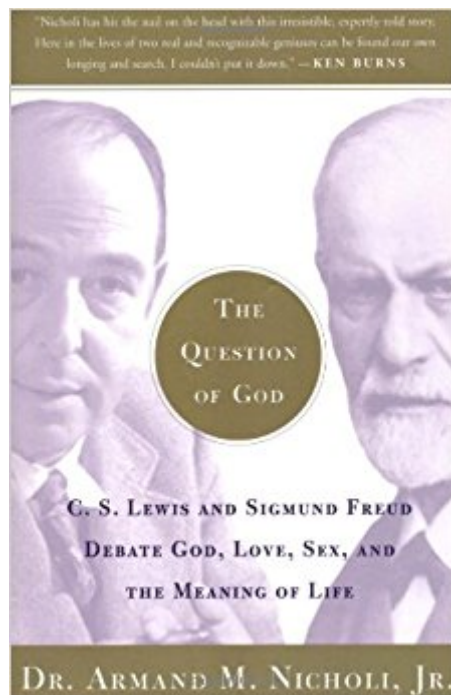


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# The Question Of God: C.S. Lewis And Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, And The Meaning Of Life



## 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.

## Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Free Press; 27823rd edition (August 7, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 074324785X

ISBN-13: 978-0743247856

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.7 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 210 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #33,472 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #18 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Philosophers](#) #40 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Metaphysics](#) #42 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Philosophy](#)

## Customer Reviews

Of course we can never really answer the question of whether God exists. And of course it would have been highly unlikely for Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis to discuss this question in person, considering that they were born in different countries and a generation apart. Nonetheless, *The*

Question of God allows readers to listen in on one of the most articulate debates possible by creating a virtual meeting of Freud and Lewis. For the past 25 years, Armand M. Nicholi has taught a similar course at Harvard, where he compares Freud's atheist-based reasoning against the atheist-turned-believer C.S. Lewis. Both men were considered brilliant, highly educated thinkers who profoundly influenced 20th-century thought. And both men presented compelling arguments for and against the existence of God. At the core is Freud's assertion that God is a figment of the imagination (more accurately, God is an outcome of our deep-seated need for protection, stemming from the helplessness of early childhood). Lewis, on the other hand, did not see the belief in a higher power as a childish need for comfort. In fact, he wrote, "rendering back one's will which we have so long claimed for our own, is, in itself, extremely painful. To surrender a self-will inflamed and swollen with years of usurpation is a kind of death." Nicholi never takes sides. Instead he gives both men a chance to eloquently answer the big questions of humanity: why is there suffering? What should be our guiding belief? How do we form a moral compass? Surprisingly, this debate turns out to be a fascinating page-turner, with most of the credit going to Nicholi. Because he understands these men's arguments so well and respects their beliefs so thoroughly, believers could begin to have doubts and atheists could start to wonder. Regardless of where you ultimately land on the question of God, this stellar book will deeply enrich your understanding of humanity.

--Gail Hudson

While Freud and C.S. Lewis never actually met, the atheistic theories of the psychoanalyst and well-known unbeliever are pitted against those of the Christian in *The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life*. Author Armand M. Nicholi Jr. is a Harvard Medical School psychiatry professor who has taught a class on the theological writings of Freud and Lewis for more than 25 years. In this accessible study, he outlines the lives of the two thinkers, both preoccupied with the question of God's existence, and compares how the two approach questions of conscience, happiness, pain and death. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In this book Dr. Armand has come as close to presenting both the Christian and materialist worldview without prejudice as is possible to do. Though a Christian, Dr. Armand presents the more powerful arguments of Freud's atheism without condescension and like Lewis himself does not dismiss all of Freud because of a worldview conflict. I highly recommend this work! When I say it will test your worldview I mean that if your atheism or Christianity is defensible you will find here a fair

presentation of the opposite view that will broaden your knowledge of human behavior while not disturbing your quiescence. But if you are not prepared to defend your view, you may find yourself changed.

