



Street Epistemology

Basic Tactics

By

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In our previous reports about *street epistemology* we've looked at their **purpose, goals** and **strategy** – that's the **WHY** issue.

We move now to their **tactics – HOW** they do what they do.

Peter Boghossian is the founding father of street epistemology. In the first chapter of his book, *A Manual For Creating Atheists* (2013), he wrote that the purpose of street epistemology and his book is to “teach you how to talk people of their faith ... I call this activist approach to helping people overcome their faith ‘Street Epistemology. The goal of this book is to create a generation of Street Epistemologists: people equipped with an array of dialectical and clinical tools who actively go into the streets, the prisons, the bars, the churches, the schools, and the community—into any and every place the faithful reside—and help them abandon their faith and embrace reason.” (*A Manual for Creating Atheists*, Chapter 1)

I’ve written about Boghossian and street epistemology for five years, so I will try not to repeat what I’ve already written. You can read more about Boghossian and street epistemology in our free Ebook, *Street Epistemologists ‘On Guard’*. What I’ll attempt to do in this report is focus on the *tactics* atheists are using to talk you, your children and friends ‘out of their faith.’

Tactics

If you look up the words ‘street epistemology’ on Google, you will find almost 35,000 listings under the Video category (total of 261,000 results for All). Click on several of the videos and you’ll see some of the tactics street epistemologists use to ‘talk people out of their faith’ in action. As you watch the instructional videos (teaching people how to do street epistemology), you’ll see that they call what they do ‘a conversational technique.’

One thing I might mention as we begin looking at the tactics of street epistemologists is that some of them have redefined Boghossian’s definition for street epistemology. Instead of continuing with Boghossians’ “how to talk people of their faith,” some atheists say that “SE is a fun and effective way to talk to people about what’s really true.”

Did you notice that tactic? It’s one atheists use often – redefining terms and meanings. Some of the street epistemologists I’ve spoken with during the past couple of years said they were moving away from Boghossian’s definition of street epistemology. I asked them why since he created it. They said street epistemology was ‘evolving.’ Interesting.

Here are some of the basic tactics for these “conversations’ from three primary sources:

1. StreetEpistemology.com
2. Complete Street Epistemology Guide: How to Talk About Beliefs
3. Street Epistemology videos

I’ll give you the short version first, then add details as we go into more depth in future articles.

Tactic 1: Build rapport with your interlocutor

Street epistemologists view themselves as modern-day followers of Socrates using the *Socratic* method. They use the term interlocutor to mean their ‘dialogue partner.’ That would be you, your child, friend, etc. who happens to come up to them on the street, campus, road, park, trail, etc. and agree to let them interview you.

Here’s how they teach the process of building rapport –

“Build rapport with your interlocutor before getting deep into dialogue. Try to find something that you have in common. Taking the time to do this cuts through much of our natural, instinctive, anxiety about immediately engaging with a stranger.”

At this point in my talking with street epistemologists about what they do and why they do it, they often ask if I have something against being nice to other people. Not at all. However, I would add that it's nice to be honest with people about why you're being nice to them. If you are a nice person and want to be nice to others, that's great – please continue. However, if you are trying to talk someone out of their long-held spiritual beliefs and are not up front with them about the real reason you're acting nice – that's not nice!

Tactic 2: Identify the claim

Let's continue. Here's the next tactical step street epistemologists are taught to take with their *interlocutor* –

“You may already know what your interlocutor's claim is. For example, you may have initiated the discussion because you overheard them say that they believe in UFOs. Or, if you are actively looking to practice SE on anyone and any subject, this step may involve idle chit-chat with the hope of chancing upon a worthwhile claim. Most people who practice SE are focused on religious claims, so a common claim is something like, ‘God is real and the Bible is true’.

Every street epistemologist I know is an atheist. I ask them why that is and many have replied – “atheism is the default position.” Okay. So they're going to use the *Socratic Method* to get people to the ‘default position.’ Good to know.

Tactic 3: Confirm the claim

The third tactical step for a street epistemologist is to ‘confirm’ the claim. What do they mean by that?

“Confirm that you have understood your interlocutor correctly by summarizing and repeating their claim back to them. Don’t continue until you are both sure that you understand it clearly. If necessary, write down the claim so that you can both refer to it if the conversation goes off track.

For example, you might ask, ‘Do I understand correctly that you believe God is a real entity and that the things written in the Bible are truly the word of God?’”

Street epistemologists who video record their conversations with *interlocutors* (often wearing a body camera and using a second camera on a tripod) often use a whiteboard for writing down words, claims, etc. Here’s how street epistemologists explain the use of whiteboards and other resources –

“Bring writing materials such as a whiteboard and marker, or clipboard and pad of paper. Dialogues wander, and writing down the interlocutor’s key points helps bring structure and focus, helps to avoid talking in circles, and enables you to illustrate epistemology with diagrams. Being prepared also shows that you are not a random passer-by but someone

who is approaching people for a reason: namely to hold dialogues with the public about how they form beliefs.”

Tactic 4: Clarify definitions

Atheists often define words differently than Christians do. Here’s how they teach this tactic to atheists who want to do street epistemology –

“If there are any words that are ambiguous (or potentially so) this would be a good time to nail them down with your interlocutor. For example, sort out what you will both mean when you use the word ‘God’ or the word ‘true’.

Clarifying definitions is something that you may have to do multiple times as the talk progresses should it become apparent that you’re using words differently.”

That’s a good suggestion for Christians as well. Almost every conversation I’ve had with atheist street epistemologists has included many discussions about the definition of words. Don’t allow a conversation to move on until you are certain that you and the street epistemologist are agreeing on the definition of terms. My experience has been that discussions often end early when Christians won’t agree to the way atheists define certain words. I have pulled out multiple dictionaries to help atheists see they were defining words incorrectly, but they insisted they were right. That usually doesn’t bode well for a lengthy, engaged discussion.

Tactic 5: Identify a confidence level

This is a favorite tactic of street epistemologists.

“Ask your interlocutor how confident they are that their claim or belief is true. If possible, have them put a number on it. If they are not willing or able to quantify it, accept whatever they give you and note that as their ‘initial confidence level’. For example, ‘How confident are you that this God is real on a scale of 0 to 100?’

Note: The confidence scale is just a way of judging for yourself how much effect your efforts are having. It is optional and not an integral part of SE. Don’t persist, as doing so may annoy your interlocutor and be counterproductive.”

Talking with street epistemologists reminds me of some Judo basics. The question about identifying a confidence level is similar to *Kuzushi* – breaking balance or off-balancing. That’s when someone who wants to throw you in one direction first pushes or pulls you in the opposite direction. When you resist the push or pull, the Judo player uses the strength of your resistance to throw you in the direction they intended in the first place.

When an atheist asks you to identify your ‘confidence level’ in your beliefs about God, the Bible, Jesus, etc., based on a numerical scale (e.g. 0 to 100) they are using a tactic similar to *Kuzushi*. They will use the number you give them against you as the conversation continues. They will often write the number you give them on their whiteboard or paper and show it to

you from time to time to demonstrate how easily they can off-balance your faith in God, the Bible, Jesus, etc. That can lead to doubt, which is the atheist's purpose. They have learned that doubt can lead to denial (e.g. walking away from their belief in God).

