

Dates of 5 Markers ^{theological} interviews :

TYPED

TAPED

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6-17-03

12-30-02

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7-5-03

7-5-03

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✓ 12-12-03

11 ~~12~~-26-03

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✓ 8-26-04

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12-22-04

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3-28-05

3-20-~~21~~05

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6-3-05

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7-5-05

- Laura Esquivel
- 'Bucking the Tiger' by Bruce Olds
- 'Flight of the Swan' by Rosario Ferré
- 'The Company' by Arabella Edge
- 'Savage Beauty: The Life of Edna St. Vincent Millay' by Nancy Milford
- 'I Don't Want To Go To Jail' by Jimmy Breslin
- 'Vermeer: A View of Delft' by Anthony Bailey
- 'Not Much Fun: The Lost Poems of Dorothy Parker' by Stuart Y. Silverstein
- 'The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s over Germany, 1944-1945' by Stephen E. Ambrose
- 'The Dying Animal' by Philip Roth
- 'Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude' by Ray Monk
- 'I Cannot Tell A Lie, Exactly' by Mary Ladd Gavell
- 'Madonna: An Intimate Biography' by J. Randy Taraborelli
- 'Hostage' by Robert Crais
- 'According to Queeney' by Beryl Bainbridge
- 'The Columnist' by Jeffrey Frank
- 'Waging Modern War' by General Wesley K. Clark
- 'The Last Empire'

Norman Mailer Questions

1st interview

December 30, 2002
Provincetown, MA,
N. Mailer's home

1. In one interview you said that you believed that God created the universe. In other places, you have said that perhaps God and the Devil were lesser divinities in liege to larger powers, who, I would think, might be the ultimate creators. Who or what do you feel is the ultimate power in the universe, and who created it?
2. Scientists now believe that the expansion of the universe is now accelerating? Does this circumstance fit in with your ideas of what you have called "a charged and libidinous universe?" I mean, is the ever-expanding, accelerating nature of the cosmos reflected in your idea of a God who can grow, develop?
3. You have written that man is probably more good than evil. Do you extend this notion to the balance in the universe?
4. Evil, you have more than hinted, is growing in power. How much has good lost over the millennia? Was there a golden age when good was in the ascendant?
5. In most religious systems--all that I can think of--there is a relationship between cosmology and ethics, between the deity's nature and identity--his providence, as the Puritans called it--and codes for human living. In Judaism and Christianity, for example, God's nature is reflected in the rules for living provided to humans. What is the relationship in your system between the nature and shape of the ruling forces in the universe and how humans should conduct themselves?
6. Of the four last things in Christian eschatology--death, judgment, heaven and hell--you have commented, at least obliquely, on all but heaven. It has occurred to me that the open-ended conclusions of your novels--all of them really--the lack of conclusiveness for your protagonists, is an obvious reflection of your metaphysics. Why have you given heaven short shrift? It has also occurred to me that lacking a vision of heaven, your belief system is unlikely to have more than one adherent.
7. Whenever you have spoken about reincarnation, you have done so in an ironic manner, or a novelistic one; you talk about witty directives in the Bureau of Karmic Re-Assignment. For example, you have many times said that God might respond to the request of a soul who wished to be re-born as a great black athlete by making the person a cockroach--but the fastest one on the block. I don't recall you ever taking about more routine re-assignments. So how does reincarnation work? Who controls the process? How does it tie in with God's need for humans as soldiers in the cosmic war with the Devil? Is it an operation run totally by God? Are all souls recycled? Are new ones created? Does it ever end?
8. In the Judaic-Christian system, man is created in God's image, but in yours it is the opposite. God has all the traits of human beings--but writ large. Unlike most theologians, you don't seem to conceive of characteristics or powers of the deity that we cannot imagine. Has your God has been leveled down?
9. What do you say to the criticism that you have affiliated the Devil with those things you personally despise: technology, plastic, modern architecture, the corporation, advertising, television and so forth?
10. Because of your belief in states of grace and the importance of dying in them, you seem to be closer to Catholicism than any other religion. The Catholic Church's latest problems seem to have troubled you more than, say, the shrinking number of Episcopalians or Jews. What is the great attraction of Catholicism for you?
11. How much has the Holocaust been responsible for your religious and philosophical views? If there had never been a Hitler would your notion of a limited, embattled God have been conceived?
12. In *St. George and the Godfather*, you say, "The world's more coherent if God exists. And twice coherent if he exists like us." Of course, you are right, but I'm afraid this is wish-fulfillment logic. God need not exist merely to satisfy your desire for order. Perhaps the world is incoherent, ~~the~~ disordered, ~~messy~~ ^{chaotic} ~~messy~~ ^{chaotic}. What then? Or is your system a bulwark against nihilism?

History, random

13. Years ago you wrote that "the essence of biology seems to be challenge and response, risk and survival, war and the lessons of war," and this is of course is the basis of your cosmic vision. Do you see any problem with using evolutionary biology as the ultimate way to understand the nature of metaphysics, I mean, the nature of Being with a capital "B"? Not to mention cosmology and eschatology.

14. Intellect, you have said more than once, may be the devil's tool, but the senses, "the authority of the senses," to quote St. Augustine, seem to be divine, or holy, in your scheme of things. I take it that in your view of history the Enlightenment and the rise of science were not steps forward. True?

15. Melville said once, "Lord, when shall we stop growing?" Is it fair to say that growth, especially growth stemming from courageous acts, is a major chord in theological belief systems?

Questions for NM, #2

16.

At the very end of *Ancient Evenings*, Meni II says, "purity and goodness were worth less to Osiris than strength," which is a restatement of Cherry's belief in *An American Dream* that "God is weaker because I didn't turn out well," and Rojack's that "God was not love but courage. Love came only as a reward." You have returned to this idea many times in your books. But while seeing it's force, I have always wondered about it. Couldn't it be argued that love creates strength just as surely as courage generates love? In Christian belief, love can move mountains, but in yours it is more of a passive virtue?

