I didn't anticipate this."

ML: Tectonic plates. . .

NM: Exactly. Tectonic plates are an example of God's incapacity to design ~~the world so well that there wouldn't be shifting tectonic plates and ensuing~~ ^{not} ~~hideous earthquakes, incommensurable loss, and whole failures of~~ explanation as to why God permitted or willed it. How much simpler to assume ^{God expect that disaster.} ~~He didn't~~ ~~indeed, just like us,~~ (He was aghast).

ML: Or, to engage the argument, the tectonic plates are just another example of the randomness and the chaos of the universe.

NM: But, the artist works to extract order from chaos. I would not even say that chaos is a lack of order. Chaos is ^a ~~the~~ mix of sets of orders that are too complex and too disparate to be ordered within the ^(onlooker's) consciousness of ~~whoever would order it~~. If you will, each element in chaos can have its own set of laws and processes, but that organization ~~within a particular~~ chaos comes into conflict with another set of orders and they are incompatible. They tear each apart. I also would postulate Malign Design ^(occurring) ~~throughout~~ ^{would posit} ~~by~~ ~~which I mean there are~~ forces not at all congenial to God's concepts of creativity. How do I arrive at this? Because nowhere in existence ^{do} ~~can~~ you find a free ride. Anything that comes along which

seems wonderful in the beginning, meets opposition, enjambments. Sooner or later a forward motion is paralyzed, ~~or~~ stunned, ~~or~~ hindered, ~~or~~ stopped,

ML: Do you then espouse a theory of Intelligent Design that has imperfect design?

NM: The design can be excellent until it runs into chaotic elements that could not be comprehended in advance.

ML: That's imperfection.

NM: ~~No~~. Perfection may not be the best word ^{to use} here. Sometimes you see creatures in the universe who are so exquisitely designed that the moment one speaks of Intelligent Design, you say, of course! Orchids, snow flakes, tigers. Evolution ^{by} trial and error, could not have produced some of the beautiful forms we see in the animal world. Race horses. Certain dogs. Even if we find most insect forms repellent, nonetheless, when we look at them under the microscope, we can see the extraordinary work that went into them. It becomes harder to believe that evolution said, "yes, the six ^{pincers} ~~feet~~ on this particular leg will have ~~these wonderful~~ ^{as wonderful as} curves like

as scimitars," and this will come about because ^{this} it is the only way to do it for ^{the species} ~~can survive~~ the survival of the species. It is literally easier to believe that ^{the limb was} ~~it was~~ designed for beauty as well as ^{for} function.

ML: You know the old cliché. You put a ^{100 million} million monkeys in a room with a ^{get} million typewriters ~~for a billion, whatever it is~~ eventually one of them will produce War and Peace or Hamlet.

NM: That's the sort of thing you ^{that's the number} go to a computer for, I forget the ~~incredible number but it's~~ too vast to be interesting.

ML: Let me give you ~~the criticism of~~ Intelligent Design.
 ~~another refutation of~~

NM: I'm listening.

ML: In the vastness of the universe, there are billions ~~and billions~~ of stars and solar systems and galaxies. ~~So far~~ by our limited knowledge, of the

ones we've looked at, not one comes close to having the basics to design a ^{— that is, the} universe. ^{all} The water and rain, the flora and fauna that went into creating ~~this~~ amazing, organic system that has been able to work together over a period

of time. There's nothing like that anywhere else ^{that} we can see in the universe.
^{statistical}, Couldn't it be we're just a fluke of the cosmos? In ^{so vast} a universe ^{so vast and}
 with so many possibilities, finally there is one planet that ^{developed} came to us out of
 the equivalent of mega-billions of monkeys ^{pounding} who pounds out Hamlet.

NM: But I would call that an argument for Intelligent Design. Because we
 find nothing ^{elsewhere} that works remotely like anything on earth—all ^{the} ~~that~~ fineness of
 detail ^{we have here} — see that ^a precisely as the powerful argument for Intelligent Design.

ML: What then is the function of all the other stars and galaxies?

NM: All we can say with any authority is that in our solar system, the earth
 seems to be the only planet that is now alive with creatures. So it may be
 that other gods—conceivably gods more powerful than ours—have had
 even larger failures. It is possible that the earth succeeded in accomplishing
 something other planets were unable to do. Given the limited powers of
 astronomy today, there seem to be no near galaxies that are comparable.
 But there may be. There very well may be. There are so many stars. ~~So~~
 many possibilities. All we can begin to say is that it seems reasonable to
 posit a god for our universe.

ML: For our solar system.

NM: For our solar system. It may be that this God failed with other planets.

Prior to the earth. I ^{won't} even begin to approach that. It's ~~all~~ too easy and too fanciful. I ^{would} say it is far more difficult to conceive of our existence if there is no God. Because then we are back to the ~~trillions of~~ ^{not to} monkeys

writing Hamlet and that is hard to believe. It is much easier for me to suppose that Hamlet is a part of human design. And if it's not, if it ^{did take} ~~took a~~

a nano-trillion of monkeys to produce an equivalent of Hamlet, what a waste.

There has to be the assumption, along with everything else, that existence is

moving toward a goal. It is certainly possible that existence itself in the deepest, most cosmic, sense, is in peril, ^{as it is} ~~so it is~~ moving forward of necessity. ~~extinction~~ ^{of necessity, therefore, it is}

It is as if we will have a rendezvous with disaster if we do not reach a

certain period or place ^{by a given} ~~at a certain~~ time, as if indefinables have to be

achieved in order to protect the continuation of ^{this} ~~existence~~.

This is what I would term reasonable paranoia. By which I mean one ^{try to} ~~can~~ think about it without ^{living into} ~~undergoing~~ dire declines or ^{flaming into} ~~manic~~ outbursts. But

if there is some reason to this last assumption, then Intelligent Design is a

crucial part of it. ~~had a great deal of Intelligent Design in their work.~~

ML: Fine. I want to take a chance with this discussion. I want to take a flyer, so to speak. You tell us that if you think at all like a philosopher, it is because you have been a novelist all your life. Splendid! I want to see what you can do with a parallel that's apparent to me. Novelists, after all, create worlds.

NM: ~~Yes, we~~ ^{do} certainly try to, at times.

ML: Good. Let's take the notion of Intelligent Design in relation to the novel.

NM: ^{Well, as I did say before} ~~It's true. You are right. As I said at the beginning,~~ true artisans like Henry James and Hemingway ^{gave themselves} ~~were given~~ over entirely to design. It's as if ^{we're designed to live} ~~their works had to live entirely by themselves,~~ as if they felt less need ^{Perhaps, as creators, they} ~~as~~ ^{to look for support} ~~creators to come in contact with the raw breath of existence.~~ ^{in the breath and facts}

ML: All right. Let me take another leap. Is there any relation between your assumption that Intelligent Design is confronted and altered by existence and your disdain for plot in your novels?

