

Start of
Interview VIII

OK As we have agreed before this
meeting, the form of the previous
interviews will be altered for
our discussion or questioning.

AMY Yes, I recognized that although
I have ^{lived} ~~used~~ the word in many
a text over many a year, indeed
even got a full reading to Elaine

David? The Quantic Councils some years
ago, I am not comfortable with
the term. ~~In a word~~, I still feel
ignorant of its meaning, in relation
to what we have talked about.
Another peril of bad memory
from which I suffer is that
one retains not nearly enough
of one's serious reading, ~~and~~
thoroughly ^{ensure} ~~ensure~~ that if you read
long enough to reach your
exhaustion, your memory will
have more recollection to a ~~text~~
than a text.

OK. Forewarned, forearmed. I come prepared.

Norris

From: "jm wordcraft" <jmwordcraft@yahoo.com>
 To: <nmncm@comcast.net>; <draymond63@aol.com>
 Sent: Tuesday, October 11, 2005 3:07 PM
 Subject: Norman's appointments with Levinson, et al

Dear Norris, dear Dwayne,

Here is the state of things re NM's medical appointments right now--you should know this, and print for NM as well.

I spoke with Ginny--Norman had further info he wanted Levinson to have re his Ambien use, quitting it last night, and how he reacted. Ginny noted it all down, said she would convey it to Levinson pronto and said she would call be with any response from L. She mentioned--completely unofficially, but as someone who's seen many heart patients go on and off the stuff--that after taking it for 2 weeks, the likelihood of some kind of severe withdrawal was small. Still, she wrote it all down to get to Dr. L. ASAP.

Re the appointments:

1. NM has to see the anticoag clinic FIRST. On Oct 5, Levinson told Ginny he wanted to see NM "in a month," that is on or about Nov 5. He also said he wanted NM to get to the anti-coag clinic as soon as they can get him in so they can test, monitor, possibly adjust his dosage. Levinson ONLY can see NM after this visit to the clinic AND NM's taking the possibly adjusted dose between the clinic visit and Nov 5. I mentioned to Ginny this was the first time anyone in their office had explained why these various appts had to happen on separate days/trips to Boston.

Wed Oct 19
11:00

Anticoag
clinic

Rm 144

Bring
list of
meds

10/11/2005.

INTERVIEW VIII

~~type mess, past~~

I would start by saying that ~~you are~~ ~~Gnosticism~~
ML: I'd like to say a few words about Gnosticism. It is not a religious movement

~~hardly alone. Gnosticism is not a religious~~
~~movement, and it~~
~~that people necessarily know much about, and it has been shunted pretty much off~~

the face of the ideological earth.

~~a few~~ ~~There is First,~~
Here are some of the general traits: First, a disdain for authority and

~~Orthodoxy: A celebration of difference and diversity, although Gnostics did not,~~
~~which is opposed by a~~

~~of course, use the word diversity. A great belief, however, in self knowledge, of~~

~~is regarded,~~ ~~to seriously~~
~~in studying the self, seeing the self as a phenomenon that you had to understand in~~
~~to some degree~~

~~is the~~
order to attain larger knowledge. The self ~~is~~ a pathway to larger knowledge. They

were dualists, but not absolute about it. *Like the Greeks, they* They got that from the Greeks. They saw *as*

the body and the spirit as separate but mutually dependent.

NM: Did they have a sense of Apollo and Dionysus? I'm thinking of how

especially
~~Nietzsche was obsessed by them in his early career.~~

have been in the Gnostics
ML: Yes, that would not be foreign to them at all but there was more of an

also
opposition between the Judaic and the Hellenic. They were very taken with Jewish

present *But, as*
mysticism which of course had been around long before Christ. As a sect, the

Gnostics seem to have come into existence around the second century B.C. and, in

the beginning,
~~they were an esoteric branch of Judaism when they began. They were not separate,~~ *isolates*

may recall
~~however.~~ As you know from reading *in* The Golden Bough *there were* the sects

sects
~~interpenetrated each other.~~ There were many competing *at* this time. But the

Gnostics had great respect for Judaism on one hand and at the same time valued

the Greek belief in knowledge and self examination. They prized that very highly.

NM: My knowledge of Jewish mysticism is not profound, but I did some reading in the Kabbalah and the Zohar. Neither existed, however, at that point.

ML: No, although later, when the Kabbalah did develop, the Gnostics were not opposed to it. They liked it. As they liked certain Buddhist texts—

NM: You're talking about a thousand years later.

ML: That's right.

NM: The Gnostics, in other words, continue well into the Middle Ages.

ML: Probably they end with the Inquisition.

NM: I thought the various uprootings of the heresies in the early centuries of Christianity took care of the Gnostics. Not so?

ML: It diminished them greatly. ^{As I say,} Gnosticism came into existence around the second century B.C. and built its ongoing strength by taking in Jewish strains, Christian strains, even Buddhist strains right up to the fourth century A.D. At that

point the Christian church, especially under St. Augustine and St. Irenaeus,

mounted a strong campaign against them using St. John as the point of their ^{speech} ~~attack~~.

Because St. John was a great believer in revelation, and the Gnostics did not, ~~believe in it~~. Augustine was another fierce opponent, and, of course, St. Irenaeus

wrote five volumes against the heresy. Many of the tenets of Christianity, for

example Original Sin, Resurrection, and Jesus as ^{the Son of} God were later additions to

Christianity. In the year 200, however, there was no sense of Original Sin and

Resurrection was barely an idea.

The assumption that Jesus was ^{divine} ~~God~~ also came later. In good part, these ideas

came in opposition to Gnosticism.

NM: Could you say that the first purpose of Original Sin was to forge a powerful

weapon against the Gnostics?

ML: Yes. Gnosticism advocated individualism in search of enlightenment. It

believed in reincarnation. It believed that all humans had some kind of divine

spark. The spark may be trapped, impossible to free, one might be out of touch

with it, but it was there.

NM: I agree with so much of this.

