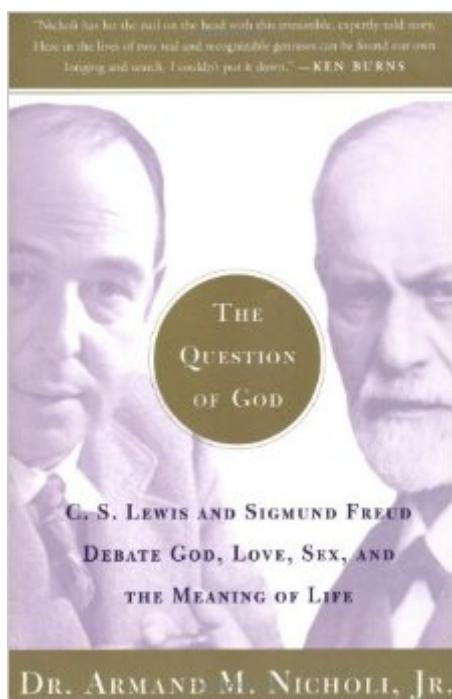


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The Question Of God: C.S. Lewis And Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, And The Meaning Of Life



Synopsis

Throughout the ages, many of the world's greatest thinkers have wrestled with the concept of -- and belief in -- God. It may seem unlikely that any new arguments or insights could be raised, but the twentieth century managed to produce two brilliant men with two diametrically opposed views about the question of God: Sigmund Freud and C. S. Lewis. They never had an actual meeting, but in *The Question of God*, their arguments are placed side by side for the very first time. For more than twenty-five years, Armand Nicholi has taught a course at Harvard that compares the philosophical arguments of both men. In *The Question of God*, Dr. Nicholi presents the writings and letters of Lewis and Freud, allowing them to "speak" for themselves on the subject of belief and disbelief. Both men considered the problem of pain and suffering, the nature of love and sex, and the ultimate meaning of life and death -- and each of them thought carefully about the alternatives to their positions. The inspiration for the PBS series of the same name, *The Question of God* does not presuppose which man -- Freud the devout atheist or Lewis the atheist-turned-believer -- is correct in his views. Rather, readers are urged to join Nicholi and his students and decide for themselves which path to follow.

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Customer Reviews

I thoroughly enjoyed exploring both the thoughts of Freud and Lewis through Dr. Nicholi's summary in this book. People who are not familiar with the writings of Lewis or Freud (or both) will find this a very readable primer on their basic worldviews. I confess that I am puzzled at those who accuse

Nicholi of "stacking the deck" in favor of Lewis, or merely feigning objectivity while actually casting Freud in a poor light. The thinly veiled assertion seems to be that Freud was actually very different than he is made out to be in this book, and that Nicholi either consciously or unconsciously skews Freud's real positions and ideas. I found that far from the truth. First, Nicholi readily acknowledges that no one is truly objective and dispassionate, particularly on such fundamental questions as the meaning of life and existence of God. But I believe he does an excellent job of not injecting his own bias into the equation. Second, Nicholi takes pains to point out many of the (rather substantial) contributions Freud has made to modern thought, particularly in his field of psychoanalysis. Finally, Nicholi's text is historical. Where people may have encountered frustration (particularly supporters or Freud's worldview) is when Nicholi attempts to look at the actual EFFECT of each man's worldview on his life; a perfectly appropriate tactic given the goal of the book. Nicholi cites nothing but historically verifiable facts about these two men. Whether one believes in God or not, the rather dramatic nature of Lewis' conversion is undeniable -- one may debate the cause(s) of his change, but not the existence of the change. The same holds true for the despair and loneliness that Freud freely acknowledges experiencing in heavy doses.

Quite simply, *The Question of God* is an exceptional book. Where to start? Dr. Nicholi's basic premise is ingenious: compare and contrast the material (Atheistic) worldview of Sigmund Freud with the spiritual (Faith-based) worldview of C.S. Lewis. The result is an exceptional book that goes straight to the heart of life and living: Is there a God? Is death our only destiny? How can we/should we enjoy life? Answers to these and other life and death (literally) questions are addressed through Dr. Nicholi's remarkable and successful effort. Dr. Nicholi's writing style is lucid, learned and accessible. Other .com critiques of his writing style as merely being "Freud says this, but Lewis says that" simply do not hold water. Dr. Nicholi injects his text on Freud and Lewis with meticulous direct quotes from each man's writings, both public and personal, plus accounts from others who knew Freud or Lewis. Dr. Nicholi's writing succeeds on all levels: fairness (Dr. Nicholi's truly unbiased prose is to be commended), lucidity, and captivation: as the favorable comments from readers on the back cover notes, I too had a hard time putting this book down. At least one earlier reviewer dismissed the book because Lewis, being a generation after Freud, always gets the last word, so the book's premise is hopelessly flawed. On the contrary, while Dr. Nicholi not only notes in the Prologue that Freud had no chance to rebut Lewis directly, he nevertheless anticipated some spiritual worldview arguments made by Lewis, and are so noted by Dr. Nicholi. Finally, still other reviewers dismissed C.S. Lewis as just another "apologetic" and not a very good one. Ridiculous!

Prior to reading this book I knew very little about Sigmund Freud, and already quite a bit about C.S. Lewis. To be honest, my initial interest in purchasing and reading the book was based on my shameless/addictive quest to own and read everything I possibly can, about LEWIS. Having said that though, I am glad to have learned so much about Freud in the process. I think that the author does a good job of presenting the viewpoints of each man, with respect to their opinions on such topics as Creation, Conscience, Religious Conversion, Happiness, Sex, Love, Pain, and Death. Big issues. Worthy of big, deeply felt convictions. And each man had them. So many reviewers here have speculated that the author does not write this book from a disinterested stance, that he in fact, favors Lewis, and presents him as being a more consistent and (for lack of a better word) healthy individual. I agree that Lewis does come off as being such. But what is most important to me (as a reader of the information) is... is it TRUE? Is this slant toward Lewis as a more self-actualized person fair? Or is it fabricated? Is it manufactured? Is Lewis deliberately favored? Hmm... Dr. Nicholi has studied the philosophical writings of both men for over twenty-five years, and teaches a course at Harvard based on an examination of these two worldviews. Somehow, I do not imagine this present book as some latent "hate-on" for Freud finally making itself known in printed form. It did not appear that way for me, although yes, Lewis does come across as being someone who lived a more personally fulfilled, whole life. I believe that the quotation marks speak for themselves. This is a well-researched book, I do not feel that Dr. Nicholi is really putting words or ideas INTO the mouth and mind of either figure.

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