NM: That's a good and challenging question. Before I get into it, let me say

a word or two about James Joyce. Unlike Hemingway and Henry James

who are not only great novelists and avatars of Intelligent Design so pure

that their works ~~tend to live by themselves, once it is designed, if you will,~~

once designed and fashioned
Joyce, to the contrary, ~~is playing~~ plays at the very edges of chaos. He's saying,

"Look how much you can do with what would be chaos in anyone else's

hands." Which is why it is very hard to get near to Joyce. We have an ~~instinctive~~ A common

reflex is to look all that-
instinctive sense that we want to avoid chaos, and so it's very hard to,

~~understand him.~~ But ~~he~~ Joyce did undertake to organize whole areas of chaos.

ML: I don't want to lose my point. In many essays, many interviews, you

have said in effect, I don't worry about plot. Plot is much less important to

me than character. You always have a storyline, but your plots are not. . .

NM: They're not clockwork.

ML: No. So I've wondered if for you to have a plot that is neat and tight

and ordered would run counter to your ideas of metaphysics.

NM: Good. Plot, if you will, is Intelligent Design. It is interesting to me—and I thought about it a lot in the years I wrote Harlot's Ghost because the CIA is a perfect example of plot, that is, Intelligent Design, coming into contact and conflict with the world. The reason I don't like plots to prevail is that they don't allow the figures in the book, the characters, to push the limits of wholly pre-designed plot to the point where life rejects the plot because life finds the plot too unacceptable, and so throws the design into another set of conditions no longer as definable.

Borges is the brilliant model of this process. Borges wrote five and six page short stories that start with incredible plots. Then the plots get shattered. All in five or six pages. Incredible stories. He, like Joyce, was fascinated with making attacks on the nature of chaos. Borges showed us for all time—talk about a novelist's novelist! He said to us: "Look at what you're all doing. You take yourselves too seriously. You miss the fact that once a plot is shattered, life still goes on. Another species of life begins and you have to deal with it."

Take this back to Intelligent Design. God looks for Intelligent Design. Then that Intelligent Design gets worked upon by existence. Orville Wright designed an airplane. Don't we know that! And after he designed it, he got it up in the air for the first time, and it flew a few

hundred feet. He went back to the drawing board to refine the knowledge received. Intelligent Design cannot exist without experience. So long as it remains Intelligent Design, pure but untested, it remains analogous to any number of very talented young novelists who never publish because they never get their book to the point where they want it to be seen. They will not put their book out on the waters. Whereas God, I will obviously argue, launches each Intelligent Design to see what happens to it. ^{That is} ~~That's~~ now God learns, how God ^{proceeds} ~~gets~~ to the next Intelligent Design.

Let me enjoy ^{one} ~~a~~ wild aspect of this notion. In my book about Henry Miller, I spoke of three men coming into a hostess's living room, Henry James, Hemingway, and Henry Miller. Each takes off his hat and behold! There's a cow turd on each head. James, I then go on to say, might have perished from an experience that awful. Hemingway would have gone into a depression—he would have seen it as emblematic of the nature of life. Just when life seemed something you could enjoy, unexpected disasters shattered your mood. And Miller would have said, "Good Lord, how did that shit get on my head?" And look at the hostess. Are her nostrils quivering or is it her twat? She is so excited and perturbed—what a wonderful moment!" Miller is an example of someone who couldn't stay with a plot for five minutes because he wanted to ^{run right into that} ~~smash into the~~ world and

~~discover~~ reveal something new about himself ~~and~~ ^{and/or} the world. He ~~is~~ ^{is at} one extreme, Henry James ~~is~~ ^{at} the other. ~~And~~ ^{And} between them lies the effective use of Intelligent Design.

ML: But what would Joyce have done?

NM: Joyce is so much of a genius I ~~don't want~~ ^{won't try} to hang onto his coattails. ~~If~~ ^{I'd} fall off. I don't know what he would have done with the cow turd.

ML: I think he would have appreciated it.

NM: He might have looked for ^{a compilation of} the twenty-two words in fifteen languages that ~~were closest to the sound of~~ ^{exercised the concept of} shit. What would be the wonderful sound he would come up with? On the other hand, he would have been removed from the situation. It was not life he was interested in so much as language.

ML: I disagree. The first person to wipe his ass in a novel is Leopold Bloom.

NM: Your point.. You are ad-in.

ML: You recently criticized Sartre's existentialism for being "floorless."

Without floor.

NM: Without a foundation.

ML: Because, as you put it, "It is, after all, near to impossible for a philosopher to explore into why we are here without entertaining some notion of what the prior force might have been." Therefore, if we grant your limited God as that prior force, then I'm compelled to ask what force preceded your God? I assume you would choose infinite regress rather than a Prime Mover?

NM: Again, I refuse to be trapped ^{by} in such questions. ^{They are} That's the atheist's last line of defense. There's a story you're probably familiar with, of Bertrand Russell and an old lady—Russell is talking about ~~how~~ the origin of the universe ^{and how it} is not knowable. ~~And~~ ^{and} an old lady in the audience speaks up, ^{She} ~~and~~ says, "On the contrary, Professor Russell. I know the basis of the universe." He says, "What is it, Madam?" She replies, "The universe is

resting upon a turtle." "Madam, that's very helpful, but what is the turtle resting upon?" And she says, "It's turtles all the way down!"

ML: I do remember that.

NM: I'm not going to get trapped in arguments that ask me to explain what came behind the God I'm talking about.

ML: But you beat Sartre over the head because he won't allow for a force behind humanity. Why can't we then try to find out—I'm not trying to refute you, but—

NM: Let me put it this way: we first have to become close enough to God and helpful enough to God—large questions we haven't even entered—the relationship of humankind to God is something we haven't even touched upon—^{but some kind of} ~~and~~ ^{for} until we're a great help to God, why should God trust us? You remember, at the end of Harlot's Ghost, Hugh Montague goes off on this—

to me—intriguing speech that God having decided ^{that the advent of} ~~man~~ was wholly ^{humans was not to be trusted, then} ~~untrustworthy~~, created the illusion of evolution, that indeed, the universe ^{In reality,} ~~the earth~~ ^{really} was created entire, ex nihilo, by God in six days, but He then laid in

^{earth and in the seas}
evidence all over the place that evolution had done it ^{instead} over millions of years,
~~that way, people~~
so that we could not get near to God's roots. So, ^{a suggestion} implied in all that is that
~~that~~
when we get close enough to God to feel we are in some kind of alliance
~~with God which I think has always been implicit in the relationship, why~~
^{why} then we might begin to have some knowledge of who is behind God. But
that won't happen until we get nearer to God.

ML: But you do see that as a possibility.

NM: Ultimately. If things go far better than I expect they will.

ML: I don't know if you're familiar with the philosopher David Hume—

^{Yes}
NM: Vaguely. I had him in college, ^{I had him. Vaguely,}
^{you might say.}

^{Hume}
ML: Well, he got into the Intelligent Design argument way back ^{then}. (One of
the proofs of St. Thomas Aquinas for the existence of God is the argument
from design. It goes back that far, a thousand years. Aquinas has many
proofs of God's existence but the fifth one was that design is so perfect in
the universe—he didn't even see beyond the solar system—

the world was not created by a team? Or this may be but only one of many attempts at creation, the first few having been botched? Or, on the other hand, our world could be the puerile first attempt of an infant deity who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance.