I have used several responses to this tactic. I usually refuse to give them a number and insist on using words. For example:

Atheist: On a scale of 0 to 100 how confident are you that God exists.

Me: I am confident that God exists.

Atheist: Okay, but on a scale of 0 to 100 how confident are you that God exists.

Me: I am confident that God exists.

Atheist: Why won't you answer my question?

Me: I did answer your question.

Atheist: No you didn't. You said you are confident but you didn't say where you are on the scale of confidence.

Me: I'm confident. According to several dictionaries, the word 'confident' means "having strong belief or full assurance." Synonyms of the word

'confident' include "certain, sure, positive, convinced, satisfied." I am confident that God exists.

Atheist: (Pause) Alright, let's move to the next question.

Another way I respond is to ask them a question about their own confidence that God does not exist. They often give me a number of somewhere between 98 and 99.9%. That's strong confidence, which I tell them is the same as my confidence. Numbers are for math and statistics and can be played with up and down. Words that are declarative – like the word *confident* – should suffice in a conversation about ideas and beliefs.

Here's another tactic.

Many street epistemologists have asked me not to ask them questions until they are finished asking me questions. I respond that I thought we were having a conversation. Their response is usually something like this – "We are having a conversation and I'll let you know when I'm finished and you can ask me any question you want."

That's a 'reveal' about their tactic. Street epistemologists call what they do a "conversational technique," but there's nothing 'conversational' about it. I bring that up.

Atheist: "I'd rather not answer your questions until I'm finished asking mine."

Me: "I thought we were having a conversation."

Atheist: "We are having a conversation and I'll let you know when I'm finished and you can ask me any question you want."

Me: "A conversation is defined as 'oral exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, or ideas, informal interchange of thoughts, information, etc., by spoken words; oral communication between persons.' A conversation is when you say something and I say something. You ask a question, I answer your question, then ask you a question. That's a conversation." Would you agree?

Atheist: "We are exchanging ideas through the Socratic method."

Me: "It seems more like an 'intervention' than a conversation."

Atheist: "This is not an intervention."

Me: "That's interesting since the creator of street epistemology, Peter Boghossian, called what you're doing 'an intervention.' He details the intervention process in his book *A Manual for Creating Atheists*."

Atheist: (Pause) "I'm not doing that. We're having a conversation – a Socratic conversation."

Me: “Great! So, here’s my question for you”

In Judo, there is a training exercise where two Judo players try to move each other around until one of them is able to complete a throw, pin or choke-out. It’s called *Randori*. If one of the Judo players was not allowed to respond to the movements of their partner, they would lose quickly and continually. What makes Judo fun and safe is that both partners in *Randori* are allowed to “play.” What makes conversations with atheists fun and safe is when you are allowed to participate in the conversation.

Street epistemologists don’t want Christians to “play.” They want us to dutifully answer their questions while they move the supposed conversation in any direction they want. I recommend you don’t play according to their rules. We can talk, but let’s have a real conversation about evidence and truth.

Tactic 6: Identify the method used to arrive at confidence level

If you do choose to play according to their rules, the next tactic street epistemologists are taught to use is identifying the method you used to arrive at your confidence level.

“Ask your interlocutor how they have determined that their belief is true, or how they’ve arrived at their stated confidence level. They may provide multiple reasons. Try to focus on just one or two, ideally those that contribute the most to their confidence. Once you’ve settled on a primary reason or method, stay focused on that through the rest of the talk. For

example, you may settle on ‘a powerful personal experience’ as their primary reason for believing that God is real.”

Some atheists will continue talking with me even when I won’t play their ‘confidence’ game. If we get that far, it sometimes goes like this –

Atheist: Okay. How did you arrive at being confident about the existence of God?

Me: Evidence.

Atheist: What evidence?

Me: The evidence for the existence of God.

Atheist: There is no evidence for the existence of God!

Me: Really? No evidence at all?

Atheist: None.

Me: What evidence led you to become an atheist?

Atheist: (Pause) Why do you think I’m an atheist?

Me: Are you a theist?

Atheist: That's not pertinent to our conversation.

Me: I think it is. In fact, Peter Boghossian wrote in the first chapter of his book about creating atheists that what street epistemologists do is transform culture 'into a society built on reason, evidence, and thought-out positions.' Sounds like evidence plays an important role in what you're doing. Do you agree?

Atheist: (Pause) Well ...

It's at that point we find out if the street epistemologist wants a real conversation about evidence or if he/she just wants to run through their atheist agenda.

Remember, we want a conversation. Just like Judo. Give and take. Both people engaged, moving and involved. If the street epistemologist is willing to talk about the evidence pro and con for the existence of God, or whatever the topic is, that's great. We can talk. If they don't want to talk about evidence, then we can ask them if we could meet at a future time when they would be open to discussing the evidence. Hopefully, you will have that opportunity at a future time.

Tactic 7: Ask questions that reveal the reliability of the method

The next step in the tactical book of street epistemology is for atheists to ask questions about the reliability of the method you used to be confident in your belief (e.g. God exists, the Bible is reliable, Jesus is real, died for sins, rose from the dead, etc).

“Your main tools here are the Socratic method, the outsider test of faith (OTF), and questions that revolve around the falsifiability of their claims. Ask questions that, when answered, lead to a contradiction of your interlocutor’s assumptions or hypotheses.

For example, you might ask, ‘If a Hindu woman had a similarly powerful personal experience that convinced her that Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva were real, would that be good evidence that she was correct?’”

In order for a street epistemologist to ask me that question, they need to do one of two things:

1. talk with me about the evidence for and against Christianity .. or ..
2. jump past the conversation about evidence for Christianity and go straight to the example listed above

If an atheist jumps past the conversation about evidence for Christianity and asks me the question about the Hindu woman, I sometimes respond like this –

Atheist: 'If a Hindu woman had a similarly powerful personal experience that convinced her that Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva were real, would that be good evidence that she was correct?'

Me: Personal experience is subjective, but it could have some value "if" it's based on a strong foundation of objective evidence. Do you think Hinduism is based on good evidence?

Atheist: No.

Me: Neither do I. Do you know why I don't believe in Hinduism?

Atheist: Why?

Me: Because it lacks objective evidence. However, Christianity is based on objective evidence .. evidence you can see.

Atheist: Like what?

Me: Let's start with the universe.

Atheist: (Pause)

What happens next could finally open the door into presenting objective evidence for the existence of God, reliability of the Bible, reality of Jesus Christ, etc. Remember, winning arguments with people is not what Jesus called us to do. Our calling is to "make disciples." Making disciples of Christ

begins with some people by presenting the Gospel. Their hearts and minds are ready to hear what God did for them through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. However, with other people we begin by presenting the evidence for God's existence, the reliability of the Bible, and the reality of Jesus Christ.

Tactic 8: Listen, summarize, question, watch, repeat

If you talk with someone trained in street epistemology, you will probably notice this tactic after a short time of talking with them –

“Listen

Listen to your interlocutor closely. Look at them directly and try to understand what they are attempting to convey without getting hung up on their exact word choices.

