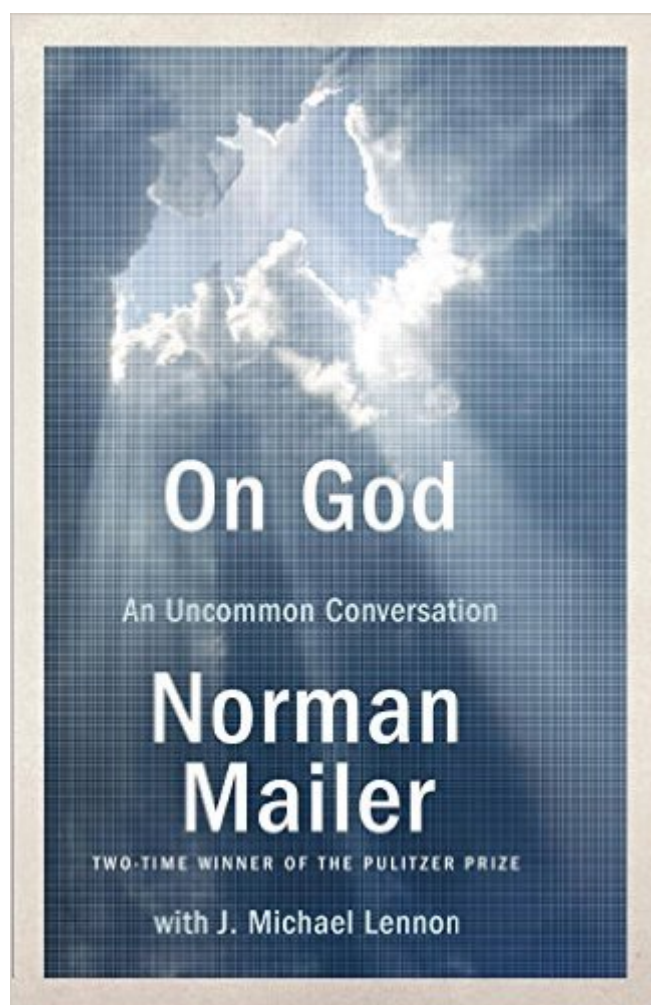


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# On God: An Uncommon Conversation



## Synopsis

“I see God,” wrote Norman Mailer, “as a Creator, as the greatest artist. I see human beings as His most developed artworks.” In these moving, amusing, and probing dialogues conducted in the years before his death, Mailer establishes his own system of belief, rejecting both organized religion and atheism. He avows that sensual pleasures were bestowed on us by God; he finds fault with the Ten Commandments; and he holds that technology was the Devil’s most brilliant creation. In short, Mailer is original and unpredictable in this inspiring journey, in which “God needs us as much as we need God.”

—Praise for *On God*

“[Norman Mailer’s] theology is not theoretical to him. After eight decades, it is what he believes. He expects no adherents, and does not profess to be a prophet, but he has worked to forge his beliefs into a coherent catechism.”

—New York “The glory of an original mind in full provocation.”

—USA Today “At once illuminating and exciting . . . a chance to see Mailer’s intellect as well as his lively conversational style of speech.”

—American Jewish Life “Remarkable . . . [Mailer’s] a believer “in his own fashion. . . . He has made [God] into a complex character.”

—The Globe and Mail “Praise for Norman Mailer “[Norman Mailer] loomed over American letters longer and larger than any other writer of his generation.”

—The New York Times “A writer of the greatest and most reckless talent.”

—The New Yorker “Mailer is indispensable, an American treasure.”

—The Washington Post “A devastatingly alive and original creative mind.”

—Life “Mailer is fierce, courageous, and reckless and nearly everything he writes has sections of headlong brilliance.”

—The New York Review of Books “The largest mind and imagination [in modern] American literature . . . Unlike just about every American writer since Henry James, Mailer has managed to grow and become richer in wisdom with each new book.”

—Chicago Tribune “Mailer is a master of his craft. His language carries you through the story like a leaf on a stream.”