NM: ~~I think it's a little weak to say it was a lame performance and He~~

~~moved on.~~ ^{best} That doesn't fulfill my notion of the passion implicit in the

artistry of God. I can't conceive of a great artist ever junking a work and

moving on because it's lame, ^{not} if that has been his major opus. ^{certainly} I do lean to

the notion that our world is God's major opus. But Hume did put it well, ^{on}

^(From my point of view he was cornered in seeing that) the argument for a perfect universe is near to intolerable. It ~~scrambles~~

^{The notion of a perfect universe} ~~scrambles~~ people's brains. ^{from such a concept} Even the priests suffer prodigiously. ~~I really think an~~

~~absolutely great novel could be written about the Catholic Church and the~~

~~people who work in it. Man, what material is there, what material! But the~~

~~training is such that it's almost impossible for a priest to become a great~~

~~novelist.~~

^{All the same, the Catholic Church is}
ML: It's a fabulously successful institution—and probably because of that,
^{insistence on a perfect universe.}

NM: Fabulously successful, yes, but you could also say the Jewish religion has been fabulously successful in ^{one way —} ~~that~~ (the Jews didn't perish) ^{but what a} price they paid.¹ And I'd ^{add} ~~say~~ what a price Catholics have paid. To have created a Church that brought so much architectural beauty to the world, so much musical beauty, so much ritual beauty—and then be locked into a set of notions they can't let go of, notions that explain nothing ^{but elevate contradiction} ~~clearly~~ and magnify spiritual and moral confusion.

You know, the services of organized religion ^(when they are beautiful) move me. I feel "How tragic. How painful." All this ~~pondering~~, all this devotion, all this loyalty, and it ~~all~~ goes into a ~~sump~~, an intellectual sump. It explains nothing. All you are finally asked to believe is that God will be there to hear your prayers, ~~if your nose is clean enough~~, God will welcome us when we die—as if that's all God has to do, ~~as if God is a couch potato~~ ~~sighs when He has to get up to answer the doorbell to welcome a new~~ ~~devotee.~~

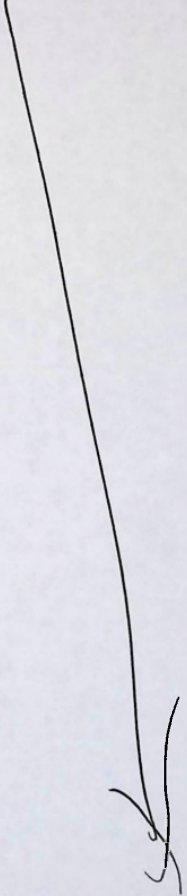
ML: What about Hume's idea the universe might have been created by a team?

NM: Not impossible. Not impossible. It explains one of my basic notions.

The team soon fell out of sorts with one another and we ended up with God and the Devil.

ML: A joint endeavor—

NM: Like those South Seas Companies in the 1700s, the 1800s. ~~They~~
~~started to fight and have been at odds ever since.~~



JMcN: If, as you say, the Creator is an artist, and not all creative works are equally successful, wouldn't this lead quite easily to racism—i.e., the "inferior race"—however one's defining it, whether the non-Aryans scapegoated by the Nazis, or the "ice people" of the Afro-centric extremists, wouldn't that "inferior" group simply be one of God's early, inferior drafts?

NM: Well, I reject the language of the question. One of the absolute disasters that Hitler brought to human understanding was an abuse of the concept of race. Because race offers us great clues. It is perfectly possible—and here again, one can only speculate—but it is perfectly possible that races, in the beginning, were Intelligent Design for different situations. In other words, for people in the tropics, God was saying, "well,

how can I design the heating system of their bodies so they can bear the heat ^{EXCESSIVE WARM?}
 (And make separate adjustments for the north.
 a little more easily?) ~~Ditto for the north~~ (We're discovering that living in

separate climates produces different relaxations and strictures of the throat.

Languages reflect that. Mind you, God as the artist, ^{might be} is discovering within the material itself, where the continuation might be. Certain sculptors talk about how they do not know exactly what the work will become until they

~~begin to~~ cut into the marble. The marble reveals ~~to them~~ what they must do with the next stroke. The same thing may be true with human design, or animal design. The environment plays ^{its} a great role.

JMcN: Your conception of God as artist assumes that God is both vastly—but not all-good, and vastly—but not all-powerful. But why couldn't God be not very compassionate at all and instead immensely curious? In other words, He is fascinated by, but not especially compassionate toward creation, much like a child who winds up toys and watches them slam into each other and chortles at the smashup. You say, "In other words, why are there volcanoes? Because God was not a perfect engineer" Or because like a two-year-old, God found the noise and fury fascinating and amusing.

To use the ultimately reductive phrase,
Maybe even the shrieks of the dying fascinating and amusing. You keep assuming God is a nice person, so to speak, ~~but~~ that seems a bit arbitrary.

~~Your reaction?~~

NM: It is arbitrary, and it could be my conditioning. I grew up in a household that was as religious as the next—it wasn't a dogma-driven household, but I remember my mother on Friday night praying before a lit

Candlelight,
—candle, praying to the Shekhina, who is, of course, the wife of God, and

there were tears in my mother's eyes and a feeling of great tenderness came from her. I think I always took it for granted that God is compassionate in relation to us.

Now, the arguments raised above cannot be refuted. I cannot say, "No, God is not going in for capers." Of course, God could go in for mean acts. But to me, ~~maybe because I, too, am searching for an orderly~~ ^{same as} ~~existence to some degree?~~ ^{So, I believe we've} the notion that God and the devil are in conflict with one another makes more sense, ~~to me.~~ ^{to me.} We've got this one God who is more good than not..

ML: Well, your mother's father was a rabbi.

NM: Yes. He studied to be a rabbi in Lithuania but by the time he came over here, the only way he could make his living was as a peddler. Then he moved to ^a small town called Long Branch, New Jersey, where he opened a butcher shop. There he worked as a butcher, ~~but~~ ^{but} there was only one synagogue in Long Branch, ~~and so~~ ^{but} when the rabbi was ill or off on vacation, my grandfather stood in for him. And my mother was very proud of this. The fundamental snobbery of the Jews—it was much better to be a

rabbi than a butcher. I was delighted, it gave ~~me~~ two different sets of inherited strains to develop */ in myself*.

ML: Well, I'm thinking of your mother's devotion and the tear in her eye—obviously, she must have come from a pretty religious household.