Summarize

Repeat what you think your interlocutor is trying to communicate and verify with them that you've understood them correctly. It's important that they feel like they've been heard. It proves that you are being attentive and taking their beliefs seriously.

For example, “It sounds like what you are saying is [.....]; Do I have that right?”

Question

Construct more socratic questions that directly apply to the epistemology they are using.

Watch

Watch for those special moments where your interlocutor stops to ‘think’. This is often betrayed by the act of looking up at the ceiling, clearly trying to sort through things in their head. It’s important to detect these ‘aporias’ and allow the silence to continue uninterrupted until the interlocutor speaks.

Aporias are signs that you are doing SE right! They may even mark the best time to end your talk as your interlocutor may be left with those thoughts and questions echoing in their mind as they continue their day.”

This is a direct quote from the street epistemology handbook. If you think it looks like they’re trying to manipulate you – they are. It’s a *tactic*, a technique, for talking you out of your belief in Christ.

Tactic 9: Wrap up the conversation

Remember that *confidence level* from Tactic 5? This is where it plays out in the atheist's favor "if" you let them pull you into their 'numbers trap.'

"If your interlocutor previously offered their confidence level, ask them again as you wrap up. This can help you judge whether your dialogue had an immediate effect.

For example, 'Given the things we've talked about, do you think your confidence level has changed? Do you still feel that 100% is accurate?'

The atheist's goal is to get you to look at a confidence number that is lower than the number you gave them at the beginning of the conversation (intervention). This is the street epistemologist's way of leaving you with doubts. In street epistemology that's a win.

Tactic 10: Part company

Whether you spend five minutes with a street epistemologist (which is often the amount of time they ask for at the beginning of your conversation/intervention) or longer, the time will come when one of you will bring it to an end. Here's how street epistemologists are taught to look at their time with you –

“What success looks like:

The IL feels that the exchange was enjoyable, positive, valuable, etc.

You successfully induced at least one instance of aporia in the interlocutor.

Both parties express a desire to talk again.

A reduction in your interlocutor's self reported level of certainty.

What failure looks like:

Arguing and raised voices

Either party feeling frustration

Either party feeling unheard or misunderstood.

Either party regretting having had the conversation.”

And finally, here are some ‘rules of thumb’ atheists believe are important for street epistemologists to know –

“Rules of Thumb

Pay close attention to your own demeanor. If your words, body language, or tone of voice betray even a small amount of condescension, your interlocutor will recognize this and be justified in reacting negatively to it. If your goal is only to ‘win’, and you don’t genuinely respect your interlocutor (even if you don’t respect their beliefs), then SE might not be right for you.

Don’t get pulled into the weeds. Most people new to SE struggle to avoid being sidetracked when they hear clearly false, or unsupportable claims. They reflexively react to them by presenting opposing evidence or arguments. When you do this, you’ve gone off the rails. It’s not a disaster as you can just drop the point and get back on track, but it’s normal to struggle with this through many talks before you feel comfortable ignoring these things and staying focused on epistemology.

Don’t allow frustration to overwhelm you. Everyone is different. For some people this may be a big challenge but SE requires that you maintain your composure or it’s really not SE.”

Quoting Sources

I learned early on in my career as a journalist about the power of ‘sound bites.’ That’s what we call short video clips of interviews in television news. They’re called ‘actualities’ in radio and ‘quotes’ in print journalism, but it’s basically the same thing – hearing or reading people speak in their ‘own voice.’ I’m doing that lot in this series because seeing/hearing atheist street epistemologists speak ‘in their own voice’ carries more weight than paraphrasing what they said.

Context is also vital. Pulling quotes ‘out of context’ to make someone say what you want them to say is called ‘cherry picking quotes’ and is wrong. Also known as ‘selective hearing and reporting,’ it’s unfair to the readers and the people being quoted. That’s why I shared the four primary sources I’m using with you earlier in this Ebook. You can check the quotes I share with you in the full context of the book, online guides, and videos from the primary street epistemology sources.

I tell you this for two main reasons:

1. I want you to have confidence that what you’re reading is true. If you don’t believe me, check it out.
2. Atheists and atheist street epistemologists I’ve communicated with for years often ‘cherry pick’ quotes from Christians or about Christianity to fit their atheist agenda. They often leave out the context and sometimes even get the quotes or attribution wrong. The more you

understand their tactics, the better you'll be able to refute their arguments and present a strong case for Christianity.

Ready? Here's their first point in guiding fellow atheists in how to do street epistemology –

“The term ” Street Epistemology ” (SE) originates in Dr. Peter Boghossian's book, *A Manual for Creating Atheists* (AMFCA). In the book, Dr. Boghossian describes how people often use faith as an epistemology — that is, as a way of coming to knowledge and justifying their beliefs. His central theme is that unreliable epistemologies, such as faith, are used to arrive at potentially harmful false beliefs. Because faith-based belief systems typically encourage or require adherents to spread the belief system, he uses the metaphor of “virus of the mind” to describe the effects faith has on people. Faith gains traction by presenting itself as a reliable method, akin to trust, by presenting reasonable doubt as an epistemological failing.

While the authors of this guide were inspired by AMFCA to practice SE, we have since encountered a wide range of claims and epistemologies — not always religious or faith-based. In this guide we do not use “virus” or “intervention” metaphors because we are considering not only faith used as a way of knowing, but all ways of knowing and all kinds of beliefs. Some ways of knowing may indeed turn out to be reliable enough to justify the belief.” *The Complete Street Epistemology Guide How to Talk About Beliefs*

Notice that the creator of street epistemology views Christianity as a “virus” and recommends ‘interventions’ for Christians. You can read that in his book, *A Manual for Creating Atheists*.

“Your new role is that of interventionist. Liberator. Your target is faith. Your pro bono clients are individuals who’ve been infected by faith. Street Epistemologists view every conversation with the faithful as an intervention. An intervention is an attempt to help people, or ‘subjects’ as they are referred to in a clinical context, change their beliefs and/or behavior.” p 110

Notice also that the authors of *The Complete Street Epistemology Guide* were ‘inspired’ by Boghossian’s book, *A Manual for Creating Atheists*, but the authors of the ‘Guide’ chose not to use ‘virus’ or ‘intervention’ metaphors. That’s a tactic, so don’t be fooled. The atheist street epistemologists I’ve spoken with still believe we theists carry the ‘faith virus,’ but they don’t want to use the term because they know a negativity on their part can put an end to their work as street epistemologists. They ‘hide’ their true agenda, at least in the early part of trying to talk Christians out of their belief in God.

Let’s continue –

“Street Epistemology is a movement to apply the tools of philosophy in everyday conversations in order to encourage people to use reliable ways of forming beliefs. While professional philosophers may publish articles and books, anyone who values truth can engage friends, family,

community members, etc. in respectful dialogues about how beliefs are known to be true.

The goal is to encourage ourselves and others to examine the methods we use to judge the accuracy of truth claims, and ultimately to improve the reliability of our epistemology. While people may alter conclusions as a result, that is not the express goal. As Dr. Boghossian himself writes, “the core of the dialogue is not changing beliefs, but changing the way people form beliefs” [AMFCA, p72]. Neither participant should fear being persuaded into holding a false belief so long as a high standard for justification is sought. If anyone realizes that they have used an unreliable method to arrive at some belief, how they use that insight is entirely up to them. They are never pressured to accept any specific belief or to act against their own best interests.”