ML: I thought you might. It's no accident that the fundamentalists, to the extent

that they know anything about Gnosticism, see it as a disreputable part of early

Christianity, and best kept in the closet. If Gnosticism survives at all now, it may

be among some sects ^{who} ~~that~~ live on the border of Iraq and Iran-- the Mandeans, ^{for example,} ~~who~~

are still there. The ~~key~~ ^{emphasize} attribute to ~~remember~~ is that in Greek, *Gnosis* means

"knowledge." *Gnosticos* is someone who is seeking knowledge by searching the

depths of the self, looking at the self as the available ground for enlightenment and

knowledge. When it came to the body, they were more divided. Some saw a

division between the spirit and the flesh, some felt that the flesh wasn't important

at all and therefore they could go out and fuck themselves silly because it didn't

make any difference. Another branch of the Gnostics were purifiers. To the

Zoroastrians, fire was holy because it purified. Water was holy. But they didn't

believe in sex. Ergo, they died out. ~~They didn't believe in procreation.~~ While

Christianity became monolithic, Gnosticism divided. And that is another one of

the reasons it didn't survive. Nor did it have ^{an} Augustine ^{or an} ~~and~~ Irenaeus ~~and the~~

~~Church fathers and St. Paul~~ ^a drawing everything together, and organizing ~~the~~ belief

system.

NM. Well, I think it hardly matters whether it was a conscious move on the part of

the early Church fathers, or an instinct ^{but I expect the Church fathers} that Christianity had to be absolute. ^{were} ^{certain}

^E otherwise, it was not going to work. To hold it together there must ~~not~~ be ^{no}

questions. Only answers. So the Gnostics were directly offensive to the Church

It seems as if they certainly agree with ~~the notion~~ 7
fathers. ~~What they were saying is~~ what some of us are saying today: That there are

a few of us might
no answers. There are only questions. The mark of a good society, we argue, is

spectrum of a
(society that has not yet come into existence, is that you move from one set of

questions up to a higher level of questions. Whereas, the early Christian

founded their church upon a wholly opposed
philosophers built on the conclusion ~~that~~ 2 people must be given absolute certainty

about life and death. Particularly about death. An absolute statement of Heaven

therefore.
and Hell was required. ~~The~~ The notion of reincarnation was too nuanced, too special,

too elegant, too delicate, too possible. So, it had to be absolutely forbidden; ~~even~~ and

still
as it is off the board today for fundamentalists.

I was reading Nietzsche's *Anti-Christ* a few days ago, and at a certain point

he says, "All priests are liars." It's a marvelous remark because it happens to be

not only daring but true. Whenever you speak with absolute authority about

something that you cannot prove, the decision to speak with such authority means

that you are ready to live as a liar. It seems to me that Christianity, because of its

determination to be wholly authoritative, was able ultimately to create huge

societies. Now, these huge societies ~~half~~ ^{work by half and} ~~half~~ ^{fail to work by half} and half don't. Certainly, for

centuries, they functioned well enough to limp along full of unanswerable ~~the~~ ^{philosophically}

questions and hideous inequalities ~~that were~~ ^{and there were} all too ready to sweep all

unanswerable questions under a rug of absolute faith.

But, let me return from my bias to my ignorance. Tell me more about the

Gnostic sense of Cosmology.

ML: I would say they posited a supreme God who was behind everything ^{and is}

unknown. And this supreme God gave birth to a lesser divine being, and then a

whole series of lesser divine beings. One was called Sophia which in Greek means

wisdom. Sophia created another creature usually referred to as the Demiurge.

Sophia created this creature out of a desire to learn more about where Sophia had

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come from. It is, however, endlessly more complex. The Demiurge thinks that it is

the God of the Old Testament. It is very similar. It is a jealous God, an angry God.

The Demiurge then creates the flora and the fauna, and then people, and does it

imperfectly. Even though humans are ~~three times~~ ^{or more} removed from the highest God

out there, they still feel this divine spark within them amidst a general feeling of

loneliness, incompleteness and abandonment. In this scheme of things, Jesus

becomes a messenger from Sophia or the God behind Sophia. Jesus is there to

keep alive the spark of what is good in human beings while opposing what is evil.

NM: Would this be a recognition by Sophia that the Demiurge may have been a bit
of a mistake?

ML: Yes.

NM: Most of the Gnostics believe that?

*Delete all but the
last 2 lines*

metaphysical discussions Interview 8 August 9, 2006

10

ML: Yes. In some versions, the Demiurge tries to undercut the messenger, Jesus or

Mohammed or Zoroaster—these new figures that come in with wisdom—the

Demiurge tries to attack them. Sometimes this gives rise to Manicheanism which

says that good and evil are at war, evil dominates the world, but good is going to

win out.

NM: That does bring up a question. Where in this schemata is Satan?

ML: Satan could be the Demiurge.

NM: Doesn't this create confusion? For some Jehovah may become Satan.

ML: Let us say that Sophia creates many figures, some very strong like the

Demiurge and some are lesser evil figures. A whole range of figures emanate from

the higher source. Any one of these can be used to exercise Evil.

NM: Long before the Gnostics, it was taken for granted that there were many

gods. This is certainly true of the Egyptians and of the Greeks. The Hindus

believed in a variety of deities. The Africans certainly ~~believed in~~ ^{reacted to} all kinds of

spirits high and low. It is as if Judaism and then Christianity came to ^a contrary

conclusion ^{this} ~~that~~ a plethora of gods did not serve their faith. It would be better for

humans to believe that there was one truth ~~and one truth~~ only.

ML: And one God.

NM: And one God. This had to be established, then ground into the psyche. Which

would of course explain the intensity of the early Christian attacks on the

Gnostics.

ML: Yes, they burned their books, they expelled them, they killed them. You

know, when they found the Gnostic Gospels in 1945 in Egypt, those were

remarkable documents—third or fourth century copies of documents that went

back to the time of Christ. Elsewhere they had been systematically burned and

destroyed. But because of the obscurity of this hiding place, these scrolls had not

been uncovered, and so it was a great revelation. Historical and Biblical scholars

had always known about the Gnostics but as ^{mainly because} a body whom Augustine and Irenaeus

^{them} had attacked. They never heard them speak for themselves. When they found the

Gnostic Gospels, they discovered a completely different Christianity, one that did

not embrace a monolithic God and had a host of negative feelings about the Old

Testament and ^{the intensity of rage and jealousy in} ~~so jealous a God as~~ Jehovah. We can ask: What was he jealous

of? Maybe other gods. So the Gnostics became the losers in this huge struggle.