NM: My grandfather was ^{most} ~~very~~ religious—he began studying the Talmud when he was four years old. The best thing to be said about the Talmud is it's very hard to become a fundamentalist while studying it. It's all too easy to ~~go fundamentalist~~ when living with the Bible but difficult when reading the Talmud. *Unlike* ~~It is the opposite of~~ the Old Testament. It inquires into the nuances of things. For instance, *in that long-gone age,* ~~in the Talmud~~ people brought animals to the temple to be sacrificed. Very often there were small disasters—a poor man might have decided to sacrifice his prize heifer because his child was ill. But on his way *with his heifer* into the synagogue, the animal would defecate. Well, the Talmud *is really so* does focus on where ~~did it defecate?~~ *was it* ~~Did it do~~ it outside? *(on)* On the patio? *Oh, did!* Did it defecate on the steps? In the vestibule? In the aisle? At the altar approach? Was it on the altar? For all these are *separate distances from the most holy and so call for* different proximities, *penalties.* there are different punishments. In certain cases the animal can still be sacrificed. At other sites, the animal is lost completely—

if it defecates too close to the altar, it ~~has to~~ ^{must} be disposed of completely. It ~~cannot~~ ^{can't even} be eaten. In the Talmud, there are all these efforts to find zones of relative compatibility between God and humans—so it ~~is~~ ^{becomes} the exact opposite of the Old Testament, ~~or~~ ^{and} the New Testament where both lay it out. "This is the way it is. Don't argue with it." Then, of course, ~~they contradict~~ ^{the Book proceeds to} ~~itself~~ ^{the law is implausible,} themselves two pages later. ~~(Another day, another service.)~~

ML: Well—there is a certain measure of Orphic ambiguity in the utterances of Christ.

NM: I wouldn't call it ambiguity. I see it as the wars of the committees, ~~who are looking to fix behavior.~~ Analogous to what's going on between the Sunnis and the Shiites in Iraq, to wit, if I give you this, you must give me that.

ML: Did your mother talk much about her father?

NM: With a kind of gentle reverence. She adored him, and he was a very kind man. One story I loved when I was a kid. She once said, "My mother worked so hard in the butcher shop, and we as children worked hard, too. I worked hard—we'd get angry at my father because whenever a poor woman

would come in and he'd be weighing the meat she bought, he'd put his finger under the scale so it cost less. And we thought, That's all very well, but ^{is being taken} you're taking the money away from us."

ML: So he was a compassionate man.

NM: ~~Most people seemed to think he was a lovely man.~~ I was only four when he died. But I like to think so ~~too~~.

JMcN: Here's a question on ritual: All your ideas have an underlying assumption that God has a continuing, even a profound interest in ~~at least~~ some individuals, and certainly in the ultimate fate of the human species and the rest of His creation. This is completely at odds with some of the earliest recorded religious expression, namely from the Sumerians, whose prayers were always begging the gods to "Remember!" Prayer and ritual were a constant attempt to engage the attention of forgetful and indifferent gods who had created and abandoned humanity. This, by the way, wasn't a notion emerging from disasters and dislocations but could be found even as their civilization flourished. Can you comment?

NM: It's the other half of the equation. The obverse side of prayer is that it rarely gets answered. So rarely that people at religious meetings cite such events as miracles. ~~[in a southern accent] "I prayed to God and I didn't know if I was answered or not, but then, to my astonishment, I fell to me knees and I began to weep, I began to weep for the sores of Christ because, my prayer had been answered."~~ ^{usually} Prayers are not answered. I always felt the Lord has enough to take care of without having to listen to all that. Think of God wading through those prayers: "Oh, God, let my team win the game!" "Oh, God, let me get some money. Let me sell this old heap that's no good and get something better," all that, all that.

I don't think God listens to prayer. The Sumerians ~~I don't know anything about them.~~ ⁵ As you describe them, ~~they~~ were relatively sophisticated people who recognized that they ^{might} ~~prayed and prayed and prayed and~~ ^{but} answers did not come ^{that} ~~very~~ often.

^{let's suppose} Now ~~let me say~~ some people have a child who's ill, and they pray to God with great sincerity for their child to live, ~~and usually the child does live~~ ^{live} I'm willing to accept the idea that that's not something to sneer at. I'm not saying it helps or it works but humanly speaking, we can certainly feel for the parent.

JMcN: When you were talking about Gandhi, you said: "But there are a few [oxymorons] that are vital and immensely valuable. One of them is "heroic passivity." One's wisdom has to become the arbiter then. We can be encountering heroic passivity, or only the quasi- heroic variety and the latter might be a disaster." Along that line, what would you say about the contemplative life? By that I mean the cloistered orders who don't run hospitals or schools, just pray for the world. This is a strong Christian tradition, ditto for the Buddhists and some Hindus, and probably the Jews have some variant of that.

NM: The Twelve Just Men. . .

ML: Do you see a value in this kind of passivity?

NM: I would answer yes. I'm not opposed to that. If we're going to ^{come}get nearer to God, to find the God behind the God, it's perfectly conceivable to me that the God of which I speak does pay attention to transcendental sincerity. I have a crude analogy to offer. Occasionally, after having worked on a novel, you come across a review that's so intelligently written and gets to close to what you were attempting to do, or, even better, shows

ways you never saw for the book, ~~that your work is illuminated for you~~ but it does illuminate the work, well, I ~~can~~ ^{He makes me} esteem that critic and I do feel better about the act of writing. ~~Raise that~~ ^{so, do I} ~~up through many orders of magnitude~~ ^{also, that} I do think there are people who contemplate existence, who pray in depth to God and are qualified to do so. They are not petty ~~greed-bags~~. What I hate about prayer is most of the time it is ~~so~~ greedy, ^{and} ~~always~~ looking for an undeserved advantage. I'm a mediocrity, I'm kind of stupid, God, but maybe you'll help me because I'm praying to You.

JMcN: This is about Buddhism: what's your take on the Buddhist notion of the bodhisatva vow? Reaching nirvana is a catch-22—if you have achieved a level of deep compassion, enough to reach nirvana, you can't go happily off into it while other sentient beings are still here struggling and suffering. So, even though you personally have a free-pass out of this far from perfect world, you voluntarily reincarnate as a "bodhisatva"—a helper, a teacher, a way-shower—and keep reincarnating until everyone has achieved nirvana. Devout Buddhists of many persuasions—and all the monks and nuns, take the "bodhisatva vow" at an advanced stage of their training.

NM: Well, I think it's a beautiful notion. ~~I subscribe to it, not personally.~~
~~I wouldn't make it, I don't have that kind of compassion.~~ The difficulty I've
 always had with Buddhism is nirvana, ~~(that)~~ ^{As I see it,} the point of existence is not to
 rise above all petty feeling, but on the contrary, ~~the point is~~ ^{our} to be able to
 struggle with ~~those~~ ^{these} petty feelings in such a way that we ~~alter~~ ^{left} them into
~~somewhat~~ ^{emotions,} more vigorous feelings. ~~So we're more able to contribute to the~~
~~best of existence.~~ Nirvana always struck me as a place I had no interest in ^{reaching.}
^{whether} ~~if~~ it existed or not—I had no idea—it didn't appeal ~~to me.~~
 I remember talking to a friend of mine who's a good Buddhist and ~~scolding him,~~ getting
 into a polite rage over drinks: "You bastards always talk about nothingness,
^{arriving at} ~~then~~ getting to nothingness. I'm a writer, I live with nothingness every minute
 I'm working. I sit at my desk and for the first half hour there's nothing—I
 have to pass through that nothingness in order to get a few ideas. I said,
 you're not ^{really} ~~even~~ talking about nothingness. Nothingness is an awful state!
 It's an empty state. Why don't you talk about what it really is, which is the
ineffable? When you get into the ineffable, then you have something to talk
 about!"