That has a nice ring to it, but is it the ring of truth?

Peter Boghossian wrote this in his book, *A Manual for Creating Atheists* –

“This book will teach you how to talk people out of their faith. You’ll learn how to engage the faithful in conversations that help them value reason and rationality, cast doubt on their beliefs, and mistrust their faith. I call this activist approach to helping people overcome their faith, ‘Street Epistemology.’ The goal of this book is to create a generation of Street Epistemologists: people equipped with an array of dialectical and clinical tools who actively go into the streets, the prisons, the bars, the

churches, the schools, and the community—into any and every place the faithful reside—and help them abandon their faith and embrace reason.”

Do you see any disconnect between what the street epistemology guide authors and Peter Boghossian wrote about what they’re doing? I do.

Guide –

“The goal is to encourage ourselves and others to examine the methods we use to judge the accuracy of truth claims, and ultimately to improve the reliability of our epistemology. While people may alter conclusions as a result, that is not the express goal. “

Boghossian –

“This book will teach you how to talk people out of their faith ... The goal of this book is to create a generation of Street Epistemologists: people equipped with an array of dialectical and clinical tools who actively go into the streets, the prisons, the bars, the churches, the schools, and the community—into any and every place the faithful reside—and help them abandon their faith and embrace reason.” *A Manual for Creating Atheists*, p 20

There is a huge disconnect, so which is it? Guide or Boghossian? It’s both!

Street epistemologists have adapted and evolved. That's part of the SE playbook. Atheism is based on theories of adaptation and evolution, so changing tactics to fit the need is to be expected.

Boghossian and street epistemologists believe they use –

“intelligence, reason, rationality, thoughtfulness, ingenuity, sincerity, science, and kindness to build the future; not the world built on faith, delusion, pretending, religion, fear, pseudoscience, superstition, or a certainty achieved by keeping people in a stupor that makes them pawns of unseen forces because they're terrified.” *A Manual for Creating Atheists*, p 22

Boghossian wrote that atheist street epistemologists do more than –

“just tear down fairytales, comforting delusions, and imagined entities. She offers a humanist view ... Let's help people develop a trustfulness of reason and a willingness to reconsider, and let's place rationality in the service of humanity.” *A Manual for Creating Atheists*, p 23

Though their methods adapt and evolve, it doesn't mean that their core doctrine has changed. Don't be fooled.

Let's look now at a few other points from the SE Guide listed earlier –

“SE dialogues work toward mutual agreement about the reliability of different ways of assessing whether or not a belief is true or likely to be true, without devolving into debate. As a Street Epistemologist, you start from a position of ‘doxastic openness’ in which you acknowledge that the other person’s position may be correct.”

Sounds nice on paper, but I haven't witnessed that yet. The word “doxastic” is defined as “of or relating to belief.” Doxastic openness is the idea of being open to changing one's belief. Street epistemologists often ask me if I'm open to changing my mind about theism. I tell them that I am open to new evidence, new facts. I ask them the same question and they usually give me a similar answer. Yes, they are open. However, I haven't found them open to new evidence or facts and here's why.

Boghossian wrote this on page 46 of his book –

“The only way to figure out which claims about the world are likely true, and which are likely false, is through reason and evidence. There is no other way.” p 46

I agree with Boghossian! We check out truth claims by using reason and evidence.

Boghossian then quotes from James Randi under the title of *The Danger of Faith* –

“No amount of belief makes something a fact.” p 46

Again I agree! But there is a problem with that claim.

Avoid Facts?

Chapter 4 of Boghossian’s book is titled “Interventions and Strategies.” Part I is about Interventions. Part II is about Strategies. Guess what the first strategy is? **‘Avoid Facts’**

What?

Boghossian just talked about the importance of reason and evidence and quoted James Randi about how “no amount of belief makes something a fact,” then begins his section on strategies with ‘Avoid Facts.’ Am I missing something here?

Boghossian started his section about avoiding facts with this quote from Joe Keohane –

“Facts don’t necessarily have the power to change our minds. In fact, quite the opposite ... when misinformed people, particularly political partisans, were exposed to corrected facts in news stories, they rarely changed their minds. In fact they often became more strongly set in their

beliefs. Facts ... were not curing misinformation. Like an underpowered antibiotics, facts could actually make misinformation stronger.”

If that isn't strange enough, here are Boghossian's first words on the subject of avoiding facts following Keohane's quote –

“People dig themselves into cognitive sinkholes by habituating themselves to not formulate beliefs on the basis of evidence. Hence the beliefs most people hold are not tethered to reality ... Thus, it is of little use to bring in facts when attempting to disabuse those in the precontemplative stage of their faith-based beliefs. If people believed on the basis of evidence then they wouldn't find themselves in their current cognitive quagmire.” p 117

Boghossian seems to believe that “facts” are not evidence. That's interesting since definitions of the word ‘facts’ include – “a thing that is indisputably the case, something that has actual existence, something that actually exists, reality, truth, a thing that is known or proved to be true.”

The definitions of ‘evidence’ include – “the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid, anything that you see, experience, read, or are told that causes you to believe that something is true or has really happened.”

Sounds like ‘facts’ and ‘evidence’ are the same thing.

Here's a look at 'evidence' from a legal perspective – “Methods and rules that guide and govern the establishment of a fact before a court, collectively called the law of evidence.”

Interesting. The 'law of evidence' include methods and rules that guide and govern the establishment of a 'fact' before a court.

Evidence helps establish a fact 'a fact.' So, what's the problem about discussing 'facts' when you have evidence to support them as true?

Just so you know it – street epistemologists are trained to **not** talk with you about 'facts.' They don't want to deal with what actually exists, reality, truth, a thing that is known or proved to be true. Facts do not work in their favor, so they're going to stay as far from facts as they can.

That can't be true! Certainly Dr. Boghossian would never want to remove evidence and facts from an honest discussion about truth and reality!

In case you think I may be taking Peter Boghossian out of context or cherry picking a quote, here's how he says he trains beginning street epistemologists –

“When I teach beginning Street Epistemologists how to help rid the faithful of their affliction and anchor their beliefs in reality, one of the most difficult strategies to get across is: do not bring particular pieces of evidence (facts, data points) into the discussion when attempting to disabuse people of specific faith propositions. Many rational, thoughtful

people think that somehow, magically, the faithful don't realize they are not basing their beliefs on reliable evidence—that if they were only shown solid evidence then voila, they'd be cured! This is false. Remember: the core of the intervention is not changing beliefs, but changing the way people form beliefs—hence the term 'epistemologist.' Bringing facts into the discussion is the wrong way to conceptualize the problem: the problem is with epistemologies people use, not with conclusions people hold ... The introduction of facts may also prove unproductive because this usually leads to a discussion about what constitutes reliable evidence. This is a reasonable and important issue, but one not often encountered in the context of a Street Epistemologist's intervention.” pp 117-119

Does that cause you any concern? It should. A primary strategy of street epistemologists is to not deal in evidence or facts. They want no part of it. They have other plans to 'disabuse' the faithful of their belief in God and they have nothing to do with facts or evidence.