But you could see, at least personally I see in the narrowness and the Orthodoxy of

Christianity from the time of Augustine on, how narrow is Christianity in relation

to its roots. A hatred of the flesh, the concept of Original Sin, the insistence that

Jesus must be God, ² he cannot merely be God's messenger. And to counter such

concepts, remarkable figures did come out of the Middle East—John the Baptist,

Jesus, Mani, Zoroaster, Adonis, Dionysus, Osiris—incredible figures. From a

Gnostic point of view they would all be messengers sent down to keep alive the spark.

NM: Wouldn't it also be an early attempt to understand the mechanics of existence? So many of these minor gods did explain aspects of life that are ignored by early Christianity. I would even say that this curiosity about the nature of God

was seen by Judaism and Christianity as the great enemy. You cannot build an

a powerfully structured integrated society so long as there are all too many ways to elaborate the details. In

this sense, you can look upon the Judeo-Christian enterprise as determined to

become an absolute arbiter over the more mysterious elements of existence.

ML: And should there be a debate, it is to be resolved by the supreme leaders of the Church.

NM: Yes, do not look into yourself. Refer to the external authority.

ML: And so you could say that the final expression of this was in 1870 when the

Catholic Church came up with the infallibility of the Pope.

NM: Yes.

ME: That was always implicit, ^{now} but finally they had to state it. It was ^{the} final

consolidation of Papal power. ~~In a lot of the reading I've done about Gnosticism,~~

when you think of the world that was in existence around the time of the birth of

Christ, you had two prevailing religious visions in the Middle East at any rate, the

Greek and the Judaic. They were opposed to each other in a variety of ways and

complemented each other in other ways. Christianity can be seen as the synthesis

of many of those ideas.

NM: Wasn't Judaism more of a complete religion [?] ~~with the details worked out and~~ ^{every}

~~authorized?~~ On the other hand, Judaism was relatively small. ~~So~~ ^{to} explain how

a Christian sect of Judaism took over that much of the Western World in a few

centuries it is necessary, I think, to assume that Rome was at the core of that

development. If Rome hadn't existed, ~~then~~ ^{*If one could suppose that*} Gnosticism might have continued.

Gnosticism, after all, had to be congenial to many upper-class Romans. That

would be my guess.

ML: Yes.

My NM: It gave them a chance to explore themselves. When people are wealthy, they

want to do just that, explore themselves. But there were other leaders in Rome, and

they believed that Rome had to become the final answer to existence; Rome, and

its government must become the answer to existence. Some even saw that with the

aid of Christianity they could fortify central government, authoritative

government. Existence could be dictated from the top down. They could even

overcome their own upper classes. So this becomes my assumption: It took the

Romans to recognize that belief in Jesus Christ was going to be very good for

Rome. Immediately, however, this was far from happening. In the first centuries

after Christ, Christianity softened Romans. Compassion, after all, was at the core

of these new beliefs. Nonetheless, the fundamental Roman concept that it was

vital to have an immensely powerful government at the top, did prevail. And

Rome became the seed-bed of the idea in the Middle Ages that for society to exist,

there must be absolute authority ^{wielded} ~~wielded~~ at the center of the summit.

Perhaps without this Roman spur to centrality, our civilization could not

have been built. In that sense, the authoritative lie, the New Testament, upon

which Christianity was founded did create Western civilization—even if it took

twelve centuries to reach the Renaissance. ^{I expect it took so} ~~Of course, irritation in the oyster shell~~

^{long because the} ~~does create the pearl. The~~ lie implicit in this new theologically ordained faith, this

respect for order from above, did present ^{its built-in} ~~obstacles. Even~~ the finest minds were

obliged to believe in dogma. Their lives, after all, were at stake—which can

account for the philosophical distances they traveled to make the illogic of faith

palatable to themselves. Medieval philosophy became a study of the ways in

which you can arrive at your desired end by ^{those most} ~~the~~ special means of language that

will enable you to come out at the end with an affirmation of ~~the~~ mighty

oxymorons ^{— as, for example,} God is All-Good and All-Powerful. ^{of course,} which violates ~~our~~ ~~these words violate our~~

~~not only our own experience but our sense of history,~~
~~experience.~~ All we can know or feel are intimations that something did create us.

There is also our philosophical sense that it is far more difficult to explain our

existence in the absence of a first cause than as the consequence of one. So, one

can believe in God in the way of a latter-day Gnostic. Yes, it is not because of

anything I read, nor anything I have been taught, certainly not because of what

spiritual propagandists have been trying to put in my head all these years, ^{no,} ~~but~~

I believe there is a creator because that makes
more simply because it ~~makes~~ sense to me. If there is not a God, then I cannot conceive

of how the universe ~~arose~~ came to be. So I go on from there to say that if

there is such a God, I have to assume that He or She is not perfect, ~~no more than~~

that on said basis of one's own experience
~~any of us. God is a creator, God is an artist, but God is still doing no more than,~~
and the world's experience.

~~His or Her best. Or Their godly best—~~if it happens to be a marriage. With that, we

stumble forward, blunder into further intimations of existence, not knowing

whether there are forces in existence larger than our God. Quite possibly, there *are,*

~~are/ Whether our God has to satisfy these higher Gods—quite possibly. That is~~

~~not knowable. What we can discern is that we live, most likely, in an existential~~

~~universe where the end is not known.~~ And, so the reason we are having these

dialogues—and I cringe at the ongoing crudity *necessarity* *brusque* ~~(inherent in the presentation of my~~

such sensitive

~~(~~ideas, but nonetheless it is what I can offer—I feel, yes, the reason we are having

these dialogues is that I think fundamentalist notions of absolute authority have

come to a point where they are too destructive to live under—too excruciating to

serve good purpose and too much of a manic faith-machine capable of inspiring

world disasters. There was a period, let's say, when without fundamentalism, there

might not have been a civilization. That period is now gone. In our age those same

ideas are choking us, distorting us, perverting and blinding us. ~~They wreck our~~ *I will say*

~~ability to think.~~

~~ML: You have not spoken today of your intimation that there is not only a God but a force opposing that God.~~

~~NM: Well, I do believe that Satanic forces are as powerful as God-like forces.~~

~~Both are at war within us. We humans are the battlefield for that war. How it will turn out is not known. In that sense, if there is such a thing as victory in these matters, God can win or Satan can win. But that brings us once more into such excesses of speculation that I leave these matters for the novelist in me. I will say~~

~~that if I feel ready to dismiss the eloquent and exceptional rationale of the best~~

~~theologians and philosophers, I have to add that their need to justify very~~

improbable propositions made them go through wonderful intellectual gymnastics.