ORDER

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2nd interview

Questions for July 5, 2003
Maker on God + Devil

- In our first interview you said ~~that you have~~ ^{belief} ~~humans have~~ an imprinted or inborn ~~belief~~ in both God's existence + his limited nature. ~~for other. Don't it to do you think~~ # Isn't it also true that ^{many} humans have an imprinted belief in God's omnipotence. Why is your imprinting the correct one, the superior one? Imprinted belief in heaven?
- You posit God as an artist. Couldn't he just as well be an engineer, a general, or public administrator, a diplomat, etc.
- You ^{have} presented ~~the~~ the notion of a cosmic battle, ~~between~~ a Miltonian battle between God + Devil at the beginning of time. God wins, but ~~is~~ not by much; he is wounded in the struggle. What ~~is~~ are the chief differences between them? How are their natures different?

- Do you feel as negative about the revelations of other ~~major~~ religions - Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, ~~then~~ Gnosticism - as you do about Judaism and Christianity?

- Your religion: ~~the~~ God is imperfect; the Devil is perhaps equal in cleverness; there is no heaven, no hell, the Bible + Koran and all revelation is unreliable at best; ^{souls are not eternal;} ~~after~~ ^{not} ~~is~~ ^{resurrected} no final judgment; Limbo won't work in your system. But I'd beyond that Purgatory might fit and might be related to your ideas of metempsychosis (reincarnation). It fits your notion of the mixed nature of humans.

In ¹⁹⁵⁹ AD (330) you say that humankind "is roughly more good than evil." ~~Do you still~~ ~~believe~~ If this is the case, it would seem as if this predominance should signal the ultimate victory of good, of God. Do you still believe ~~this~~ that man is more good than evil?

Why and how is
Reincarnation : ~~a~~ ~~the~~, a soul clean
In reincarnation ? Does God, or his
Karmic Bureaucrats, extinguish
some hideous souls, or must they
give up, commit suicide

I'm having trouble seeing how
evolution + reincarnation ~~relate to~~ ^{mesh in your}
~~scheme of things~~ ^{are} ~~interdependent~~. Did they begin
simultaneously? ~~or~~ ~~the they~~ Could one
of or the other end, cease to function

Is ~~the~~^{the} the soul of a child dependent on the child's parents + procreation? Or does God insert the reincarnated soul at the appropriate moment, e.g. when sperm penetrates egg?

Ladder of reincarnation: is each successive cohort slightly better than the previous? If not, what's the point of the process?

- What are the most unmistakable signs of the cosmic war that you see in the world? Or is it all internal, an intuition?

- If things are indeed getting worse and the devil is winning, why would he wish to destroy rather than run the world as the ultimate tyrant

- Spirit - soul distinction

- It strikes me that there are no easy rallying points in your religion. Your God, who you have called noble in some places, seems more like an Afghan warlord fighting another Afghan warlord

The Jewish-Christian mystic Simon Weil believed that God became limited by creating the universe, which she saw as both an act of renunciation and one of power - sharing with humans, who now had a major role in the universe, along with the Devil, who gained immensely by God's creative act. Does this idea resonate at all?

~~It is clear~~

- It is clear why courage is cardinal virtue for you: only by being strong + daring will evil be defeated. The pacifism and love of Gandhi + M.L. King would never defeat Satan. He would applaud their use.
- Role of saints + prophets + demons + rebels as intermediaries in cosmic war?

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Norman Mailer

Heroes

you note:

Ultimately a hero is a man who would argue with the gods, and so awakens devils to contest his vision. The more a man can achieve, the more he may be certain that the devil will inhabit a part of his creation.

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Why shouldn't a hero's actions dampen and discourage the activity of ^{the} devil?

Arg. human of 150 years ago:

- died at 50
- no education
- never traveled
- no electricity, few books

- worked 80 hours/wk

- few freedoms

- beset by superstition, racism, poverty

With all its drawbacks, technology changed

all this. I take it you would argue that these were short-term gains, local effects and that in the long run it will destroy no

47 yrs
6 from h.s.
890 xale pphs
1490 hms
a bottle

- Your view of the Devil confuses
me. Is he an active, wily
greedy General, or a principle
of negation, nothingness.
Does he want to rule or
destroy?

Sligo Press

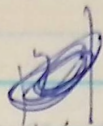
PROSPECTUS

A Limited Edition of

Norman Mailer's Letters.

3rd interview

11/28/03



1. Given the usual subtleties about good + evil that flow from trad. assurances that God is in command of the universe, ~~but~~ and your rejection of these, ~~we~~ how exactly can we know that what we think of as good is ^{actually} good?

What if the traditional virtues of charity, compassion, forgiveness, forbearance are not virtues but vices, errors or evils?

(1) 2. You have spoken of the authority of the senses quoting St. Thomas ~~and the~~ ^{tho's} What is ~~the~~ authority based on? From where does its sanction flow? What empowers it if not ~~is~~ God? (Yet the ~~evil~~ evil, as almost all cultures have long been associated with the ~~world~~ + flesh + the world, the sensual.

3. Is there any merit, use or value
in Revelation, in the holy books
of the great religions? Or
are they merely to be seen as historical
artifacts, ^{quite} ^{but} ^{useless} ^{curious} it is

4. You spoke ^{earlier} of a time in the distant
future when after some "definitive"
metamorphosis of existence
human vision would join God's
vision and travel across the
heavens. What are the necessary
conditions for this to ~~exist~~ occur?
What needs to happen?

5 — If your idea of the artist, ~~as I surmise~~,
is that s/he at their best can
clarify the good-evil struggle and
propel humanity toward the good
is this accurate?

6. — You have lamented the debasement of language
How does the rise of the electronic
medium ^{the image} and the fall of the written
word affect the larger struggle?

7. - love is courage again Thoreau

H. James' idea of the greatest act,
the which ^{requires} both love + courage, is

(8) an act of renunciation. Doing
something for which there is not
extrinsic reward or recognition
save a personal sense of achievement
or ennoblement. ~~Among you~~

One can find instances of this
kind in your work, but more
often ~~there is~~ a bold act of
brave + courage is highlighted
Is this because of your good-
evil theology?