“You should be willing to revise your beliefs if this turns out to be the case. Ideally, it becomes increasingly clear to both of you whether or not the methods can be relied upon to lead one to the truth.” *Complete Street Epistemology Guide: How to Talk About Beliefs*

I hear what street epistemologists are saying, but I've never seen any of them revise their beliefs – at all – **none**. I base that on talking with street epistemologists personally and watching their videos. I've seen street epistemologists in obvious positions of having no way to respond to

Christian evidence, but still hold on to their beliefs. Their methods, tactics, strategies failed them, yet they held tenaciously to their atheism.

I do agree with their statement that “it becomes increasingly clear to both of you whether or not the methods can be relied upon to lead one to the truth,” but the problem has been that while their method could not be relied on to lead them to truth concerning atheism, they continued to be atheists.

“You may use Street Epistemology in dialogue because you value truth and because you desire to help yourself and others use methods that are less likely to produce false beliefs. You can expect either party’s confidence or beliefs to change as a result of such dialogues. Realizing you have been using an unreliable method may lead you to re-examine your beliefs, alter your confidence, or even renounce a belief having deemed it unlikely to be true. By holding true beliefs about reality on matters of practical consequence, we can all make better choices for our lives and for our communities.” *Complete Street Epistemology Guide: How to Talk About Beliefs*

I seriously question whether they ‘value truth’ for the same reasons already mentioned.

I do agree with this statement – “By holding true beliefs about reality on matters of practical consequence, we can all make better choices for our lives and for our communities.” The problem, though, is they continue to hold false beliefs about reality and won’t budge on that. They say they are prepared to ‘re-examine’ their beliefs, ‘alter’ their confidence, and

'renounce' a belief having deemed it unlikely to be true, but actions are more powerful than words.

I say that as a former 'strong and mocking' atheist who finally looked at the evidence for Christianity and did 're-examine' my beliefs, did 'alter' my confidence, and did 'renounce' my atheism after deeming it unlikely to be true. I'm not asking any atheist street epistemologist to do something I haven't done.

This next section from the Complete Street Epistemology guide is found in Section 2.4 and is titled *When to use it*.

“You can use Street Epistemology whenever a truth claim is being made. However it is most useful for extraordinary claims, such as miracles and supernatural phenomena, including:

- Existence of one or more gods or immaterial persons (theism).
- Phenomena that violate or suspend the operation of natural laws (supernaturalism, paranormal and psychic phenomena, miracles, karma).
- Biological death does not end one’s existence as a conscious being (afterlife, reincarnation, resurrection).
- The effectiveness of healing modalities that science based medicine rejects as unproven or ineffective (quackery).
- The scientific validity of an idea or system which has never been adequately researched or fails under scientific testing (pseudosciences).
- A covert but powerful force/group is responsible for certain events or situations, where evidence of that force/group is lacking (conspiracy theories). In such cases, we often encounter the following justifications, and the Street Epistemologist asks whether they are sufficiently reliable to warrant belief in the claim.
- Faith : When given as a reason for belief, it can be understood as firm confidence in the claim in excess of what is warranted by evidence.
[SEP: Faith]
- Numinous, revelatory, or mystical experiences [SEP: Religious Experience]

- Personal experiences : answered prayers, “worked for me” therapies.
- Testimony (e.g., anecdotes, tradition, authorities): Testimony may be helpful in describing the evidence for a claim or how to obtain the evidence, but perceptions and memories are not generally reliable evidence on their own. Testimony is particularly vulnerable to errors and omissions by the reporter, intentional or not. [IEP: Testimony],[SEP: Epistemological Problems of Testimony”

Lots of material to cover here, so let’s take it one point at a time.

Extraordinary Evidence?

Street epistemologists use SE “whenever a truth claim is being made.” That could cover a lot of ground since everyone makes multiple truth claims throughout their day. However, they do zoom in a bit by saying that it is most useful for **extraordinary claims**. How do they define extraordinary claims?

“such as miracles and supernatural phenomena”

I see – miracles and supernatural phenomena are *extraordinary claims* and need a separate category of evidence. Ordinary evidence, in any number, won’t do.

What we have here is typical **atheistic materialism** (e.g. physicalism). While popular astronomer Carl Sagan used to promote the phrase “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence,” the idea is much

older than the 20th century. In his 18th century book *On Miracles*, David Hume stated that an extraordinary claim is one that directly contradicts a massive amount of existing empirical data. He also wrote this –

“No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavors to establish.” David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, 1748)

Claims that are new or novel do not necessarily fit Hume’s category unless there exists massive amounts of evidence to the contrary. Atheists want to establish a separate category for what would be needed for truth claims **they view** as extraordinary. However, evidence doesn’t work that way. The evidence is the same for all truth claims.

- Truth claim made → observe evidence that supports claim and evidence that opposes claim → conclusion reached after weighing all of the evidence

Extraordinary evidence belongs to the extraordinarily large number of observations, not as a separate category.

It seems that atheists want to control when the term *extraordinary* can be used. That, based on their stated materialistic view of life, seems arbitrary.

To say that something is rare and doesn’t happen often does not by itself make something an **extraordinary** claim. What we need to seek is

trustworthy, corroborating evidence for any claim. Even the rarest of truth claims can be proven with ordinary evidence if ordinary evidence supports the claim. Why would we need to pass over an abundance of *ordinary* evidence that supports a supposed *extraordinary* truth claim and demand *extraordinary* evidence when *ordinary* evidence would give us what we need to make a reasonable decision about the claim? Is it possible that atheist street epistemologists require the separate category of extraordinary evidence because of a **bias** toward the supernatural? That's what I did when I was an atheist and what I believe many, if not most, atheist street epistemologists are doing as well.

If we go along with the street epistemologist for a bit to see what extraordinary evidence would look like, what do we learn?

I'll jump ahead in the *Complete Street Epistemology Guide* to Section 4.7, *Eliciting the interlocutor's epistemology*, because that gives us more insight to how atheist street epistemologists view extraordinary claims –

“The interlocutor may give a justification for their belief that relies on an equally extraordinary claim, such as a specific miracle. In this case think of yourself as a foundation inspector. Work with the interlocutor to determine whether their beliefs are built on solid ground or shifting sand. Dig deeper into the foundations of the interlocutor's belief system by asking, “What gives you confidence that X is true?” Keep digging until you reach a justification that is not based on something extraordinary. At that point you are ready to begin inspecting the quality of the foundation,

determining the reliability of the methods that the interlocutor uses to know that the foundational belief is true.”

Did you see that!

“Keep digging until you reach a justification that is not based on something extraordinary.”

The atheist street epistemologist will continue to “dig” (ask questions for the purpose of causing doubt) “until” they reach a person’s justification that is NOT based on something *extraordinary*.

May I state the obvious? That is **blatant manipulation** on the part of the atheist.