Embarking on an immense error demands huge powers of development in the

brain of the person who is working on that vast error. Even though they fail

ultimately (and so egregiously that we have ^{had} to pay for their failures through ~~the~~

centuries) ~~afterward~~ nonetheless, the powers of human ratiocination have been

increased. That ^{is} ~~is~~ part of the perversity of philosophy.

ML: So I guess from what you've said you now understand why here and there in

commentary on your work and writing people will say, "Oh, Mailer, he's sort of a

Gnostic."

NM: Well, yes, ^{now} I do understand ~~now~~. Not that it matters. ~~What I ~~do~~ want to~~

~~emphasize before we finish is that~~ ^{just} I want to accomplish something with these

dialogues ^{Normally, you,} ~~which intellectuals normally don't look to engage in~~ You are not

supposed to talk about religion unless you know a great deal about it, ~~formally~~.

~~speaking~~, and then you are wise to say little. But I have proceeded to ponder these

questions without being qualified. Yet, my basic argument is that of course I am

nonetheless

~~qualified~~. We all are. That is why I can say yes, if you want to get down to it, I

probably am a Gnostic in the sense that the inner feeling I have about these

matters is so clear and so acute to me; ~~this notion that God is existential, that God,~~

~~is doing the best that He or She can do, is so fundamental, that I do~~ *and I do*

talk about it. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that oxymorons pollute the mind,

and the Great Oxymoron is the most toxic of them all—which is equal to saying

that modern-day fundamentalism is poison for the human spirit.

ML: Whereas Gnosticism now indicates the road to take?

NM: Perhaps we can now afford to be Gnostics. In their early Christian time, the

fundamental wisdom of human beings may have been: "We need order. We do not

need stimulation. We do not need thought that is lively and novel and new. We

need order. We need command from above." That was a stage in human existence.

~~was~~ It ~~is~~ ^{that} much like the stages of existence ^{that} children pass through where they must live
under order at a certain point or ^{nothing holds their behavior together,} it all comes apart.

ML: You're talking like a Hegelian now.

NM: Well, I don't care about the labels. I think we are at a stage of development

where Gnosticism may serve us better.

ML: I can imagine how you as a new Gnostic must think about corporations *too*.

NM: Well, we don't have to go there. Right now, I much prefer to wander

through the forests of theology than the quicksands of economics.

Metaphysical Interview, VIII

ML: I'd like to say a few words about Gnosticism. It is not a religious movement that people necessarily know much about, and it has been shunted pretty much off the face of the ideological earth.

Here are some of the general traits: First, a disdain for authority and Orthodoxy: A celebration of difference and diversity, although Gnostics did not, of course, use the word diversity. A great belief, however, in self knowledge, of studying the self, seeing the self as a phenomenon that you had to understand in order to attain larger knowledge. The self as a pathway to larger knowledge. They were dualists, but not absolute about it. They got that from the Greeks. They saw the body and the spirit as separate but mutually dependent.

NM: Did they have a sense of Apollo and Dionysus? I'm thinking of how

Nietzsche was obsessed by them in his early career.

ML: Yes, that would not be foreign to them at all but there was more of an

opposition between the Judaic and the Hellenic. They were very taken with Jewish

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Gnostics had great respect for Judaism on one hand and at the same time valued

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opposed to it. They liked it. As they liked certain Buddhist texts—

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strong campaign against them using St. John as the point of their attack. Because

St. John was a great believer in revelation, and the Gnostics did not believe in it.

Augustine was another fierce opponent, and, of course, St. Irenaeus wrote five volumes against the heresy. Many of the tenets of Christianity, for example

Original Sin, Resurrection, and Jesus as God were later additions to Christianity.

In the year 200, however, there was no sense of Original Sin and Resurrection was barely an idea.

The assumption that Jesus was God also came later. In good part, these ideas came in opposition to Gnosticism.

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come from. It is, however, endlessly more complex. The Demiurge thinks that it is

the God of the Old Testament. It is very similar. It is a jealous God, an angry God.

The Demiurge then creates the flora and the fauna, and then people, and does it

imperfectly. Even though humans are three times removed from the highest God

out there, they still feel this divine spark within them amidst a general feeling of

loneliness, incompleteness and abandonment. In this scheme of things, Jesus

becomes a messenger from Sophia or the God behind Sophia. Jesus is there to

keep alive the spark of what is good in human beings while opposing what is evil.

NM: Would this be a recognition by Sophia that the Demiurge may have been a bit

of a mistake?

ML: Yes.

NM: Most of the Gnostics believe that?

ML: Yes. In some versions, the Demiurge tries to undercut the messenger, Jesus or

Mohammed or Zoroaster—these new figures that come in with wisdom—the

Demiurge tries to attack them. Sometimes this gives rise to Manicheanism which

says that good and evil are at war, evil dominates the world, but good is going to win out.

NM: That does bring up a question. Where in this schemata is Satan?

ML: Satan could be the Demiurge.

NM: ^{Doesn't} Yes, but [?] this creates confusion. For some Jehovah is Jehovah. For others, ^{may} Jehovah become Satan.

ML: Let us say that Sophia creates many figures, some very strong like the

Demiurge and some are lesser evil figures. A whole range of figures emanate from the higher source. Any one of these can be used to exercise Evil.

NM: Well, ~~let's add that~~ [≡] long before the Gnostics, it was taken for granted that

there were many gods. This is ^{Certainly} true of the Egyptians and of the Greeks. ~~Certainly~~

^T The Hindus believed in a variety of deities. ~~And~~ [↑] the Africans certainly believed in

all kinds of ^{high and low} spirits. ^{the contrary} It is as if Judaism and then Christianity came to a

conclusion that a plethora of gods
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~~profound determination that it did not serve to look for cosmic truth. Human~~
~~them with them~~
It would be better for humans to believe
beings had to be shepherded into believing that there was one truth. *Even from teachers*

ML: And one God.