I like to think he was struck with the thought, even a little.

Back to the bodhisatva: I think it's a ^{noble} beautiful conception. Whether
^{is another matter.} true or not, I have no idea. ~~In other words,~~ ^{who} can any human choose to

reincarnate rather than going into Nirvana? ~~I think the Lord might say,~~
~~"Reincarnation is not your choice, it's Mine."~~ In that sense, I'm ~~obviously~~
beyond my range. But it is a beautiful notion.

JMcN: At the end of your last interview, you said that in many ways the Creator was like a Greek god—strong yet not all powerful, flawed but noble, well, you know Greek myths are full of incidents where the gods took human form, or animal form. Apart from the well-known stories of Zeus turning up as this or that to impregnate some human woman, there are also stories of Zeus turning up as a beggar. In one story, peasants take in a wretched beggar overnight, share their far-from abundant meal with him, treat him very well, and next morning, find his bed empty and a sack of gold in his place—Zeus came calling—and rewarded them for their kindness to the poor! God showing up on earth is an idea embraced long before

Christian theology, [but I see nothing in your writings of God as a swan, a river, or anything as possibly Jesus.—jm note: I never wrote that last part!!

And it isn't logical!! Or even correct. Ancient Evenings is chock-full of the Pharaoh as a divine presence.]

NM: I don't see any need to answer the question. I just take it for granted.

If God wants to appear as a human, why not? And indeed, He would. But I

think ~~actually~~ ^{that} what's more interesting is the belief if you're good when you don't have to be good, something wonderful happens. Which I think is also

part of human nature. Humans live for revenge—but they also live for ~~a~~ ^{the}

~~belief~~ ^{belief} sentiment that we are capable of goodness. So ~~the~~ ^{For me,} brunt of those stories, ~~the~~

impact they have on me, is look at ^{is} the human desire involved. One, ~~that I~~ ^I

~~can~~ ^{want to} be capable of goodness and ~~two, that there's something in the universe~~ ^{indeed, there is}

that rewards you for goodness. Prayer is the ugly stepchild of that emotion.

~~What makes it interesting is the pot of gold—they weren't praying for the~~

~~gold. That's far better than saying, "Hey, I was good—now reward me!"~~

SECOND HALF INTERVIEW
NORMAN MAILER
J. MICHAEL LENNON
PROVINCETOWN, MA
MARCH 20, 2005

Via

JML: We're going to begin the discussion by talking about the God behind
the God.

NM: Your question, as I recall, was "What about the God behind the God?"

Since you assume that this God is not All Powerful, not all Good, but a
limited God, an Existential God; a God doing the best that He or She can do,
is there then a God behind?" And I said, "Yes, probably. But we're not near
enough to the God that is there for us". We finished the last interview about
a half hour ago but now I feel there were some remarks I want to add.

Neither of us is prepared, but on the other hand, I have been thinking about
this for a long time. Part of the interest that I've had in Theology, not my

fundamental interest, but still vital, has always been political. In other

words, what kind of political system would God like? And I'm not sure God

^{is} has been certain. I think God ^{man have} has been partial ^{was} at different times ^{to}

to Monarchy; to Communism; and certainly ^{was} interested in Democracy, in

Capitalism. God was interested in all these systems. ^{They} They are not without

comparison to the designs of His animals. Which ones work? ^{best?} I think a great

deal was put into Communism at one point. However, I also have this

notion that we are very much at the mercy of diabolical doings. At this point

^{is at war with} I see the Devil as an equal competitor to God. The Devil may even win.

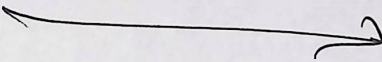
What form that would take, I don't begin to know. I wouldn't begin to have.

^{So} a notion as to what that means. But we could end badly. I think that's

^{It's} always been implicit. That's why I speak of an Existential God. Like an

Existential human He does not necessarily live forever.

You may ask: Where is the positive element in all of this? What might give us a sense of beauty, religious awe, or even a feeling that I want to be near to God. What do people like me believe? What are ^{our} ~~some~~ positive intimations of God? Well I do believe there are elements of compassion in our world, elements of goodness. ^I ~~We~~ might even believe that love may be more of a life-giving force than hate.



The war I have with Fundamentalists is not over such basics. I think many fundamentalists feel a need to be close to God and want to feel close. They feel deprived when they ~~can't~~ ^{don't feel they are near}. Which is one big reason why Fundamentalism works well for these evangelists who keep bringing people to God. What I oppose in Fundamentalism is, of course, the texts. This depends altogether on writings that were put together by committee, writings calculated two millennia ago to have powerful political effects. Paul ~~for~~

example, knew what he was up to, and his followers treat the Old and New Testaments as if they were revealed to us by God; as if God wrote them. I react viscerally against that. I hate to think that God is as bad a writer as some of the sentences in the Old Testament. And in the New Testament— even more so. That alone is enough to convince me forever that God had very, very little to do with either. In fact, I would suggest that if we need an author it was the Devil. He was the one to inspire Paul and the scribes. All that is to the side of the real question. I am asking what kind of society can I see that would make some sense? The majority of us are working ~~after all~~

actually ~~various blind fashion~~ to create a world where there is reasonable equity, ~~and~~

~~tender sense of the difficulty and delicacy and beauty of the human~~

condition at its best. What political form could that world take? ~~I do not~~

~~agree with the most powerful conservative thinkers.~~ If we start with the

brilliant arguments of writers as great as Nietzsche, we argue that it is wrong

to pay great attention to the weak, the poor, the hungry, the meek, the mediocre, the inferior. They are, argues Nietzsche, a huge drag upon existence. They are filled with hatred. They wish to destroy all that is noble or aristocratic, beautiful or fine. ~~And it~~ ^{the} is a sustainable argument—

Nietzsche is probably the most interesting and powerful conservative who ever wrote. Yet, as an argument, it only goes so far before it falls short, even crashes. And for a very simple reason. It is that the aristocracy was corrupt, the priesthood was and is corrupt, ^{the} oligarchs of capitalism are corrupt.

Conservatism is as filthy in its practices as its opponents. If the poor are malodorous, so are the rich. And the rich have advantages that the poor do not have.

On the other hand, Socialism has never worked. Why? Because it refuses to live with the notion that God exists and is part of the human balance. So a built-in difficulty intrudes on what was conceived as an

When the
equitable system. ~~The~~ people who come to power under socialism live in

vacuum of political omnipotence. That destroyed Stalinism, Social
democracy does not breed that kind of an open omnipotence. Socialists do
not function in a democracy. They face opponents, you are running a
political party and you do not believe in the existence of a God, then there *can be*

nothing superior to
no substitute for the hegemony of ego. ~~And ego is antithetic to modesty and~~

directed toward more and more power. O in my opinion, I have to say that I
would be happier with world leaders who believed they might be in
collaboration with certain desires of God (provided it is an existential God,
an artist) and in no way Jehovah, in no way All-Good and All-Powerful.