An atheist street epistemologist is not going to find any agreement in a conversation with a theist about the existence of God until the theist gives the atheist a justification not based on something the atheist views as extraordinary. That puts the supposed “discussion” under the total control of the atheist. They don’t have to allow anything in that they don’t want to allow. Pretty nifty, don’t you think?

I’ve been talking with atheists as a theist for almost 50 years and what we just saw from the atheist *Complete Street Epistemology Guide* (CSEG) shows us where talks bog down and often stop between theists and atheists. The atheist will not accept any reasoning based on a belief they view as extraordinary.

Let's look again at the CSEG to see what atheist street epistemologists view as extraordinary claims.

[I copied and pasted this list from the CSEG without making any changes. You can look at it online for yourself.]

- Existence of one or more gods or immaterial persons (theism).
- Phenomena that violate or suspend the operation of natural laws (supernaturalism, paranormal and psychic phenomena, miracles, karma).
- Biological death does not end one's existence as a conscious being (afterlife, reincarnation, resurrection).
- The effectiveness of healing modalities that science based medicine rejects as unproven or ineffective (quackery).
- The scientific validity of an idea or system which has never been adequately researched or fails under scientific testing (pseudosciences).
- A covert but powerful force/group is responsible for certain events or situations, where evidence of that force/group is lacking (conspiracy theories). In such cases, we often encounter the following justifications, and the Street Epistemologist asks whether they are sufficiently reliable to warrant belief in the claim.
- Faith : When given as a reason for belief, it can be understood as firm confidence in the claim in excess of what is warranted by evidence.
[SEP: Faith]
- Numinous, revelatory, or mystical experiences [SEP: Religious Experience]

- Personal experiences : answered prayers, “worked for me” therapies.
- Testimony (e.g., anecdotes, tradition, authorities): Testimony may be helpful in describing the evidence for a claim or how to obtain the evidence, but perceptions and memories are not generally reliable evidence on their own. Testimony is particularly vulnerable to errors and omissions by the reporter, intentional or not. [IEP: Testimony],[SEP: Epistemological Problems of Testimony”

Now, let’s look again at what the same atheist training manual states about how street epistemologists should deal with these “extraordinary” claims –

“The interlocutor may give a justification for their belief that relies on an equally extraordinary claim, such as a specific miracle. In this case think of yourself as a foundation inspector. Work with the interlocutor to determine whether their beliefs are built on solid ground or shifting sand. Dig deeper into the foundations of the interlocutor’s belief system by asking, “What gives you confidence that X is true?” Keep digging until you reach a justification that is not based on something extraordinary. At that point you are ready to begin inspecting the quality of the foundation, determining the reliability of the methods that the interlocutor uses to know that the foundational belief is true.”

That means the atheist street epistemologist is going to oppose **any** explanation, **any** evidence a theist will share with them. Except for one. The one evidence that atheists tell me they will accept as support for the truth claim that God exists is if God reveals Himself to them in Person.

That's when I tell them my story of daring God to show up on my radio talk show and be interviewed and how a science professor appeared on my show months later and introduced me to several pieces of scientific evidence that led to my investigation into whether God existed or not. I invite them to do the same thing.

As for the comment about working with the interlocutor to determine whether their beliefs are built on solid ground or shifting sand, I might mention that the image at the top of these blog posts addresses that very issue. It is my view as a former atheist that atheist street epistemology is built on nothing more than shifting sand –

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. ‘But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.’” Matthew 7:24-27

The Existence of God or gods

Atheist street epistemologists view any claim of the existence of God or gods or immaterial persons as “extraordinary.” Why would that be a challenge to a theist?

“The interlocutor may give a justification for their belief that relies on an equally extraordinary claim, such as a specific miracle. In this case think of yourself as a foundation inspector. Work with the interlocutor to determine whether their beliefs are built on solid ground or shifting sand. Dig deeper into the foundations of the interlocutor’s belief system by asking, “What gives you confidence that X is true?” Keep digging until you reach a justification that is not based on something extraordinary. At that point you are ready to begin inspecting the quality of the foundation, determining the reliability of the methods that the interlocutor uses to know that the foundational belief is true.” *The Complete Street Epistemology Guide 4.7*

Here’s how we responded to this statement in the last part of our series –

“To say that something is rare and doesn’t happen often does not by itself make something an extraordinary claim. What we need to seek is trustworthy, corroborating evidence for any claim. Even the rarest of truth claims can be proven with ordinary evidence if ordinary evidence supports the claim. Why would we need to pass over an abundance of ordinary evidence that supports a supposed extraordinary truth claim and demand extraordinary evidence when ordinary evidence would give

us what we need to make a reasonable decision about the claim? Is it possible that atheist street epistemologists require the separate category of extraordinary evidence because of a bias toward the supernatural? That's what I did when I was an atheist and what I believe many, if not most, atheist street epistemologists are doing as well."

God exists or He doesn't; gods (little g) exist or they don't. The process of determining the existence of a God or gods is a matter of investigating the available evidence, not some special category of "extraordinary" evidence that atheists won't admit into evidence anyway.

Most atheists I am now communicating with and have communicated with through the years tell me there is **no evidence** for the existence of God. I used to say that when I was an atheist and now realize how wrong I was to say that.

I should have known better because of my work as a journalist. I had covered enough trials and hearings to know that all sides in a matter present evidence they believe supports their case, point, perspective, issue, etc. It's about convincing a jury, judge, commission, etc. with the available evidence. However, I admit I didn't use that knowledge when arguing with theists. I told them they had **no evidence** and thought I was pretty smart for coming up with that great response to their statements about God. I was wrong. Why?

Because **there is evidence** for the existence of God – lots of it. So, the question is not whether evidence exists but if it is **convincing** evidence I've been writing another series for FaithandSelfDefense.com called "Convince Me There's A God." For six years I've detailed the evidence I looked at as an atheist that eventually led me to believe in the existence of God and become a Christian.

I recently started presenting evidence for the reliability of the New Testament and the reality of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so it will take a few more years to complete that part of the series. I'm only listing the evidence that was available to me in 1971, when I conducted the investigation in answering atheist questions about why I became a Christian. I'll start another series after "Convince Me" to look at the evidence for theism and Christianity that's become available to investigate since '71.

My main point is that there is an **abundance of evidence** for the existence of God. I've heard some people call it an "embarrassment of riches" because Christians have so much evidence available to support their truth claims.

Extraordinary? Really?

So, let's dig in to the atheist street epistemologist's claim that Christians need "extraordinary evidence" to support a claim that God exists.

What would that "extraordinary" evidence look like?

"Dig deeper into the foundations of the interlocutor's belief system by asking, 'What gives you confidence that X is true?' Keep digging until you reach a justification that is not based on something extraordinary. At that point you are ready to begin inspecting the quality of the foundation, determining the reliability of the methods that the interlocutor uses to know that the foundational belief is true." *The Complete Street Epistemology Guide 4.7*

Isn't that interesting. Atheists tell Christians that belief in God is an *extraordinary claim* that demands *extraordinary evidence*, but they will only accept a justification that is not based on something extraordinary. Does that seem illogical to you? It does, but is even more than illogical – it's manipulative. They demand to see something they won't accept if they see it. Either they don't know what they're saying or they do. Probably some of both within the atheist community.