8.

Probe:

You said earlier that humans were
"created by something or someone marvelous
which or who is not that unlike
ourselves". So we ~~are~~ are in some
way created in the image of
good, of God. Doesn't this
argue that we are more good
than evil? ~~It~~

9.

If ~~the~~ the devil is all evil +
God + humans of mixed

(10) virtue + evil, it seems
that evil has ~~more~~ the bad
cards, no?

Some like Irenaeus + Augustine
the "early Christians" believed that
was heresy to believe that
human experience was analogous
to divine experience. ~~for~~ Others
~~have wrestled with this thought~~
like St. Thomas ~~the~~ author
of a suppressed gospel, thought
the human psyche to ~~be~~ derive
it's pattern in Gods. You
have wrestled with this question
as well, am I right?

~~St. Thomas~~
In Thomas' gospel it is made
clear that humans have the obligation
to bring forth what is within them,
and it will save them. And to
repress ~~the~~ what is inside will
destroy the person. Your position

your position on Jesus is similar
to that of Muslims. They revere
him as a teacher, ^{+ prophet} but do not
recognize him as a savior

Questions for Norman Mailer on God and the Devil
For 8-17-04 interview

4th
interview

1. How far down the chain of being does the war between God and the Devil manifest itself? You have said that dogs have souls; I assume therefore that both sides have enlisted them. What about other animals? Are some always on God's side—eagles, doves, whales—and some always on the Devil's—vultures, hyenas and snakes of course—or does each species have divided loyalties?
2. Are there parts of existence that are unclaimed by neither side? I'm thinking of microbes and uninhabited planets, the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.
3. What are the ways the Devil can influence the evolutionary process? Only from the outside by causing ecological disasters? Or from the inside of the process itself?
4. In most religions saints play a tremendous role. They intercede for lesser humans; they give witness of God's greatness; they are models for humanity by their ability to withstand suffering, some of it self-imposed. Do you see saints in the same way?
5. You told me once that you had had an encounter with a succubus, right here on Commercial Street in Provincetown. Can you describe this experience and relate the demon to your theology?
6. Because your God and Devil are limited I assume that human perfection is truly impossible for you. If a human being were all good, she or he would be better than God. And if we could find an absolutely perfect human, your theology would be hard-pressed to account for he or she.
7. How much of the misery in the world—poverty, disease, crime, and ecological horrors—can we trace to the Devil, or the cosmic war, and how much is just in the nature of things? Jesus said we would always have the poor with us, as if even God could not give everyone a living wage.
8. Are wealth and poverty evolutionary assets? Are they pre-determined by God when his karmic agents tap a soul for reincarnation?
9. You have strong feelings about the injustices related to wealth. How is wealth related to the cosmic war?
10. I can guess how the great monsters and heroes of history are part of your theological scheme, but how does a thinker like Karl Marx fit in. His ideas on wealth must have appealed to the Lord, but Communism might have been more appealing to the Devil. It's more complex, I'm sure, but how so?
11. Do writers and philosophers of great stature play special roles in the cosmic drama?
12. Peace of mind at death is important in many religions, none more so than Catholicism, which has a sacrament—extreme unction—for the occasion. Why is the state of mind at death of such importance in your scheme of things?
13. You have said little about Purgatory as an idea, as a place, as a metaphor. What is your view of it? And how about Limbo?
14. Can you relate any of the current upheavals in the world to your schema? Afghanistan, Iraq, the Sudan, North Korea? Do God and the Devil advance their causes via big elections, like the one before us now in the U.S?

15. I was troubled by your comments about evolution when we last spoke. You said that God was learning about evolution as he went along, and that he was present in the slime of early creation, evolving with everything else. Yet you have also said with great assurance that god is the creator of the world, or the solar system. I have difficulty reconciling these positions. Do you have any further thoughts about the relationship between reincarnation and evolution?
16. Can we talk about pivot points in human history? What are the three or four most important, in your view, over, say, the past 500 years?
17. We have not spoken at any length about technology. I'd like to go at it at the most basic level. One, perhaps simplistic, view of it is that it is a product of human ingenuity, a way of extending our muscles and minds over greater distances and doing more work. Most of humanity sees it as a way of freeing us from drudgery, of giving us more time to read, think, travel, relax or exercise by helping grow our food and properly dispose of our wastes. Why shouldn't it be seen, on balance, as largely salutary? Is technology inherently evil, or has it been just misused? Misused by the Devil, perhaps?
18. Great religious ideas have great followings and last for millennia. Your faith in the theological and intellectual efficacy of your system is strong, yet you have also said that your system is not going to be adopted by many, if any, others. Does this bother you?

Questions for Norman Mailer on God and the Devil
(For 7/5/03 Lennon interview)

1. In our first interview you said that you have an imprinted or inborn belief in both God's existence and his limited nature. It is also true that many, if not most humans have an inherent or imprinted belief in God as all-powerful. Why is your imprinting the correct one, the superior one. Also, many have an imprinted belief in heaven, which you don't have. Why?
2. What are the signs of the cosmic war that you see in the world, its clearest manifestations? Or is it all inborn, an intuition?
3. You see God as an artist. Couldn't he just as well be an engineer, a general, a public administrator, a diplomat? These are all human occupations, of course.
4. You have presented the notion of a cosmic battle, a Miltonic battle between God and the Devil at the beginning of time. God wins, but not decisively, and he is wounded in the struggle. What are the chief differences between the opposed forces. How are their natures different?
5. Do you feel as negative about the revelations of other religions—Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Gnosticism—as you do about Judaism and Christianity?
6. Let me give a summary of your religious beliefs: God is noble but imperfect and not all-powerful; the Devil is equal in cleverness and strength and may win the cosmic war which rages; Humans play a crucial role in this war, but often unknowingly; there is no heaven, no hell; all revelation is unreliable; souls are not essences nor are they eternal; there is no final judgement. Limbo won't work in your system, but I'd hazard that purgatory might fit. It could be related to your ideas of metempsychosis (reincarnation) as well as your idea of the mixed moral natures of humans. I have to say there are not many rallying points in your religion. Your God and your Devil sometimes seem more like Afghan warlords than deities. It is quite a perilous conception.
7. In *Advertisements for Myself* (p. 336), you say that humankind "is roughly more good than evil." If this is the case, it would seem as if this predominance should signal the ultimate victory of good, of God. Do you still believe that humans are more good than evil?