NM: And one God. This had to be established, ~~confirmed~~ *than* and ground into the

psyche. Which would of course explain the intensity of the early Christian attacks
on the Gnostics.

ML: Yes, they burned their books, they expelled them, they killed them. You
know, when they found the Gnostic Gospels in 1945 in Egypt, those were
remarkable documents—third or fourth century copies of documents that went
back to the time of Christ. Elsewhere they had been systematically burned and
destroyed. But because of the obscurity of this hiding place, these scrolls had not
been uncovered, and so it was a great revelation. Historical and Biblical scholars
had always known about the Gnostics but as a body whom Augustine and Irenaeus

had attacked. They never heard them speak for themselves. When they found the

Gnostic Gospels, they discovered a completely different Christianity, one that did

not embrace a monolithic God and had a host of negative feelings about the Old

Testament and so jealous a God as Jehovah. We can ask: What was he jealous

of? Maybe other gods. So the Gnostics became the losers in this huge struggle.

But you could see, at least personally I see in the narrowness and the Orthodoxy of

Christianity from the time of Augustine on, how narrow is Christianity in relation

to its roots. A hatred of the flesh, the concept of Original Sin, the insistence that

Jesus must be God, he cannot merely be God's messenger. And to counter such

concepts, remarkable figures did come out of the Middle East—John the Baptist,

Jesus, Mani, Zoroaster, Adonis, Dionysus, ^{Osiris}~~Orsis~~—incredible figures. From a

Gnostic point of view they would all be messengers sent down to keep alive the

spark.

NM: Wouldn't it also be an early attempt to understand the mechanics of

existence? So many of these minor gods did explain aspects of life that are ignored

by early Christianity. *I would even say that* ~~And it was precisely~~ this curiosity about the nature of God

~~was seen by~~ that Judaism and Christianity ~~saw~~ as the great enemy. ~~Because~~ you cannot build an

integrated ~~solid~~ society so long as there are *all* too many ways to elaborate the details. In this

sense, you can look upon the Judeo-Christian enterprise as determined to become

an absolute arbiter over the more *mysteries* ~~mysterious details~~ of existence.

ML: And should there be a debate, it is to be resolved by the supreme leaders of

the Church.

NM: Yes, do not look into yourself. ~~Refer to~~ the external authority.

ML: And so you could say that the final expression of this was in 1870 when the

Catholic Church came up with the infallibility of the Pope.

NM: Yes.

ML: That was always implicit, but finally they had to state it. It was a final

consolidation of Papal power. In a lot of the reading I've done about Gnosticism,

when you think of the world that was in existence around the time of the birth of

Christ, you had two prevailing religious visions in the Middle East at any rate, the

Greek and the Judaic. They were opposed to each other in a variety of ways and

complemented each other in other ways. Christianity can be seen as the synthesis

of many of those ideas.

NM: Wasn't Judaism more of a complete religion with the details worked out and

authorized? On the other hand, Judaism was relatively small. So, to explain how

a Christian sect of Judaism took over that much of the Western World in a few

centuries it is necessary, I think, to assume that Rome was at the core of that

development. If Rome hadn't existed, then Gnosticism might have continued.

after all,
Gnosticism had to be congenial to many ~~many~~ upper class Romans. That would

be my guess.

ML: Yes.

NM: ~~After all,~~ ^{III} it gave them a chance to explore themselves. When people are

wealthy, they want to do just that, explore themselves. But there were other

leaders in Rome, and they believed that Rome was the ^{had to become the final} answer to existence; Rome, ~~and its~~

~~and its power~~ ^{authority must become} not religion, but Rome. Government ~~was~~ the answer to existence. ~~So, some of~~

~~Some even~~ ^{this is of} them also saw that with Christianity they could fortify the notion of central

government, ~~of~~ authoritative government. Existence could be dictated from the

top down. They could even overcome their own upper classes. So this becomes

my assumption: It took the Romans to recognize that belief in Jesus Christ was

going to be very good for Rome. Immediately, however, this was far from

happening. In the first centuries after Christ, Christianity softened Romans.

at the core of these new beliefs,
Compassion, after all, was ~~the~~ *aria*. Nonetheless, the fundamental Roman concept

that it was vital to have an immensely powerful government at the top, did prevail.

And Rome became the seed-bed of the idea in the Middle Ages that for society to

would
exist, there must be absolute authority *at the center.*

~~The large point, I think, is we don't know if it was necessary to have such
authority at the top, not if human society was to develop.~~

Roman spur to centrality, our civilization could not have been built. In that sense,

the authoritative lie, the New Testament, upon which Christianity was founded did

create Western civilization—even if it took twelve centuries to reach the

Renaissance. Of course, irritation in the oyster shell does create the pearl. The lie

would
implicit in this new theologically ordained faith, this respect for order ~~from the~~

Even
~~invisible~~ above, did present obstacles *to* the finest minds of these centuries. They

were obliged to believe in dogma. Their lives, after all, were at stake—which can

account for the philosophical distances they travelled to make the illogic of faith

palatable to themselves. Medieval philosophy became a study of the ways in

which you can arrive at your desired end by the special means of language that

will enable you to come out at the end with an affirmation of the mighty

oxymoron—God is All-Good and All-Powerful. Those words violate our

experience. All we can know or feel are intimations that something did create us.

