

# Reflections

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reading notes

SEPTEMBER 2004—*C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud*

Armand Nicholi, a professor of Psychiatry, for the past 30 years has taught a course at Harvard in which he compares and contrasts the lives and the writings of C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud. PBS aired a facsimile of this course in a four hour special, which can be viewed by those with high-speed internet access, or can be purchased from the PBS internet store.

C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud provide a remarkable study in contrasts. Both men espoused atheism in their early years. In fact, Mr. Lewis used many of the arguments employed by Mr. Freud to defend his atheism as a young adult. But while Sigmund Freud held to his unbelief to the tragic end, Mr. Lewis eventually embraced the basic tenets of the Christian faith and became what some believe to be one of the most important apologists of Christianity in the 20th century.

Professor Nicholi's studies have led to the publication of an excellent book on the subject as well as the PBS special. The book is titled, *The Question of God*, and its contents are spelled out in the subtitle, *C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex and the Meaning of Life*.

The PBS program is divided up similarly. A typical segment includes well-acted dramatizations of C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud reflecting on their lives and thoughts on the afore mentioned subjects. Each segment was peppered with documentary type materials. After each dramatized segment the viewer is ushered into a round table discussion led by Professor Nicholi. The participants included what appeared to me to be an agnostic, two evangelicals, an atheist (Michael Shermer), two generic believers in God, and a philanthropist.

The book and the PBS special give a realistic glimpse into what people are thinking on these important subjects, and why they think the way they do. It gives us an opportunity to consider how we might want to respond to people with similar ideas and objections to the ideas and values we hold to be so dear. The extent to which you discuss important issues with the people around you is the extent to which you will probably find these resources of value.

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