The evidence is on the side of Christians, so we need to get over thinking we have to cower in a defensive position about the existence of God. We make a big mistake by handing over control of a conversation about God to atheists.

Cumulative Case & Best Explanation

Two of the primary areas we can talk about with atheists are the “cumulative case” and “best explanation.” The evidentiary process includes looking at all available evidence through the lenses of *deduction*, *induction* and *abduction*.

Deduction – “the deriving of a conclusion by reasoning; specifically : inference in which the conclusion about particulars follows necessarily from general or universal premises : a conclusion reached by logical deduction ... Simply put, deduction—or the process of deducing—is the formation of a conclusion based on generally accepted statements or facts” (Merriam-Webster)

Induction – “inference of a generalized conclusion from particular instances : a conclusion arrived at by induction ... it means forming a generalization based on what is known or observed.” (Merriam-Webster)

Abduction – “a syllogism in which the major premise is evident but the minor premise and therefore the conclusion only probable. Basically, it involves forming a conclusion from the information that is known.” (Merriam-Webster)

Think about the roots of each word. Deduction, induction and abduction are based on the Latin word *ducere*, which means “to lead.” The **de** in deduction means “from” and is used for accepted statements or facts. The **in** in induction means “to” or “toward” and is used for “lead to” a

generalization. The **ab** in abduction means “away” and leads us to “take away” the best explanation we find during an investigation.

Investigative journalism uses all three in the process of developing coverage of a story or series of stories. I’m personally thankful to scores of police and sheriff’s detectives, and public and private investigators who took time during their investigations to help me understand how to process evidence and reach proper conclusions based on the available evidence. I also followed them into courtrooms where they presented their evidence and investigative process under the scrutiny of prosecutors, defenders, judges, juries, and, of course, the news media.

Cumulative case — observing and testing all available evidence and building a case based on the totality of the presented evidence

An example would be looking at all of the available evidence from science, history and philosophy concerning the existence of God or gods.

Best explanation — choosing the hypothesis that best explains the presented evidence

An example would be choosing the best explanation for the presented evidence from possible theories. That’s **explanatory power**.

Most of the investigations I undertook as a journalist were based on current cases – cases that were still fresh. I did get involved in some older cases and a few cold-case investigations, but certainly not as many as former atheist Jim Wallace. He was a cold-case detective in the Los Angeles area for many years and was one of the founding members of the Torrance Police Department's Cold-Case Homicide Unit. Jim used his skills investigating the claims of theism and Christianity and became a Christian.

Understanding the process of cold-case investigation is helpful in learning how to investigate ancient historical events. Jim wrote – “Christianity could be defined as a ‘cold case’: it makes a claim about an event from the distant past for which there is little forensic evidence.” (*Cold-Case Christianity*, David C. Cook, 2013)

The cold-case approach works well because it was developed to deal with events that happened in the distant past that have little or no direct physical evidence and no living eyewitnesses. Here's how Jim Wallace explains it –

“These cases are made by examining the nature of circumstantial evidence and assembling a convincing, cumulative circumstantial case ... The tools used by Cold Case Investigators can be applied to the New Testament gospels to determine if the facts they represent are a true record of the life of Jesus.” Jim Wallace

Well said.

I conducted my “cold case” investigation into Christianity in 1971 and Jim conducted his in 1996: 25 years apart, yet we both came to the same conclusion. Why? Because we looked at the same evidence and used similar investigative techniques. I believe that can work for anyone who is willing to spend the time and energy to conduct a similar investigation.

Our Response to Tactics

First – don’t allow atheist street epistemologists to take control of the discussion. That’s a primary tactic of street epistemology. They use techniques to control the conversation. Don’t let them do it.

Atheist street epistemologists are taught to “strive to ‘sow seeds of doubt that will blossom into ever-expanding moments of doxastic openness.’” (*The Complete Street Epistemology Guide How to Talk About Beliefs*, 3.1.5, Know what success looks like)

That echoes beautifully the stated purpose of street epistemology as explained by the founder of SE –

“This book will teach you how to talk people out of their faith. You’ll learn how to engage the faithful in conversations that help them value reason and rationality, cast doubt on their beliefs, and mistrust their faith. I call this activist approach to helping people overcome their faith, ‘Street Epistemology.’ The goal of this book is to create a generation of Street Epistemologists: people equipped with an array of dialectical and clinical tools who actively go into the streets, and the community—into any and

every place the faithful reside—and help them abandon their faith and embrace reason.” (A Manual For Creating Atheists, Peter Boghossian, Chapter I, Pitchstone Publishing, 2013)”

Remember that when you meet an atheist street epistemologist. They may talk to you in a way that might make you think they want to have an open and equal conversation about how we know what we know. However, according to the founder of street epistemology and the training manuals used for street epistemologists, that is not the reason at all. Their stated/published reason is to cast doubt on your beliefs, cause you to mistrust your faith, and talk you out of your faith in Christ. That’s what street epistemology is *really* about. Any atheist who denies that is either not telling you the truth or they haven’t gone through the training to be a street epistemologist.

Christians have no reason to be defensive about their beliefs. Evidence is on our side. We can take the discussion to the atheist based on the evidence. That’s what Jesus did. That’s what the apostles did. That’s what the early Christians did. That’s what Christians have done for centuries. They turned communities upside down with their evidence for the existence of God, reliability of Scripture, and reality of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus told us to take the truth of the Gospel to every nation and make disciples.

Does that mean we shouldn’t talk to an atheist street epistemologist? Not at all. What it means is we should take control of the conversation. How do we do that?

Knowledge of how atheists will try to control the conversation will help you determine what to do. The following quotes are taken directly from the *Complete Street Epistemology Guide* (CSEG), 3.2 & 3.3 –

“Bring writing materials such as a whiteboard and marker , or clipboard and pad of paper . Dialogues wander, and writing down the interlocutor’s key points helps bring structure and focus, helps to avoid talking in circles, and enables you to illustrate epistemology with diagrams. Being prepared also shows that you are not a random passer-by but someone who is approaching people for a reason: namely to hold dialogues with the public about how they form beliefs. Bring a timer or use the timer on your phone to limit the length of the dialogue. The timer helps to focus the dialogue and shows that you respect/value their time. When the time expires, it gives both of you an opportunity to exit the dialogue. You can always continue if both parties are comfortable doing so. If you have trouble with dialogues running on, try setting a backup timer and when it goes off tell the interlocutor that you have to leave right now and suggest following up at another time. Consider bringing contact cards or providing contact information to facilitate follow-up dialogues. Consider recording your dialogues in order to monitor and improve your own performance, solicit constructive feedback, and demonstrate your techniques to others. Another option is broadcasting your dialogues using live-streaming technologies, like Periscope.”

What do we learn from the CSEG? Atheist street epistemologists are prepared to “school” Christians in epistemology and record it for the world to watch.

Face-to-face encounters are their favorite way to communicate –

“Face-to-face is simply the highest-bandwidth communication medium possible between two people.” (CSEG 3.4 Choosing the medium)

Face-to-face is one way they can record their “conversations” with Christians in order to show other atheists what they did.