There is also our philosophical sense that it is far more difficult to explain our

existence in the absence of a first cause than as the consequence of one. So, one

can believe in God in the way of a latter-day Gnostic. Yes. ~~It~~ is not because of

anything I read, nor anything I have been taught, ^{certainly} not because of what spiritual

propagandists have been trying to put in my head all these years, but simply

because it makes sense to me. If there is not a God, then I cannot conceive of

how the universe around me came to be. So I go on from there to say that if there

is such a God, I have to assume that He or She is not perfect, no more than any of

us. God is a creator, God is an artist, but God is still doing no more than His or

Her best. Or Their godly best—if it happens to be a marriage. With that, we

stumble forward, blunder into further intimations of existence, not knowing

whether there are forces in existence larger than our God. Quite possibly, there

are. Whether our God has to satisfy those higher Gods—quite possibly. That is

not knowable. What we can discern is that we live, most likely, in an existential

universe where the end is not known. And, so the reason we are having these

dialogues—and I cringe at the ongoing crudity of ^{inherent in} my presentation of my ideas, but

nonetheless it is what I can offer—I feel, yes, the reason we are having these

dialogues is that I think fundamentalist notions of absolute authority have come to

a point where they are too ^{destructive} ~~expensive~~ to live under—too excruciating to serve good

purpose and too much of a manic faith-machine capable of inspiring world

disasters. There was a period, lets say, when without fundamentalism, there might

not have been a civilization. That period is now gone. In our age those same ideas are choking us, distorting us, perverting and blinding us. They wreck our ability to think.

ML: You have not spoken today of your intimation that there is not only a God but a force opposing that God.

NM: Well, I do believe that Satanic forces are as powerful as God-like forces.

Both are at war within us. We humans are the battlefield for that war. How it will turn out is not known. In that sense, if there is such a thing as victory in these matters, God can win or Satan can win. But that brings us once more into such

excess of
~~rank~~ speculation that I leave these matters for the novelist in me. I will say that if I

feel ready to dismiss the eloquent and exceptional rationale of the best theologians and philosophers, I have to add that their need to justify very improbable

propositions made them go through wonderful intellectual gymnastics. Embarking

on an immense error demands huge powers of development in the brain of the

person who is working on that vast error. Even though they fail ultimately (and so

egregiously that we have to pay for their failures through centuries afterward)

nonetheless, the powers of human ratiocination have been increased. That's part of

the perversity of philosophy.

ML: So I guess from what you've said you now understand why here and there in

commentary on your work and writing people will say, "Oh, Mailer, he's sort of a

Gnostic."

NM: Well, yes I do understand now. Not that it matters. What I do want to

emphasize before we finish is that I want to accomplish something with these

dialogues which intellectuals normally don't look to engage in. You are not

supposed to talk about religion unless you know a great deal about it, formally

speaking, and then you are wise to say little. ~~And~~ ^{But} I have proceeded to ponder these

questions without being qualified. Yet, my basic argument is that of course I am qualified. We all are. That is why I can say yes, if you want to get down to it, I probably am a Gnostic in the sense that the inner feeling I have about these matters is so clear and so acute to me: this notion that God is existential, that God is doing the best that He or She can do, is so fundamental, that I do feel ready to talk about it. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that oxymorons pollute the mind, and the Great Oxymoron is the most toxic of them all—which is equal to saying that modern-day fundamentalism is poison for the human spirit.

ML: Whereas Gnosticism now indicates the road to take?

NM: Perhaps we can now afford to be Gnostics. In their early Christian time, the fundamental wisdom of human beings may have been: "We need order. We do not need stimulation. We do not need thought that is lively and novel and new. We

need order. We need command from above." That was a stage in human existence.

It's much like the stages of existence children pass through where they must live

under order at a certain point or it all comes apart.

ML: You're talking like a Hegelian now.

NM: Well, I don't care about the labels. I think we are at a stage of development

where Gnosticism may serve us better.

ML: I can imagine how you as a new Gnostic must think about corporations *too*.

NM: Well, we don't have to go there. Right now, I much prefer to wander

through the forests of theology than the ~~quicksand~~^{quick sands} of economics.

INTERVIEW ~~VIII~~ IX

ML: As we have agreed ^{this} before this meeting, the form of the previous interviews

will be altered for our discussion on Gnosticism. ^a I think this may even be the most natural way to conclude this ^{be}
→ that way be But I have to with that

NM: ~~Yes~~, I recognize that although I have lived the word in many a text over

many a year, indeed even gave a full reading to Elaine Pagel's The Gnostic

Gospels some years ago, I am ^{still} not comfortable with the term. I ~~still~~ feel ignorant

of its meanings in relation to what we have talked about. One of the perils of bad

memory from which I suffer is that one retains not nearly enough of one's serious

Growing old usually
reading. *Age* thoroughly ensures that if you last long enough to reach your

eighties, your memory will bear more resemblance to *have to* a wall than a text.

ML: Forewarned, forewarned. I came prepared.

~~ML~~ I would start by saying that you are hardly alone. Gnosticism is not a
religious movement and it has been shunted pretty much off the face of the
ideological earth.

~~Manichaeism?~~

Here are a few of the general traits: There is first, a disdain for authority
and Orthodoxy which is opposed by a great belief in studying the self. The self is
regarded as a phenomenon that you had to understand to some serious degree in
order to attain larger knowledge. The self is the pathway to larger knowledge.

In this sense, the Gnostics were close to the
Manichaeans who
They were dualists, but not absolute about it. Like the Gnostics, they saw the body

and the spirit as separate but mutually dependent. They were very taken with

Manichaeans

Jewish mysticism which of course had been present long before Christ, ^{and 30} But as a

^{puc-diac)} ^{into} set, the Gnostics (seem to have come into existence around the second century

^{indeed} B.C. and in the beginning ~~they~~ were an esoteric branch of Judaism. As you may

recall from reading The Golden Bough, there were many competing sects at this

time. But the Gnostics had great respect for Judaism ^{while} ~~on one hand and~~ at the same

^{valuing} time ~~valued the~~ Greek belief in knowledge and self examination. ~~They prized that~~

~~very highly.~~

NM: My knowledge of Jewish mysticism is not profound, but I did some reading

in the Kabbalah and the Zohar. Neither existed, however, at that point.

ML: No, although later, when the Kabbalah did develop, the Gnostics were not

opposed to it. They liked it. As they liked certain Buddhist texts—

NM: You're talking about a thousand years later.

ML: That's right.

NM: The Gnostics, in other words, continue well into the Middle Ages.

ML: Probably they end with the Inquisition.

NM: I thought the various uprootings of the heresies in the early centuries of

Christianity took care of the Gnostics. Not so?

ML: It diminished them greatly. As I say, Gnosticism came into existence around the second century B.C. and built its ongoing strength by taking in Jewish strains, Christian strains, even Buddhist strains right up to the fourth century A.D. At that point the Christian church, especially under St. Augustine and St. Irenaeus, mounted a strong campaign against them using St. John as the point of their spear.