8. If this is the case, it would seem as if this predominance means that the Lord's side will ultimately achieve victory

9. Reincarnation: What are the reasons that a soul is chosen for reincarnation? Does God, or his karmic bureaucrats, extinguish some hideous souls, or must they acquiesce, give up and commit eternal suicide?

10. I'm having a bit of trouble understanding how evolution and reincarnation mesh in your scheme of things. Did they begin simultaneously? Evolution, with its attempts to make species stronger and better, more durable, fits your scheme well. And reincarnation is often seen as an upward ladder, although souls can go down as well as up. The idea of reincarnation is improvement, moral progress. Are both controlled and directed by God? Are their purposes intertwined? Without the Devil's interference, would the process ultimately lead to human perfection, a transit from brute to seer?

11. Is the passing on of souls, new and old, dependent on human procreation, sex? Or does God insert the reincarnated soul at the appropriate moment of the sex act, when the sperm penetrates the egg, perhaps?

12. If things are indeed getting worse in the world and Satan is winning, why would he wish to destroy rather than RUN the world as the ultimate tyrant? Wouldn't he wish to rule humans and make them his evil slaves and minions rather than destroy them?

13. The Jewish-Christian mystic, Simone Weil believed that God became limited by creating the universe, which she saw as both an act of renunciation and one of power-sharing with humans, who she believed had a major role to play, as did the Devil who gained immensely by God's creative act. Does this idea resonate at all for you?

14. It is clear why courage must be the cardinal virtue in your cosmic scheme: only if the forces of good are brave, strong and daring will evil be defeated. The pacifism of Gandhi or Martin Luther King would play into the Devil's hand. He would applaud its use.

15. Your view of the Devil confuses me. Is he an active, wily, greedy general, or a principle of general negation? Does he want to rule or destroy? Is he ambitious or nihilistic?

16. You do seem to be in agreement with most religions on the role of saints and prophets: they are intermediaries in the cosmic war. But there are not many of them. I suppose the same is true of demons.

17. I want to challenge your idea about things getting worse. In 1900, the average American lived 47 years. Only 6% graduated from high school and only 14% of homes had a bathtub; 6% had a telephone. The flush toilet was a rarity. And so on. Perhaps the level of language was higher among the intelligentsia but most people had more than a few books in their home. Today approximately 1,000 books are published every day worldwide and the vast majority of Americans are literate. Technology with all its drawbacks changed everything. I take it you would argue that these are short-term gains, local effects, and that in the long run technology will destroy us.

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5th interview
December 04 questions for NM

X 1. Many people, perhaps a majority, know that technology is not an unmerited good. We know that it can run amuck, poison the earth, create misery and so forth. But we also know that on a case-by-case basis, we love and need it. I want my 4-wheel drive in the Pennsylvania winter; you like to watch football on television, others are happy about pacemakers, food processors, computers—half the country, even you, uses a cell phone. Is there any intelligent position one can take without being a mindless consumer of gadgets or a Luddite?

2A Let's say that God begins to win the war with the Devil; let's go further and say that over the next millennium God does win the war. What will the world look like? What would a near-Utopia look like?

3. When I was writing my doctoral thesis on you, I included a chapter on what I understood to be your theology. The Philosophy professor on my committee argued with me about it, saying that your system, insofar as he could understand it, was terribly incomplete. He could not find in it either beginnings—how the universe came into being—or ends—how the cosmic war would end at the end of time, or even if there would be an end to time. He also felt that you had no clear definition of central question of Being: what is the ultimate nature of man, of God? I answered "existentialism" to all of his questions, and one of my English professors on the committee added that you were a literary man, not a systematic philosopher, despite your readings in Marx, Freud, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Schopenhauer. But you must admit that a philosopher who won't or can't propose any ultimates except uncertainty is a very unusual philosopher?

a meta question
9 4. What happens to the souls of individuals if they have a long run of successful reincarnations? I mean, if they just keep improving? Is eternal bliss ever reached?
x 5. Original sin: at times you sound like a conservative Catholic when you talk about human weakness. But there is one difference: Catholics believe original sin is erased through baptism. You believe that we can't ever jettison our defects, can't ever "put on the new man," as some Christians like to say. In your system there are no spiritual plateaus that offer this kind of relief. Only more mountains to climb.

6. The moment of death carries more weight in your theology than in any other I know, even Mother Theresa's. But I don't see any consideration of what happens to the 20% of people who die suddenly—strokes, heart attacks, and aneurysms. Some people are dead before they hit the ground. Are they just unlucky? Collateral damage in the war between God and the Devil?

1 7. We have not spoken of ritual as part of religion. Recently, my wife and I went to the ordination of a priest. It was an extraordinary event. Thirty or 40 priests and bishops and deacons stood over the kneeling aspirant, touching a shoulder or back, or if they could not reach, the shoulder of someone who could. All the

22
5th
December 04 question for NM

while, a chorus was chanting, "Veni, Spiritu Sancti" (come Holy Spirit), while a lead singer sang a capello verses about the glory of being of being a priest—the holy responsibilities and obligations, special status among believers, etc., ending with the ancient—from the Jews, I think—pronouncement by the ordaining bishop: "Thou art a priest forever." It was a very moving, very powerful experience. In one of our earlier conversations you noted that fundamentalists believe that observing ritual and keeping their nose clean was the ticket to heaven. Does ritual have any significant merit for you?