This book relates to my own personal journey of trying to answer life's toughest questions: Why am I here? What is my purpose? Nicholi does a great job summarizing Lewis' and Freud's lives in such a short book. I was really impressed with Lewis' life, especially his conversion. I think his life as an atheist is quite reflective of others. Life can be harsh, and can quickly cause you to give up faith in God at it's most painful moments. When Lewis put his emotions aside, and looked at the evidence neutrally, God was able to work through Lewis, ultimately leading to his conversion. After his conversion Lewis' life blossomed, and relieved him of this depression, pessimism, and negative outlook on life. He evolved into a more extroverted individual, and developed many great friendships, which were the highlight of his life. Freud, on the other hand, as well all know, was very adamant about his atheism. Nicholi definitely shows that Freud had some doubts if his atheism was the correct worldview, due to its inadequacies of answering certain questions about life. After reading about Freud's life, a lot of his beliefs about God were fueled off emotion, not reason. He seemed to live a difficult life, through his relationship with his father, anti-Semitism, and the passing away of his daughter/grandson. The thing that stood out to me the most about Freud was his sexual life. If you never looked into his life, you may have thought his behaviors were similar to Kinsey's. Nothing could be farther from the truth; he was actually very conservative, even more than Lewis was. This is a book I will definitely read again, I could not have been more pleased purchasing it.

Dr. Armand N. Nicholi, Jr., succinctly exposes the ambivalent worldviews--heart, mind, and soul--of C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud. Each characterize the opposing spectrum of beliefs which cascade humanity's existence--unbelief, as represented by the materialist worldview, and belief, as represented by the spiritual. Dr. Nicholi brings awareness to the development of humanity and the choice of will to follow determined paths of existence and belief. He accomplishes this task by carefully examining Lewis and Freud as model spokesmen of their worldviews. As much as the book is a detailed examination of their individual beliefs, Dr. Nicholi alerts the reader to how each man developed into their highly oppositional paradigms though sharing profound similarities of wounded living and development throughout their lives. The doctor entertains the prospects of dialogue if Lewis and Freud would have meet and compared/contrasted the significant existential themes of living--God, Love, Sex, Death, etc. This is probably one of the most profound books I have had the

opportunity to read and reflect upon throughout my college and seminary journey. Each man experienced the themes which all humanity encounters to some degree of depth throughout life. We are born, experience life, and die. We all have the same destiny in this regard, but it is the perplexing vision of how each human responds to these experiences--often times in opposition--while sharing significant similarities. This was the case with Lewis and Freud, and so it is with the rest of us. I am often stupefied at my place in this world (thanks Michael W. Smith...it was significant in my life back in the 80s). Regardless of my wounded past, I here stand before the throne with confidence enduring this broken existence by a hope which is transcendent and holy, not temporal and finite. I envision that I could have as easily ended up on the otherside of the tracks, but for whatever reason, I did not (though I envision this reason was divinely orchestrated). This unraveling of Lewis and Freud's life impressed a greater desire to delve into the depths of our created existence through the eyes of the divine while continuing to experience life as a wounded and fallen creature--yet grace filled--moving towards our glorified destiny. The desire to experience life with expectant hope is more satisfying than a life lived through anxiety and fear. My heart celebrates with the longings of Lewis but is pained in the gloom of Freud. As much as we must take a side, it may be that we too often live in both of their realities. This book definitively tore my mind away from the abstract of Lewis' depth of theology and Freud's breadth of philosophy and theory. Regardless of occupation, pastor or counselor, both Lewis and Freud have made a lasting impression upon the world and we would be wise to cautiously approach and appreciate the profundity of their work. This book is a success and would be a great place to begin existential exploration.

I am very delighted with this book. I have read all of C.S. Lewis's apologetic works and so I am very familiar with the sources that are referenced in the book concerning his viewpoint. I was less familiar with Freud but after reading this work, I certainly have a clearer understanding of his basic psychological theories. What I appreciate most about the book is how the author interjects the thoughts and feelings expressed by those who were his students at Harvard concerning the viewpoints expressed by each of these men and whether or not these theories held true in the students own life experiences. A fascinating book. One which I would recommend to anyone especially those who express confusion concerning lifes most important question.

For someone who is a Christian and also in the mental health field I found this incredibly interesting. So neat to see the parallels between their lives yet how they wound up with completely different

conclusions about life. Great, easy read!

This book is for anyone who doubts the existence of God or as a source to reinforce our own beliefs. Freud's and Lewis' viewpoints are clearly laid out without bias and the reader has an opportunity to see how the choices made by each molded them into the persons they became. I highly recommend this book.

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