Because St. John was a great believer in revelation, and the Gnostics ^{were} ~~did~~ not,

Augustine was another fierce opponent, and, of course, St. Irenaeus wrote five volumes against the heresy. Many of the tenets of Christianity, for example

Original Sin, Resurrection, and Jesus as the son of God were later additions to

Christianity. In the year 200, however, there was no sense of Original Sin and

Resurrection was barely an idea. The assumption that Jesus was God also came

later. In good part, these ideas came in opposition to Gnosticism.

NM: Could you say that the first purpose of Original Sin was to forge a powerful weapon against the Gnostics?

ML: Yes. Gnosticism advocated individualism in search of enlightenment. It

believed in reincarnation. It believed that all humans had some kind of divine

spark. The spark may be trapped, impossible to free, one might be out of touch

with it, but it was there.

NM: I agree with so much of this.

ML: I thought you might. It's no accident that the fundamentalists, to the extent

that they know anything about Gnosticism, see it as a disreputable part of early

Christianity, and best kept in the closet. If Gnosticism survives at all now, it may

be among some sects who live on the border of Iraq and Iran-- the Mandeans, for

example, are still there. The attribute to emphasize is that in Greek, *Gnosis* means

"knowledge." *Gnosticos* is someone who ^{seeks} ~~is seeking~~ knowledge by searching the

depths of the self, looking at the self as the available ground for enlightenment ~~and~~

~~knowledge~~. When it came to the body, they were more divided. Some saw a

division between the spirit and the flesh, some felt that the flesh wasn't important

at all and therefore they could go out and fuck themselves silly because it didn't

make any difference. Another branch of the Gnostics were purifiers. To the

Zoroastrians, fire was holy because it purified. Water was holy. But they didn't

believe in sex. Ergo, they died out. While Christianity became monolithic,

Gnosticism divided. And that is another one of the reasons it didn't survive. Nor

did it have an Augustine or an Irenaeus drawing everything together, and

organizing a belief system.

NM. Well, I think it hardly matters whether it was a conscious move on the part of the early Church fathers, or an instinct, but I expect the Church fathers were certain that Christianity had to be absolute. Otherwise, it was not going to work. To hold it together there must be no questions. ^{Naught but} ~~Only~~ answers. So the Gnostics were directly offensive to the Church fathers. It seems as if they certainly agree with what some of us are saying today: That there are no answers. There are only questions. The mark of a good society, a few of us might argue, speaking of a society that has not yet come into existence, is that you move from one set of questions up to a higher level of questions. Whereas, the early Christian philosophers founded their church upon ^{the} ~~a wholly~~ opposed conclusion. People must be given absolute certainty about life and death. Particularly about death. An absolute statement of Heaven and Hell was required ~~therefore~~. The notion of reincarnation was too nuanced, too special, too elegant, too delicate, too possible.

So, it had to be absolutely forbidden; and still is off the board today for

~~fundamentalists.~~

I was reading Nietzsche's *Anti-Christ* a few days ago, and at a certain point he says, "All priests are liars." It's a marvelous remark because it happens to be not only daring but true. Whenever you speak with absolute authority about something that you cannot prove, the decision to speak with such authority means that you are ready to live as a liar. It seems to me that Christianity, because of its determination to be wholly authoritative, was able ultimately to create huge societies. Now, these huge societies work by half and by half they fail. Certainly, for centuries, they functioned well enough to limp along philosophically full of unanswerable questions and hideous inequalities ready to sweep all unanswerable questions under a rug of absolute faith.

ML: ~~ML:~~ Long before the Gnostics, it was taken for granted that there were many

gods. This is certainly true of the Egyptians and of the Greeks. The Hindus

believed in a variety of deities. The Africans ~~certainly~~ reacted to all kinds of

spirits high and low. It is as if Judaism and then Christianity came to a contrary

conclusion; this plethora of gods did not serve their faith. It would be better for

humans to believe ~~that~~ there was one truth only.

~~ML: And one God.~~

NM: And one God. ~~This had to be established, then ground into the psyche.~~ Which

would of course explain the intensity of the early Christian attacks on the

Gnostics.

ML: Yes, they burned their books, they expelled them, they killed them. You

know, when they found the Gnostic Gospels in 1945 in Egypt, those were

remarkable documents—third or fourth century copies of documents that went

back to the time of Christ. Elsewhere they had been systematically burned and

destroyed. But because of the obscurity of this hiding place, these scrolls had not been uncovered, and so it was a great revelation. Historical and Biblical scholars had always known about the Gnostics but mainly because Augustine and Irenaeus had attacked them. They never heard them speak for themselves. When they found the Gnostic Gospels, they discovered a completely different Christianity, one that did not embrace a monolithic God and had a host of negative feelings about the Old Testament and the intensity of rage and jealousy in Jehovah. We can ask: What was he jealous of? Maybe other gods. So the Gnostics became the losers in this huge struggle.

But you could see, at least personally I see in the narrowness and the Orthodoxy of Christianity from the time of Augustine on, how narrow is Christianity in relation to its roots. A hatred of the flesh, the concept of Original Sin, the insistence that

Jesus must be God. He cannot merely be God's messenger. And to counter such

concepts, remarkable figures did come out of the Middle East—John the Baptist,

Jesus, Mani, Zoroaster, Adonis, Dionysus, Osiris—incredible figures. From a

Gnostic point of view they would all be messengers sent down to keep alive the

spark.

NM: Wouldn't it also be an early attempt to understand the mechanics of

existence? ~~So many of these minor gods did explain aspects of life that are ignored~~

~~by early Christianity.~~ I would even say that this curiosity about the nature of God

was seen by Judaism and Christianity as the great enemy. You cannot build a

powerfully structured society so long as there are all too many ways to elaborate

the details. The Judeo-Christian enterprise was determined then to become an

absolute arbiter over the more mysterious elements of existence.

ML: And should there be a debate, it was to be resolved by the supreme leaders of the Church.

NM: Yes, do not look into yourself. Refer to ^{your} ~~the~~ external authority.