—The Cincinnati Post

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I read "Miami and the Siege of Chicago" shortly after it was published. It was a fairly decent book. But I saw Mailer was a second-tier novelist who considered himself, vainly, to be absolutely first-tier. He admired Hemingway too much and modeled his behavior after that vastly more talented American novelist. Mailer wanted to be Hemingway. But Mailer never really evidenced Hemingway's bold grace or prolific talent and never really pulled off the clownish, public ruses, which ultimately now diminish him. As for existentialism, Mailer liked to quote Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky. I'm not sure how well he really understood Sartre or Kierkegaard or Gabriel Marcel or Heidegger. But Mailer brands himself as an existentialist because he seems to love the sound of the word, which he too often repeats, and wants you to believe he is "authentic" -- the real thing. Mailer comes off as a narcissist, which he is, of course, and lives at the center of his own cosmos: God is an author, God forbid. Having said all of this candidly, "On God" offers some fresh and profound theology: it turns out that Mailer is far superior, later in life, as a theologian than over a long career as a novelist. His approach to the big question as to "If God is good and all powerful, why is there so much evil?" is convincing and cogent and enlightened. Read the book for Mailer's answer to this one question alone. He offers some of the most insightful, however speculative, perspective on the authentic reality of the relationship between God and the Devil since the epic poetry of Milton in "Paradise Lost." He attacks the inauthenticity rampant among organized religion.

During much of his long and illustrious career in American letters, Norman Mailer wrote extensively about his beliefs concerning God, the Devil and the war between good and evil, as well as man's role in this cosmological struggle. The foundation of Mailer's cosmology is based on the idea that God is not all-good and all-powerful, but is an existential God doing the best that He/She can do. His thoughts and beliefs relating to his religious system were often expressed implicitly in his novels and more explicitly in his non-fiction. Now, with the publication of this excellent book, On God, we have Mailer's thoughts on these topics systematized and expanded over the course of more than two hundred fascinating and stimulating pages. The book is in the form of an interview as indicated by the subtitle "An Uncommon Conversation." This interview took place at intervals over the course

of three years - from June 2003 to June 2006. The interrogator, Michael Lennon, is very skillful at extracting Mailer's thoughts, getting further explications, always probing deeper, reminiscent, in a way to Melville's description of peeling the onion, layer by layer, to get to the deeper meanings one finds below. The reader is often as pleased with the manner in which ideas develop as in the actual ideas themselves. The book seems spontaneous and fresh even though Mailer had been thinking about the topics covered for the past fifty years. On God will certainly prove to be invaluable to Mailer scholars or for that matter to anyone who loves to read his books since an intelligent comprehension of his works is not possible without an understanding of his metaphysics. This book should also be of interest to anyone who has an open mind with regard to religious questions.

Norman Mailer has spent a good deal of his fifty plus year career as a writer wrestling with the issue of God and the nature of His being, speculations that have helped make his books rich texts for advancing limitless sets of dualisms about the condition of America and the growing complexity in the issue of good vs. evil. He has now brought us his new book, "On God: An Uncommon Conversation", a series of discussions with his literary archivist, professor J. Michael Lennon. It is a fascinating discussion, intriguing quite despite Mailer's confessed lack of theological training. The lack of training works to Mailer's advantage; his God is less an all seeing General Manager of the universe than he is an artist trying to fill a page with beautiful words, or a canvas with arresting figures in sublime colors and shades. Mailer is that rare creature, an actual American religious existentialist, a philosophy that insists that we cannot have a meaningful faith unless we face the circumstances of our life straight on, without reservation, and take a creative action to deal with them, sans the comforting catechisms priests, rabbis or monks might offer us. The point is that we advance toward a solution, create a meaningful context for ourselves in an existence where greater assurances are impossible, and that we take full responsibility for the consequences of the acts we do; we commit acts of faith that God is with us, without guarantees, and that we make mistakes along the way. Mailer is taken with the notion that we're created in his image, and speculates that he also gave us his temperament and fallibilities as well as his best graces, all without the supernatural abilities.

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