7. Have recent political events reaffirmed or undercut your theology? I mean, has the re-election of George Bush affected your beliefs?
8. American historians have for a long time debated the concept of American exceptionalism—the idea that the U.S. has a special role in history, even a divine destiny. It goes back to the Puritans, to Gov. Bradford's "city on a hill." Does this notion resonate for you; how does it fit, or not fit, with your theology?
8. You have little regard for Dante; you called him "Johnny One Note." I know you don't agree with the idea of eternal punishment. But his Hell has nine different levels of suffering and they do not differ merely in intensity, the level of pain. They also vary in kind; the torments are reflections, often very clever, of the sins of the individual. I would have thought you would appreciate this diversity of suffering.
10. In looking over your various comments on God's nature, I would have to say that he reminds me of a warlord, an Afghan general, perhaps, who is very cultured, loves beauty, but is also brave and ruthless. He may be a trifle vain. Am I close?
11. We have spoken of soul, but not spirit. I know that you see a distinction. Can you delineate?
11. Pure intellect, you have made clear, may be closer to the Devil than the Lord. What about language, which is, after all, perhaps the most complex and subtle creation of mind?
- X 12. Would these conversations on matters theological be of interest to either God or The Devil? If your one-person religion is an accurate depiction of creation, one or the other might not be too pleased that their aims had been uncovered.
12. Why did God make us?
14. You have several times mentioned the possibility that God intended humans to develop their telepathic powers, and in *Ancient Evenings* some of your characters employ such powers. I have to add that modern novelists can, in a sense, read minds. Do your speculations about telepathy come from using this novelistic tool or technique?

18 3-20-04 06

Questions for NM 6th int.

- 1) Is there any relation between your ideas of a universe at war ~~and~~ with the future unwritten, and your disdain for plot in your novels? Does the latter reflect ~~in~~ the former?
- 2) Intelligent Design: can you give me your thoughts on this idea, which is ^{now} gaining some credibility ~~outside~~ outside of ~~fund~~ religious circles.

I.D. adherents say that random mutation + natural selection ~~can~~ ^{cannot} explain the ^{profound appearance of} design we see in nature, that intelligence must be involved.

- 4) You recently criticized Sartre's existentialism because, as you put it "It is after all men to impossible for a philosopher to explain into how we are here without entertaining some notion of what the prior

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- ['The Nautical Chart'](#) by Arturo Pérez-Reverte
- ['Henry Ford and the Jews: The Mass Production of Hate'](#) by Neil Baldwin
- ['Love in the Days of Rage'](#) by Lawrence Ferlinghetti
- ['The Warrior Elite'](#) by Dick Couch
- ['Crossing Over'](#) by Ruben Martinez
- ['Fierce Pajamas: An Anthology of Humor Writing From the New Yorker'](#) edited by David Remnick and Henry Finder
- ['In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong'](#) by Amin Maalouf
- ['The Complete Lyrics of Irving Berlin'](#) edited by Robert Kimball
- ['The World Below'](#) by Sue Miller
- ['Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress'](#) by Dai Sijie
- ['Tris Murdoch: A Life'](#) by Peter J. Conradi
- ['West of the American Dream'](#) by Paul

3/20/01

(2)

force might have been "But

~~if we grant your point that~~

~~It is~~ If we grant that your
limited God is that prior force, and

we not compelled to ask what
force is prior to ~~the~~ your God?

I assume you'll choose infinite
regress rather than unmoved
mover

(3)

David Hume

Christensen

- 'The Deadwood Beetle' by Mylene Dressler
- 'Hughes: The Private Diaries, Memos and Letters' by Richard Hack
- 'Andy Warhol' by Wayne Koestenbaum
- 'Half a Life' by V.S. Naipaul
- 'Jack: A Life Like No Other' by Geoffrey Perret
- 'Niagara Falls All Over Again' by Elizabeth McCracken
- 'Portrait in Sepia' by Isabel Allende
- 'War in a Time of Peace' by David Halberstam
- 'President Nixon: Alone in the White House' by Richard Reeves
- 'Patience and Fortitude' by Nicholas A. Basbanes
- 'Beginnings: A Memoir' by Horton Foote
- 'Germs: Biological Weapons and America's Secret War' by Judith Miller, Stephen Engelberg and William Broad
- 'Feast of the Goat' by Mario Vargas Llosa
- 'Islands, Women, and God' by Paul Ruffin
- 'Peace Like a River' by Leif Enger
- 'The Last Face You'll Ever See' by Ivan Solotaroff and 'Have a Seat Please' by Don Reid

Locke, John (1632–1704). Highly influential founder of British empiricism. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke wrote that all ideas come to mind from experience and that none are innate. He also held that authority derives solely from the consent of the governed, a view that deeply influenced the American Revolution and the writing of the U.S. Constitution. His two *Treatises on Government* express his political thought.

Lucretius (c. 99–55 B.C.). Roman Epicurean philosopher and poet. In *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things), Lucretius depicted the entire world, including the soul, as composed of atoms.

Machiavelli, Niccolò (1469–1527). Italian Renaissance statesman and political writer. In *The Prince*, one of the most influential political books of modern times, Machiavelli argues that any act of a ruler designed to gain and hold power is permissible. The term *Machiavellian* is used to refer to any political tactics that are cunning and power-oriented.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST GOD'S EXISTENCE

Arguments against God's existence have been given by philosophers, atheists, and agnostics. Some of these arguments find God's existence incompatible with observed facts; some are arguments that God does not exist because the concept of God is incoherent or confused. Others are criticisms of the proofs offered for God's existence.

One of the most influential and powerful "proofs" that there is no God proceeds from "The Problem from Evil." This argument claims that the following three statements cannot all be true: (a) evil exists; (b) God is omnipotent; and (c) God is all-loving. The argument is as follows:

- If God can prevent evil, but *doesn't*, then He isn't all-loving.
- If God intends to prevent evil, but *cannot*, then He isn't omnipotent.
- If God *both* intends to prevent evil and is capable of doing so, then how can evil exist?