Avoiding egotism, countermanding egotism in the politically mighty is the

So, then, is
key. ~~My feeling is~~ that to advocate a socialism without an existential sense

of religion is to make a profound error. The beauty of Christ--what Christ *was*

saying to all of us—is that the poor have as much reason to exist as the

wealthy. Nietzsche hated that. He argued that Christ finally was nothing but

~~a rabble-rouser~~. I don't want to over-simplify ^{Nietzsche's} ~~his~~ argument, but finally he

did feel that Christ was not only speaking to the unwashed but arousing a

great rage in them and this rage would yet destroy all that was noble in

civilization. I would argue that unless we have a profound understanding of

the needs of the poor, and the rights of the poor, and the passion of the poor

to become more than ~~what~~ they are at present, we are merely reshuffling the

horrors of society. So I say that socialism without a belief in a God cannot ^{compassionate existential}

^{whereas} work as well as a socialism with a belief in God, ~~provided~~ and here is the

key difference ~~provided it is a belief in an Existential God, a divinity~~ ^{who}

~~whose task is even more difficult than ours. That God wants the same things~~ ^{much of what}

^{can open life and society for us} ~~that we want and often sees further ahead than we do but not always, not~~

~~completely. So it is not a slavish relation to God so much as a sense of the~~

~~Beauty of the possibilities that God can open for us in life. . If that is~~

workable, if a socialist society should ever exist with such a belief in an Existential God, I think we might begin to get into some of the beginnings of human equity. Let me say, since I have a great distrust of large organizations and obsessive government power, that I also think small business must be a viable part of any state socialism.

JME: All right. Let me add one thing which immediately came to mind.

When you were running for mayor of New York in 1969, you spoke of enclaves of people who had small businesses who respected each other's turf, they respected each other. There was a sense of community; you could live wherever you wanted. There was a real Existential sense of what your community would be like.

NM: You find out through ^{them} how the society works. Which social concepts prove most viable. One of the extremes was a society of dog lovers. On that turf, the animals could defecate all over the streets and nobody had to clean it up. That was just the dog-lovers few blocks.

I think the real problem, of course, would be that there would have to be structure at the top. You couldn't keep modern communities alive without huge factories. Or without huge intellectual networks. All of that.

But, at least, ^{then} let the largest organizations be socialist rather than ^{corporate} corporate.

stet { Because the corporation cannot be trusted. The corporation is—I've called it the Big Empty. The corporation is psychopathic. It does not care about its past, it has very little interest in its previous history, it has very little interest in its future.

JML: It does have an interest in its future.

NM: ~~Most of that interest in the future is restricted to the well being of the~~
~~present~~. Things are done without looking to the long future. For example,
out-sourcing is an immediate way of making profits. I ~~would argue that they~~
~~are much more interested, each year, in the bottom line.~~ They have to show a
profit every year, just like the psychopath has to feel that he and his ego are
larger today than yesterday
developing into more and more profit. ~~(Other wise they will slump and go~~
existential) would
go into a fearful depression. By contrast, under ~~socialism it could be more~~

natural to have an interest in the past and the future. The idea ~~would be that~~

~~you don't look for huge profits in socialism,~~ *but* you look for the well being of *all,*

~~the society, for the well being of all.~~ To keep such Socialism alive, ~~to keep~~

~~it from deteriorating into one huge mega government,~~ small business has to

be encouraged, and the notion of community, of neighborhood. A two-tiered

society with a firm understanding that one tier cannot invade the other.

Behind it all would be the idea that we might even be working with God.

Not working to obey Him, ~~to~~ ~~Him~~, to praise Him, to slave for His

vanity, but on the contrary to live with the beautiful idea that ~~we might even~~

~~be working with God, that~~ God shares desires with us, that we are at last

working together, yes, finally, after centuries and millennia of hatred of God,

~~beseechments~~ *beseechments*

~~beseechments~~ of God, intense if mindless prayer, valleys and promontories of

ritual, attempts to take God by force, attempts to do without god; ~~after all,~~

~~that~~, attempts to glorify Him at the expense of all reason, there might be at

last an agreeable sense that, yes, we are working with God and God is

working with us, and we don't understand God altogether and God doesn't

understand us altogether but we even might have a certain ~~tenderness~~ *regard*

~~compassion~~ for each other. If you have a society built on the religious

notion that God needs us even as we need God, that offers much more

promise than the ongoing idea now, the ridiculous notion of corporate

capitalism that greed is a good, ^{"but don't get us} and God is All-Good.

~~is wrong, they say, we're in
church on Sunday just
like anybody else, and
God is also All-Good.
(Just kidding!)~~

Metaphysical Interview 6

*Ready for final version
Dante's poem*

MICHAEL LENNON: March 20th, 2005, interview 6.

I know you've been thinking about Intelligent Design and I have, too.

But aren't you an unlikely person to find credence there?

NORMAN MAILER: Why?

ML: Because it's a pet theory of the fundamentalists.

NM: That's the last of my concerns—what fundamentalists think. ~~I start as~~

Pro or con, a)

~~a novelist. A novelist cannot afford to be ideologically bound. It's~~

have to because there is a tendency
~~something we fight, even if we tend to tie ourselves up by way of our style.~~

are two good examples
~~Take Henry James and Hemingway. Both were fabulous stylists, but~~

~~they paid for the huge achievement of their separate styles by being able to~~

bound to
~~write only about certain kinds of things. They were locked into their style.~~

~~Picasso, as I've said before, had a huge influence on me because for him,~~

as he saw it
~~style was not a part of one's person, not necessarily. I think he saw style as~~

from separate directions
~~a tool with which you could attack reality. First from one direction, then~~

on different occasions
~~from another.~~

*Michael - Your answer, see p 20
were to be called
with each other*

~~As far as this idea of Intelligent Design, let me say I come to it~~
~~superficially. On the other hand, the premise behind these interviews, is~~
~~that I won't be embarrassed by my lack of knowledge. Theologians~~ ^{not}
~~matter what high level they celebrate~~ ^{also intellectually} ~~they are trapped by their ideas. They~~
 are obliged to do their thinking with received ideas, that is, ideas they are
 not free to change. (As, for example, God is All-Good and All-Powerful.)

So theologians build their philosophies by way of ~~unstable~~ mental
~~acrobatics,~~ ^{gymnastics.} ~~So, there are many questions they cannot begin to confront.~~

~~I must say~~ ^{the} tsunami comes to mind. All they can offer for
 explanation is that God is a great mystery and His ways are unfathomable.
~~It was as if they delighted in the fact~~ ^{they were hiding} ~~they could hide~~ behind the "mystery"
 one more time—for the twenty-eighth thousandth time.