ML: And so you could say that the final expression of this was in 1870 when the Catholic Church came up with the infallibility of the Pope. That was always implicit. But finally they now had to state it. It was the final consolidation of Papal power. When you think of the world that was in existence around the time of the birth of Christ, you had two prevailing religious visions in the Middle East at any rate, the Greek and the Judaic. They were opposed to each other in a variety of ways and complemented each other in other ways. Christianity can be seen as the synthesis of many of those ideas.

NM: Wasn't Judaism more of a complete religion? On the other hand, Judaism was relatively small. To explain how a Christian sect of Judaism took over that

much of the Western World in a few centuries it is necessary, I think, to assume

that Rome was at the core of that development. If Rome hadn't existed one could suspect that Gnosticism might have continued. Gnosticism, after all, had to be congenial to many upper-class Romans. That would be my guess.

ML: Yes.

NM: It gave them a chance to explore themselves. When people are wealthy, they

want to do just that, ~~explore themselves~~. But there were other leaders in Rome, ^{who} ~~and~~

~~they~~ believed that Rome had to become the final answer to existence; Rome, and

its government ~~must become the answer to existence~~. Some even saw that with the

aid of Christianity they could fortify ~~central government~~ authoritative

government. Existence could be dictated from the top down. They could even

overcome their own upper classes. So this becomes my assumption: It took the

Romans to recognize that belief in Jesus Christ was going to be very good for

Rome. Immediately, however, this was far from happening. In the first centuries

after Christ, Christianity softened Romans. Compassion, after all, was at the core

of these new beliefs. Nonetheless, the fundamental Roman concept that it was

vital to have an immensely powerful government at the top, did prevail. And

Rome became the seed-bed of the idea in the Middle Ages that for society to exist,

there must be absolute authority wielded at the center of the summit.

Perhaps without this Roman spur to centrality, our civilization could not have

been built. In that sense, the authoritative lie, the New Testament, upon which

Christianity was founded did create Western civilization—even if it took twelve

centuries to reach the Renaissance. I expect it took so long because the lie implicit

in this new theologically ordained faith, this respect for order from above, did

present built-in obstacles. The finest minds were obliged to believe in dogma.

Their lives, after all, were at stake—which can account for the philosophical

distances they traveled to make the illogic of faith palatable to themselves.

Medieval philosophy became a study of the ways in which you can arrive at your desired end by the most special means of language that enable you to come out at the end with an affirmation of mighty oxymorons—as, for example, God is All-Good and All-Powerful, which, of course, violates not only our own experience but our sense of history. All we can know or feel are intimations that something did create us. There is also our philosophical sense that it is far more difficult to explain our existence ^{by} ~~in~~ the absence of a first cause than as the consequence of one. So, one can believe in God in the way of a latter-day Gnostic. Yes, it is not because of anything I read, nor anything I have been taught, certainly not because of what spiritual propagandists have been trying to put in my head all these years. No, I believe there is a Creator because that makes more sense to me. If there is not a God, then I cannot conceive of how ^{our} ~~the~~ universe came to be. So I go on from

there to say that if there is such a God, I have to assume that He or She is not

perfect. Not on the aforesaid basis of one's own experience and the world's experience. With that, we stumble forward, blunder into further intimations of existence, not knowing whether there are forces in existence larger than our God.

Quite possibly, there are. And, so the reason we are having these dialogues—and I

cringe at the ongoing crudity necessarily inherent in ^{such} the brusque presentation of

such sensitive ideas, ~~but~~ ^{now} nonetheless, it is what I can offer ^I I feel, yes, the reason

we are having these dialogues is that I think fundamentalist notions of absolute

authority have come to a point where they are ~~too~~ destructive to live under ^{SE} too

^{intellectually} excruciating to serve good purpose and too much of a manic faith-machine

capable of inspiring world disasters. There was a period, let's say, when without

fundamentalism, there might not have been a civilization. That period is now

gone. In our age those same ideas are choking us, distorting us, perverting and

Just turn on your TV and listen to televangelists yelling for money. Their presence is so toxic that I feel ready to dismiss the eloquent and exceptional

rationale of the best theologians and philosophers. I have to add that their need to

justify very improbable propositions *that make the televangelists possible, excruciating* made them go through *the* wonderful intellectual

gymnastics. Embarking on an immense error demands huge powers of

development in the brain of the person who is working on that vast error. Even

though they fail ultimately (and so egregiously that we have had to pay for their

failures through the centuries) nonetheless, the powers of human ratiocination

have been increased. That is part of the perversity of philosophy. *Working with an ill-founded thesis can also improve one's ability to debate.*

commentary on your work and writing people will say, "Oh, Mailer, he's sort of a

Gnostic."

NM: Well, yes, now I do understand. Not that it matters. I just want to

accomplish something with these dialogues. Normally, you are not supposed to

talk about religion unless you know a ~~great~~ ^{good} deal about it, and then you are wise to

say little. But I have proceeded to ponder these questions without being qualified.

Yet, my basic argument is that of course I am ~~nevertheless~~ ^{all the same} qualified. We all are.

That is why I can say yes, if you want to get down to it, I probably am a Gnostic in

the sense that the inner feeling I have about these matters is so clear and so acute

to me ~~and I~~ ^{certainly} do feel ready to talk about it. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that

oxymorons pollute the mind, and the Great Oxymoron is the most ~~toxic~~ ^{- All-Good and All-Power but} of them

all—which is equal to saying that modern-day fundamentalism is poison ^{to} for the

human spirit.

ML: Whereas Gnosticism now indicates the road to take?

NM: Perhaps we can now afford to be Gnostics. In their early Christian time, the

fundamental wisdom of human beings may have been: "We need order. We do not

need stimulation. We do not need thought that is lively and novel and new. We

need order. We need command from above." That was a stage in human existence.

It was much like the stages of existence that children pass through where they

must live under order at a certain point or nothing holds their behavior together.

ML: You're talking like a Hegelian now.

NM: Well, I don't care about the labels. I think we are at a stage of development

where Gnosticism may serve us better.

ML: I can imagine how you as a new Gnostic must think about corporations *too*.

NM: Well, we don't have to go there. Right now, I much prefer to wander

through the forests of theology than the quicksands of economics.

Let me conclude, however, by
thanking you for the order and
stimulation you brought to
this theologically ignorant mind.