Another argument claims that the existence of an all-knowing God is incompatible with the fact of free will—that humans do make choices. If God is omniscient, He must know beforehand exactly what a person will do in a given situation. In that case, a person is not in fact free to do the alternative to what God knows he or she will do, and free will must be an illusion. To take this one step further, if one chooses to commit a sin, how can it then be said that one sinned freely?

Hume provided powerful critiques of the main arguments for God's existence. Against the cosmological argument (Aquinas's third argument), he argued that the idea of a necessarily existing being is absurd. Hume stated, "Whatever we can conceive as existent, we can also conceive as nonexistent." He also asked why the ultimate source of the universe could not be the entire universe itself, eternal and uncaused, without a God?

Hume also criticized the argument from design (Aquinas's fifth argument). In particular, he emphasized that there is no legitimate way we can infer the properties of God as the creator of the world from the qualities of His creation. For instance, Hume questioned how we can be sure that the world was not created by a team; or that this is not one of many attempts at creations, the first few having been botched; or, on the other hand, that our world is not a poor first attempt "of an infant deity who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance."

Existentialism—Does It Have a Future?

I would say that Sartre, despite his incontestable strengths of mind, talent, and character, is still the man who derailed existentialism, sent it right off the track. In part, this may have been because he gave too wide a berth to Heidegger's thought. Heidegger spent his working life laboring mightily in the crack of philosophy's buttocks, right there in the cleft between Being and Becoming. I would go so far as to suggest Heidegger was searching for a viable connection between the human and the divine that would not inflame too irreparably the reigning post-Hitler German mandarins who were in no rush to forgive his past and would hardly encourage his tropism toward the non-rational.

Sartre, however, was comfortable as an atheist even if he had no fundament on which to plant his philosophical feet. To hell with that, he

didn't need it. He was ready to survive in mid-air. We are French, he was ready to say. We have minds, we can live with the absurd and ask for no reward. That is because we are noble enough to live with emptiness, and strong enough to choose a course which we are even ready to die for. And we will do this in whole defiance of the fact that, indeed, we have no footing. We do not look to a Hereafter.

It was an attitude; it was a proud stance; it was equal to living with one's mind in formless space, but it deprived existentialism of more interesting explorations. For atheism is a crop-less undertaking when it comes to philosophy. (We need only think of Logical Positivism!) Atheism can contend with ethics (as Sartre did on occasion most brilliantly) but when it comes to metaphysics, atheism ends in a locked cell. It is, after all, near to impossible for a philosopher to explore into how we are here without entertaining some notion of what the prior force might have been. Cosmic speculation is asphyxiated if existence came into being ex nihilo. In Sartre's case—worse. Existence came into being without a clue to suggest whether we are here for good purpose, or there is no reason whatsoever for us.

All the same, Sartre's philosophical talents were damnably virtuoso. He was able to function with precision in the upper echelons of every logical structure he set up. If only he had not been an existentialist! For an existentialist who does not believe in some kind of Other is equal to an engineer who designs an automobile which requires no driver and accepts no passengers. If existentialism is to flourish (that is, develop through a series of new philosophers building on earlier premises) it needs a God who is no more confident of the end than we are; a God who is an artist, not a law-giver; a God who suffers the uncertainties of existence; a God who lives without any of the pre-arranged guarantees that sit like an incubus upon formal theology with its flatulent, self-serving assumption of a Being who is All-Good and All-Powerful. What a gargantuan oxymoron—All-Good and All-Powerful. It is certain to maroon any and all formal theologians who would like to explain an earthquake. Before the wrath of a tsunami, they can only break wind. The notion of an existential God, a Creator who may have been doing His or Her artistic best, but could still have been remiss in designing the tectonic plates, is not within their scope.

Sartre was alien to the possibility that existentialism might thrive if it would just assume that indeed we do have a God who, no matter His or Her cosmic dimensions, (whether larger or smaller than we assume), embodies nonetheless some of our faults, our ambitions, our talents, and our gloom. For the end is not written. If it is, there is no place for existentialism. Base our beliefs, however, on the fact of our existence, and it takes no great step for us to assume that we are not only individual, but may well be a vital part of a larger phenomenon which searches for some finer vision of life that could conceivably emerge from our present human condition. There is no reason, one can argue, why this assumption is not nearer to the real being of our lives than anything the oxymoronic theologians would offer us. It is certainly more reasonable than Sartre's ongoing assumption—despite his passionate desire for a better society—that we are here willy-nilly and must manage to do the best we can with endemic nothingness installed upon eternal floorlessness. Sartre was indeed a writer of major dimension, but he was also a philosophical executioner. He guillotined existentialism just when we needed most to hear its howl, its barbaric yawp that there is something in common between God and all of us. We, like God, are

imperfect artists doing the best we can. We may succeed or fail—God as well as us. That is the implicit if undeveloped air of existentialism. We would do well to live again with the Greeks, live again with the expectation that the end remains open but human tragedy may well be our end. Great hope has no real footing unless one is willing to face into the doom that may also be on the way. Those are the poles of our existence—as they have been from the first instant of the Big Bang. Something immense may now be stirring, but to meet it we will do better to expect that life will not provide the answers we need so much as it will offer the privilege of improving our questions.

Norman Mailer

Questions and comments from first interview:

Judith
McNally
questions

1. You said: "What does stimulate my thought is the war between God and the Devil.

That makes sense to me—that war between the gods."

You prefaced this by calling speculation on the mechanics of creation, and of a possible expansion and final implosion of the universe as "too speculative, windy, and open." Yet further along in these interviews, you're willing to speculate considerably on the existence of the devil, the mechanics of reincarnation, and quite a bit else. Why the difference?

2. About Nazism and blood-consciousness, you say "The extermination camps were an absolute violation of such a venture. They were cheating people of their deaths. They informed the camp inmates they were going to have a shower. In they all marched, took off their clothes, happy to have a shower with all those lice on them, hoping the shower would be hot, went in, and were gassed. Their last reaction in life had to be, "you cheated me!" They die in a panic. That's not going back to the blood, to instinct, to preparing oneself to enter the next world."