My feeling has always been that ~~God created us in His image or in~~ ^{we are created in God's}
~~His image.~~ That seems reasonable to me. God, by my notion, is always
 laboring, to find a better, more well-adapted creation than His ^{last} ~~latest~~ design.
 Remember my remark that the dinosaurs, at one point, must have been a
 huge part of God's beliefs. He had dared to create this immense animal
^{who} might be able to rule the jungles, the mountains, and the plains. ^{Then} ~~They~~ He
 discovered that He had misdesigned it. Had to go back to the drawing

board. God, like us, makes mistakes. I must say that I had no idea Intelligent Design has been given to us by fundamentalists.

ML: Well, I don't want to say they invented the idea. It's been around since the 18th century when the world was conceived to be virtually a clock, it was so perfectly designed. Intelligent Design grows out of the Enlightenment.

NM: Perhaps I have a misunderstanding of what is meant by Intelligent

Design. I can only speak of it on the basis of reading one good article in the

New York Times, which spoke of a concept ^{it as} that was at odds with evolution,

~~because there might well be~~
It offered the notion that there may be a force in existence that brings a

^{adds to} ~~(sense of design into Creation itself.~~ ^{to Evolution,} I thought this ^{was} perfect for what I am

talking about. Because I do think, yes, that God is always looking to make

existence ~~(better and better)~~ ^{and survival of} more finely designed, God also makes errors.

~~the Rarest may be too rough and ready a method,~~
God is an artist. As an artist, He doesn't always succeed, He can fail as

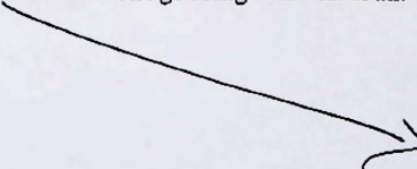
well

ML: You understood the article, but can't you see how it would lend support to people who are opposed to evolution? Intelligent Design, by contrast, shows the hand of the Creator.

NM: It is ~~only~~ ^{So they} people like fundamentalists ~~who~~ ⁼ have no understanding of an artist, ~~who~~ ^{present} are able to speak that way. As they ~~saw~~ ^{all out in six days}, the Creator saw it all at once, did it perfectly and brought it ~~out~~. Lo and behold, it's been perfect ever since. He never failed once. The design was extraordinary from the start. He even gave us an Old and New Testament to bolster our understand^{ing} of His immaculate design.

ML: Let me say what I understand to be the position of present-day Intelligent Design. It would say: we don't know exactly which processes of natural selection, mutation, evolution, are directly related to the Intelligence used to create the world, but we are saying that what does exist out there in nature speaks of the presence of an Intelligence behind it at some level—maybe at some removes back, but it is certainly opposed to those fundamentalists who would say God created the world in ^{an} ~~one~~ instant six thousand years ago. ~~You wouldn't go along with that at all.~~

NM: ~~Of course not.~~



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~~ML:~~ Intelligent Design ^{proposes} ~~people do say~~ ^{every} that evolution cannot explain all the appearance of design that we see in natural life. Intelligence had also to be involved. ~~Whereas Darwin said, Here's the process, I don't know if there~~
~~was anything behind it.~~

NM: It certainly makes ~~great~~ sense to me that Intelligent Design is one of the elements in evolution. What I find ~~comfortable, even~~ agreeable about it as a notion, is that if we do have a God who created a universe as manifold as ours—how indeed could it have been done without Intelligent Design?

^{in that} ~~When~~ having notions that this is where to go, ^{here, this is how to do that,}
this is how to develop this species, here's what's wrong with ^{that} ~~this~~ species,

^{and} there ^{did I} ~~didn't~~ conceive of enough? The other element present, which I ^{am}
^{really to} ~~must~~ emphasize over and over is that God is not all-powerful. These

creations go out into an existence that doesn't necessarily receive them with generosity. ^{In the process} They ~~change under~~ external circumstances ~~but~~ God as the
^{little} designing artist has to say to Himself or Herself, "I didn't anticipate this."

ML: Tectonic plates. . .

NM: Exactly. Tectonic plates are an example of God's incapacity to design the world so well that ^{these plates wouldn't shift and cause} there wouldn't be shifting tectonic plates and ensuing hideous earthquakes, incommensurable loss, and whole failures of explanation as to why God permitted ^{it, or, worse,} or ~~willed~~ it. How much simpler to ^{anticipate it and say} assume He didn't ~~indeed~~ just like us, He was agnostic.

ML: ^{can't it be said that} ~~As to~~ engage the argument, the tectonic plates are just another example of the randomness and the chaos of the universe.

NM: But, the artist works to extract order from chaos. I would not even say that chaos is a lack of order. Chaos ^{may often be a} is the mix of sets of orders that are too complex and too disparate to be ordered within the consciousness of ^{the observer,} ~~whoever would order it.~~ If you will, each element in chaos can have its own set of laws and processes, but ^{when} ~~that~~ organization within a particular chaos comes into conflict with another set of orders ^{they prove} and they are incompatible. ^{At the worst they} ~~They~~ ^{we might also have to} tear each apart. I also would postulate Malign Design, ^{there may be} ~~in~~ through our universe. ^{does one} ~~By which I mean there are~~ forces not at all congenial to God's concepts of creativity. ^{By the} ~~How do I arrive at this? Because nowhere~~ ^{inevitable observation that nowhere} in existence can you find a free ride. Anything that comes along which

~~appears to be~~
~~seems~~ wonderful in the beginning, meets opposition, enjambments. Sooner or later a forward motion is paralyzed, or stunned, or hindered.

ML: Do you then espouse a theory of Intelligent Design that has imperfect design?

NM: The design can be excellent until it runs into chaotic elements that could not be ~~comprehended~~ ^{anticipate} in advance. ~~off~~ In their

conception, however, they are beautiful...

~~ML: That's imperfection.~~

~~NM: No. Perfection may not be the best word here.~~ Sometimes you see creatures in the universe who are so exquisitely designed that the moment one speaks of Intelligent Design, you say, of course! Orchids, snow flakes, tigers. Evolution, trial and error, could not have produced some of the beautiful forms we see in the animal world. Race horses. Certain dogs.

Even if we find most insect forms repellent, nonetheless, when we look at ^{a magnifying lens} them under the microscope, we can see the extraordinary work that went

into them. It becomes harder to believe that evolution said, "yes, the ~~six~~ ^{myriad}

~~hooks and~~ feelers on this particular leg will have ~~these~~ ^{whitened} wonderful curves ~~like~~ ^{remnants of}

says evolution came
scimitars," and this ~~will come~~ about because it is the only way to do it for

the survival of the species. It is ~~literally~~ easier to believe that ~~it was~~ *these insects*

(legs were)
designed for beauty as well as function.

ML: You know the old cliché. You put a million monkeys in a room with a million typewriters—or a billion, whatever it is—eventually one of them will produce War and Peace or Hamlet.

Get thee to a computer, Satan!

NM: That's the sort of thing you go to a computer for. I forget the

~~incredible number but it's too vast to be interesting.~~

~~ML: Let me give you the criticism of Intelligent Design.~~

~~NM: I'm listening.~~

ML: In the vastness of the universe, there are billions and billions of stars, ~~and~~ solar systems and galaxies. So far, by our limited knowledge, of the ones we've looked at, not one comes close to having the basics to design a universe. The water and rain, the flora and fauna that went into creating this amazing, organic system that has been able to work together over a period

of time. There's nothing like that anywhere else ^{that} we can see in the universe.
 , Couldn't it be we're just a fluke of the cosmos? In a universe so vast and
 with so many possibilities, finally there is one planet that came to us out of
 the equivalent of mega-billions of monkeys ^{pounding} who pounds out Hamlet by
 hit or miss.

NM: ~~But~~ I would call that an argument for Intelligent Design. ~~Because we—~~
~~find nothing that works remotely like anything on earth.~~ All that fineness of
 detail—I see that precisely as the powerful argument for Intelligent Design.

ML: What then is the function of all the other stars and galaxies?

NM: All we can say with any authority is that in our solar system, the earth
 seems to be the only planet that is now alive with creatures. So it may be
 that other gods—conceivably gods more powerful than ours—have had
 even larger failures. It is possible that the earth succeeded in accomplishing
 something other planets were unable to do. Given the limited powers of
 astronomy today, there seem to be no near galaxies that are comparable.
 But there may be. There very well may be. There are so many stars. So
 many possibilities. ^{So many UFOs.} (All we can begin to say is that it seems reasonable to
 posit a god for our universe.

ML: For our solar system.

NM: For our solar system. It may be that this God failed with other planets. Prior to the earth, I don't ^{way it} even begin to approach that. It's ~~all~~ too easy and too fanciful. I would say it is far more difficult to conceive of our existence if there is no God. Because then we are back to the trillions of monkeys writing Hamlet and that is hard to believe. It is much easier for me to suppose that Hamlet is a part of human design. And if it's not, if it took a nano-trillion of monkeys to produce an equivalent of Hamlet, what a waste. There has to be the assumption, along with everything else, that existence is moving toward a goal. It is certainly possible that existence itself in the deepest, most cosmic, sense, is in peril, ^{so} it is moving forward of necessity. It is as if ^{existence itself} we will have a rendezvous with disaster if we do not reach a certain period or place at a certain time, as if indefinables have to be achieved in order to protect the continuation of existence.

This is what I would term reasonable paranoia. By which I mean one can think about it without undergoing dire declines or manic outbursts. But if there is some reason to this last assumption, then Intelligent Design is a crucial part of it, ~~had a great deal of Intelligent Design in their work~~

In effect you are saying
 ML: Fine. I want to take a chance with this discussion. I want to take a flyer, so to speak. You tell us that if you think at all like a philosopher, it is because you have been a novelist all your life. Splendid! I want to see what you can do with a parallel that's apparent to me. Novelists, after all, create worlds.

NM: Yes, ~~we~~ certainly try to, at times.

Can you apply
 ML: Good. Let's take the notion of Intelligent Design in relation to the novel.

NM: ~~It's true.~~ You are right. As I said at the beginning, true artisans like

Henry James ~~and Hawthorne~~ were given over entirely to design. It's as if

let's
 their works had to live entirely by themselves, as if they felt less need as

some of us
 creators to come in contact with the raw breath of existence.

ML: All right. Let me take another leap. Is there any relation between your assumption that Intelligent Design is confronted and altered by existence and your disdain for plot in your novels?

Well, good! That is a
NM: That's a good and challenging question. Before I get into it, let me say
a word or two about James Joyce. Unlike Hemingway and Henry James
who are not only great novelists ^{but} ~~and~~ avatars of Intelligent Design so pure
that their works tend to live by themselves, ~~once it is designed, if you will,~~
Joyce, to the contrary, is playing at the very edge of chaos. He's saying,
"Look how much you can do with what would be chaos in anyone else's
hands." Which is why it is ~~very~~ hard to get near to Joyce. We have an
instinctive sense that we want to avoid chaos, and so it's very hard to
understand him. But he did undertake to organize ^{the tower of Babel,} ~~whole areas of chaos.~~

ML: I don't want to lose my point. In many essays, many interviews, you
have said in effect, I don't worry about plot. Plot is much less important to
me than character. You always have a storyline, but your plots are not. . .

NM: They're not clockwork.

ML: No. So I've wondered if for you to have a plot that is neat and tight
and ordered would run counter to your ideas of metaphysics.

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Agree you're good!

NM: ~~Good~~ Plot, if you will, is Intelligent Design. It is interesting to me— and I thought about it a lot in the years I wrote Harlot's Ghost because the CIA is a perfect example of plot, that is, Intelligent Design, coming into contact and conflict with the world. The reason I don't like plots to prevail is that they don't allow the figures in the book, the characters, to push the limits of ~~wholly~~ pre-designed plot to the point where life rejects the plot, ~~because life finds the plot too unacceptable~~ ^{clearly def. in the} and so throws the design into another set of conditions no longer as ~~definable~~ ^{analyst}.

Borges is the brilliant ~~model~~ ^{analyst} of this process. Borges wrote five and six page short stories that start with incredible plots. Then the plots get shattered. All in five or six pages. Incredible stories. He, like Joyce, was fascinated with making attacks on the nature of chaos. Borges showed us for all time—talk about a novelist's novelist! He said to us: "Look at what you're all doing. You take yourselves too seriously. You miss the fact that once a plot is shattered, life still goes on. Another species of life begins and you have to deal with it."

Take this back to Intelligent Design. God looks for Intelligent Design. Then that Intelligent Design gets worked upon by existence. Orville Wright designed an airplane. Don't we know that! And after he designed it, he got it up in the air for the first time, and it flew a few

hundred feet. He went back to the drawing board to refine the knowledge received. Intelligent Design cannot exist without experience. So long as it remains Intelligent Design, pure but untested, it remains analogous to any number of very talented young novelists who never publish because they never get their book to the point where they want it to be seen. They will not put their book out on the waters. Whereas God, I will obviously argue, ^{with lemmahen} launches each Intelligent Design to see what happens to it. That's how God learns, how God gets to the next ^{and better} Intelligent Design.

Let me enjoy ^{an extreme} a wild ^{postulation} aspect of this ~~notion~~. In my book about Henry Miller, I spoke of three men coming into a hostess's living room, Henry James, Hemingway, and Henry Miller. Each takes off his hat and behold! There's a ^{big} ~~cock~~ turd on each head. James, I then go on to say, might have perished from an experience that awful. Hemingway would have gone into a depression—he would have seen it as emblematic of the nature of life. Just when life seemed something you could enjoy, unexpected ^{even odious} disasters shattered your mood. ^{Bah} And Miller would have said, "Good Lord, how did that shit get on my head? And look at the hostess. Are her nostrils quivering or is it her twat? She is so excited and perturbed—what a wonderful moment!" Miller is an example of someone who couldn't stay with a plot for five minutes because he wanted to smash into the world and