Actually, I think you mis-read Nazi intentions. The victims in the extermination camps, from a Nazi point of view, were not people in the same way the Nazi ubermensch were people, and so didn't necessarily need a conscious, prepared-for death.

However, the passage leads to an interesting question: Since you call the gas chambers an abuse of instinct, are you implying that a true connection with instinct would make racism or racial superiority theories impossible? How would this work? After all,

looking at human groups, one sees a bewildering diversity of languages, skin colors, body types, talents, and so forth.

2

And leading from this, 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? (after all, as one feminist joke goes: God looked at Adam, said, "I'm sure I can do better," and created Eve.)

3. "Technology is the Devil's invention." This is so fuzzy and skewed and selective in argument. If people lose their hearing with age, does it somehow bring a person closer to God to bellow "speak up!" at people instead of using state-of-the-art high-tech hearing aids? Should people with glaucoma just go blind rather than saving their vision (and their independence and the pleasures of reading, etc) via very high-tech laser surgery? Yes, certainly, technology increases power, and can also be a nuisance, but I would advance the argument it can also advance pleasure considerably. Where, exactly, do you draw the line between "good" and "bad" technology, and why?.

3

4. 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. 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?

And if God may be maturing and evolving, might not the devil be doing the same? And becoming compassionate?

5. That leads us to the "age of the world" speculation. Some traditions see cosmology as cyclical—the Hindus, for instance, see "great ages" of hundreds of thousands of years where universes are born, peak, and die, succeeded by a new universal cycle of birth, growth, maturity and death—correlating with the idea of an expanding and eventually contracting universe. Others, like de Chardin, the Jesuit philosopher, see cosmology as linear, with an "Omega point" of union of everything with God eventually being reached. How do you see it?

And would you see the present world-age as young, mature, old, or senescent?

④ 6. 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?

7. You say: "there are no answers, there are only questions, profound questions, and that that is ennobling." Clarify, please—if we take your statement literally, then you're a Buddhist. If there are NO—that is no answers anywhere, on any plane, then everything is in the thinking—whether it is human thinking, the inchoate dreams of trees and rocks, or perhaps some thought of a Universal Mind—that's straight Buddhism. Do you mean, perhaps, there are no answers we can find in our limited state of embodied humanity? (Although there are, indeed, answers "out there," even if we never discover them.) If the latter, do you foresee a time/method of discovery?

8. You say: "I believe the soul is a gift, a great gift. Of course, you can abuse any gift to the point where it does not survive." But couldn't the soul, the human soul, actually be an achievement, obtained by all kinds of experience and learning as a spark of life progresses from protozoa to insect (that fast cockroach!) to donkey, to dog and finally to human being—and it's growth be earned by lifetimes of mainly decent behavior?

Second interview

1. You say: "We are tainted, warped, even treacherous to the divine projects offered us. We are torn between God and the Devil and our own vanity." So, then, does that mean

you believe in original sin? And a need for some kind of divine redemption to keep human beings growing in a positive direction?

6 You say about Gandhi and pacifism: "But there are a few [oxymorons] that are vital and immensely valuable. One of them is "heroic passivity." That's where one's wisdom becomes the arbiter. There can be heroic passivity, or quasi- heroic passivity. The latter might be a disaster."

Along that same line, what would you say about any possible value of the contemplative life? By that I mean the cloistered orders who don't run hospitals or schools, ^{but} just pray for the world. This is a strong Christian tradition, ditto for the Buddhists and some Hindus (and probably others I'm not aware of.) Do you see this as ^{heroic in this?} "passivity" or as tying in to your notion of our possible telepathic future (i.e., the Catholic notion of "the communion of saints.")

3. You say, about the possible end of the world: "So why not extend that to the frightful cost of divine desire, where the loss is greater? God might have had an earlier conception of human existence more beautiful, much more beautiful than the one He's left with now." Could you expand on this notion of God as a tragic hero? Or at least a tragic figure?

4. You say: "But generally speaking, I think, most souls don't die that easily, although I do have this notion that the soul's not around for endless reincarnations. A cat has nine

lives—what does a human soul have? Three or four lives? It's boundlessly speculative."

OK, then, but when the soul is finished with incarnations, then what? (FYI, The

Buddhists see it as you do, but say after a soul no longer needs to reincarnate—he has

learned all, done all that's necessary for enlightenment, he moves into nirvana, union with the universal mind.)

⑦ 5. Further, what's your take on the Buddhist notion of the bodhisatva vow? Reaching nirvana is a catch-22—^{When a soul has} if you have achieved a level of deep compassion, enough to reach nirvana, ^{the soul} you can't go happily off into it while other sentient beings are still here struggling and suffering. So, even though ^{a soul may have} you personally have a free-pass out of this far from perfect world, ^{the soul} 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.

might tie into your idea of reincarnation

Third interview:

1. You say about the authority of the senses: "St. Thomas Aquinas said that, and Hemingway, in his way: "If it feels good, it is good." Well, but what about short-term gains versus longer-term gains? For instance, the fashion model who lives for months on a semi-starvation diet, or the athlete who goes through plenty of aches and pains in practice, for the long-term gain of the prestige and income of a modeling career, or an Olympic medal—in other words, give up one material pleasure for a more valued material pleasure (i.e., the money and what it can do) and the spiritual pleasure of being a

champion or a world-famous model. Even a sensualist might ration his sex life with a much-desired partner to bring a sharper edge of desire to their encounters. Can you comment?

2. You say: "Blake did have an apocalyptic mind that he served manfully. Full-time. It's one of the reasons his remarks inspire the highest flights of fancy. But on the other hand, he is seen by our modern spirit as impractical."

Just FYI, Blake COULD be rather practical. Here's a story—sorry, I can't source it beyond the fact that the professor told it to us aeons ago in his class on Blake. Seems Blake was devoted to his wife but also espoused free love and open marriage. So one fine day he introduced a young woman to his wife, saying she was a former prostitute whom they would take in, educate, and she'd become the "second wife." Blake's wife, fully aware of his theories, didn't argue, just burst into tears. Blake put the young lady he was about to rescue on the next train out of town—an instance, I'd say, where practicality trumped theory.

3. You say: "Or, will we destroy ourselves? In that sense, directly, there's no security. No spiritual security whatsoever." If so, just how and where does anyone find any comfort or respite? In a world of hopes and hypotheses, but no certainty, no final judgment or end of days when "it will all work out," how does anyone find any spiritual peace? [As opposed to simple exhaustion!]

4. You say: "then what we speak of as original sin—God's obligatory collaboration with the Devil—we were born good and evil." FYI, "original sin" is unique to the Christian tradition and has a very particular meaning—when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were thrown out of paradise, every human born thereafter was in a state of "original sin" by inheritance. It took the death of Christ on the cross to redeem all of humanity and give them (if baptized!) a chance at heaven. If you mis-use the term, when it is so specifically defined, you'll confuse people. The Moslems, by the way, while they have something very similar to the Xian Adam and Eve story, (Adam is revered as a prophet, so obviously he got his act together eventually despite a rocky beginning) feel nothing is inherited by the descendants thereof—children are born innocent and end up in heaven or hell as a result of their own good and bad deeds. No Christly redemption needed. People save or damn themselves. Just FYI. Satan's sin was rebellion and disobedience. Adam's sin was disobedience. And are you saying, perhaps, God's sin was permitting Satan to live instead of destroying him and his rebellious colleagues? Or moving ahead with human creation while he still had an ongoing mess with satan? (God committing the sin of hubris and overextending himself?) Just some ideas—comment on any that catch your fancy.

④ You said in our last interview that your Creator is like a Greek God,

5. An FYI about incarnation of Jesus—this is not a new idea. 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

flawed
yet
noble,
strong
but
not
all
powerful
rebels

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 or conversations of the incarnation of your God as a human, or a servant or a slave

Fourth interview

1. About Francis of Assisi you say: "Yes, he's perfect in a beautiful way that took care of a great many animals, and thereby brought us a little more into sympathy with creatures who often feel more life than ourselves." Actually, the folktales about his preaching to songbirds and wolves are just that—lovely legends. His hymns to "brother sun and sister moon" are the real deal, his own writings. But Francis was ahead of his time in founding an order of nuns, of accepting women on a basis of equality in religious life, of ministering to lepers—a true rebel who frequently embarrassed the local church establishment. His service to the "untouchables" of the day and his egalitarian attitudes are in a way far more interesting than the nice story of wild animals coming to hear his sermons.

2. You say: "whereas cats strike me often as creatures of the devil. Now, mind you—they were all created by God." Cats are independent existentialists, grownups in fur who pick and choose their loyalties. Dogs have a pack instinct and often consider their human owners the alpha-dog and themselves as loyal second-in-command—also, dogs are miserable if the hierarchy of the group and their place is unclear, be the group a pack of dogs or a human family. They are—well, fundamentalists about that. Cats have far more

intellectual independence, and "make their living" by exploiting their opportunities in whatever situation they find themselves in.

3. You say: "So, I would say that at the moment when one is close to death, that is, if one knows one's going to die, there can be a desire for another life, or a yearning toward peace or—and this is the worst condition—a wish to pass away in stupor." What about the completely unexpected death—the healthy person felled by an aneurism who never feels a thing, the person (not living in a war zone) who's picked off for no discernible reason by a sniper? What happens to that person? Have you any comment on the many spiritual traditions who advise people to prepare for death? How would anyone not embroiled in terminal illness go about living so as to be ready for death?

9 4. You say: "The logistics of the hereafter interest me because God's energies, as I see it, are immense but, to repeat, not infinite." You seem to see the afterlife as only a sort of Grand Central Station where people change trains—i.e., make their way from one life to the next. Many spiritual traditions see the afterlife not as a permanent destination but as an extended layover—there are classrooms, hospitals and spas, so to speak, connected to the train station. That is, many souls get a chance to regroup, learn, heal and collaborate in the choice of their next life. Granted, since this is speculative, your vision can be as true or false as theirs but why see a delay in reincarnation as a bureaucratic bungle? Couldn't we be creatures of two worlds, meant to spend roughly equal time in the timeless "over there" as living in bodies "over here?"

10.

8. Do you think there's meant to be communion between the afterlife and here? Any thoughts on the huge number of fictional and fairly well documented stories of the dead coming back to their relatives?

6. You say: "The notion that if you suffer long enough you'll purge yourself—I don't see any reason to have that in the Hereafter. I would suggest instead that being reborn takes care of purgatory. For some people, life is, indeed, purgatory. For a few people, life is heaven—they're happy 90% of the time. For some people, life is hell. I don't think we need these other structures." But, Norman, YOU didn't design the Cosmos—the Creator in which you believe so completely did!! Your metaphysics puts earthly life at the center of things, with the spiritual realm as an add-on, a way-station between incarnations. Why couldn't it be more 50/50? Or even earth as a backward slum where those who flunked out of angel school have to take remedial courses? You do seem to have a prejudice against spending time in the other realm—why?

7. You say: "Now, traveling on airplanes is disagreeable. Everyone thought it'd be immensely exciting but it isn't. It's reductive. You don't feel like a voyager so much as a piece of packaged goods." I agree modern airports and check-ins are no fun BUT watching the sun turn clouds molten, and the fantastic cloudscapes at 40,000 feet, or seeing the far-north ice lit up from a jet doing the polar route—not to mention the rush of takeoffs and landings—flying is FUN. In other words, this is all very individual.

8. Following from this, if people miss the fun of flying, it's because they're too tired from overwork—or working on their laptops in First Class. Again, the problem isn't the laptop, it's the skewed bosses who overwork their people—the fault, dear Norman, lies not in our technology but in ourselves that we are underlings. The horror of "living in a closed environment" is not that it's closed, but somebody got the idea that working 80-hour weeks was a good thing.

9. You're always saying that work is a blessing—but I'd say our present developed First World is creating an unhealthy singular focus on paid work. Where is the balance and what separates "good work" from mindless drudgery or the pursuit of greed?