Atheist street epistemologists also use other ways to talk Christians out of their faith (these are also from CSEG 3.4 Choosing the medium) –

- Video calls/conferencing
- Audio only
- Real time text chat
- Email / Comment Threads

Atheist street epistemologists are taught specific tactics to use while talking with Christians. This information is directly from the CSEG that you can read here –

“After getting someone’s attention, get right to the point with a polite and simple question, such as, “Do you have five minutes to chat about how you arrived at your god belief?” , or a similar question about any other belief. A question like this is non-intrusive and interesting. Smile and look people in the eye when you ask. When a person declines your request simply wish them a nice day, and move on. Accept that the choice to decline is a perfectly valid and normal response to a request. When a

person accepts your request, thank them and greet them, and try to make them as comfortable as possible. Ask their first name and provide yours, using their name throughout the dialogue.

As mentioned in "Preparing useful materials", set a time limit on the interview. Ideally between 5 and 15 minutes. Avoid talking for more than 1 hour. It is difficult to maintain focus for much longer and you'll end up talking in circles. You also want your dialogue to be memorable, and it's very difficult to remember and reflect on all the topics covered in a marathon session." CSEG 4.2, Initiating the dialogue

It's important we recognize that this is a "tactic." The atheist street epistemologist is not trying to become your new friend. They're not interested in having an honest and open conversation with you. They want to "talk you out of your faith." Remember what we read earlier from Peter Boghossian?

"This book will teach you how to talk people out of their faith ... The goal of this book is to create a generation of Street Epistemologists: people equipped with an array of dialectical and clinical tools who actively go into the streets, the prisons, the bars, the churches, the schools, and the community—into any and every place the faithful reside—and help them abandon their faith and embrace reason." *A Manual For Creating Atheists*, Peter Boghossian, Pitchstone Publishing, 2013

Training Our Children

Even as atheist Peter Boghossian is training his atheist street epistemologists tactics for talking Christians out of their faith, Christian parents need to train their children how to deal with those atheists and their tactics. It is not a safe place for Christian. It is a battleground.

Christian parents spend almost two decades raising their children to believe in God. Atheist street epistemologists have been trained to lead children and young people to doubt their belief in five to fifteen minutes. Think about that. That is not a safe conversation. That is an attack on our children.

The fact that some Christian young people can be talked out of their faith, or at least have serious doubts about the existence of God, in a matter of minutes may say more about their Christian training than the atheist street epistemologists' training. What do I mean by that?

I have taught self defense for 54 years and have seen how well children and young people can defend themselves **if** they're well-trained. The opposite is true as well. I've seen how poorly children and young people defend themselves if they are **not** well-trained.

The same is true for **faith defense**. Children and young people who are trained well in Christian apologetics are better able to deal with atheists (and others) who attempt to talk them out of their faith in Christ. Even as I

recommend self-defense training for children and youth, I “highly” recommend faith-defense training.

Defense #1

“Teach your children not to engage with atheist street epistemologists until they train in faith defense.”

This is similar to the advice I give young people in self-defense classes. Walk or run away from people who can harm you. If you can’t get away –

1. Escape and run
2. Stun and run
3. Fight and run

The priority in self defense is *escaping* danger. Faith defense is different. That’s because Jesus Christ wants us to go into every part of the world and preach the Gospel to the lost. He wants us to go into dangerous territory and tell people the truth about sin and salvation. Jesus sends us out with a warning –

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues.”
Matthew 10:16-17

Faith defense means we need to develop “wisdom” in how we talk with people since we are in a position of being “sheep in the midst of wolves.” To send Christian children and young people into the world without helping them develop wisdom first is like sending someone into war with no defensive training or weapons. Any army that would send its soldiers into battle with no training or weapons is extremely foolish. Those soldiers would be slaughtered in the first fire fight.

Are we doing the same thing when we send our children into the world without training them in faith defense?

Whose job is it to train children to be have spiritual “wisdom”?

1. Parents
2. Grandparents
3. Extended family
4. Teachers (e.g. church, school)
5. Youth leaders
6. Pastors

Unfortunately, many parents don't see themselves as being involved in training their children to have spiritual “wisdom” to deal with the “wolves” in the world who will attack their children. They look to teachers, youth leaders and pastors to do that work. However, that's not how God designed children to learn.

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6

“My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother; For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, And chains about your neck.” Proverbs 1:8-9

Proverbs is an excellent example of how parents should train their children. King Solomon used the term “my son” more than 20 times in his wisdom writings. Here are some examples of what Solomon taught his son – great advice for us in training our children to have spiritual wisdom.

“My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.” Proverbs 1:10

“My son, do not walk in the way with them, Keep your foot from their path; For their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed blood.”
Proverbs 1:15-16

“My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you, So that you incline your ear to wisdom, And apply your heart to understanding; Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, And find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, And preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, Equity and every good path.” Proverbs 2:1-9

“My son, do not forget my law, But let your heart keep my commands; For length of days and long life And peace they will add to you.” Proverbs 3:1-2

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor detest His correction; For whom the Lord loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.” Proverbs 3:11-12

“My son, let them not depart from your eyes—Keep sound wisdom and discretion; So they will be life to your soul And grace to your neck.” Proverbs 3:21-22

Christian Defense #2

“Train children, young people and young Christians in basic faith defense so they will be able to talk with atheist street epistemologists in the event they are attacked.”

Please note the last part of this defense statement – “in the event they are attacked.”

This is similar to how we train young people in self defense. We want them to know how to defend themselves “in the event they are attacked.” We don’t train young people so they can go out get into fights with people. We train them so they can defend themselves in the event they are attacked.

Christian faith defense is different in the sense that Jesus Christ does send us out into a world where many people won’t like the message of the Gospel because of its emphasis on sin and repentance. Christian young people need to know how to deal with a vast array of objections to the Gospel of Christ, including those of atheists and agnostics. Why? So they can talk with people intelligently about the Gospel of Christ. That also means defending intelligently.

Atheist street epistemologists are more aggressive than many atheists Christian young people may meet along the way. Whereas many atheists aren’t interested in talking with Christians, street epistemologists actively search for opportunities to talk with Christians. Their stated purpose is to

“talk people out of their faith” (*A Manual For Creating Atheists*, Peter Boghossian, Chapter I, Pitchstone Publishing, 2013).

So, what does Christian **faith defense training** look like? It’s not too different than **self defense training**, except that it’s in a spiritual arena rather than physical.

Stand in the Truth

The first lessons in martial arts are aimed at teaching new students how to **stand**. Standing properly is vital to structuring your body to move quickly and powerfully while defending yourself. It is vital to personal safety. The purpose is to unbalance an opponent while remaining in good balance yourself. It takes time to master the skill of standing, but it is essential to defeating a stronger opponent.

The same is true in the spiritual arena. The first lesson is how to stand – “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore ...” (Ephesians 6)

Jesus told a crowd of people that they were of their father the devil, saying – Satan “does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.” (John 8:44) That’s important to remember because Satan is our enemy. He does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. What does that tell us? Our stance must be rooted in truth.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that our rejoicing should be “in the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6) and Jesus said that all truth has its foundation in love for God (Matthew 22:37-38). Paul prayed for Christians that they would be “rooted and grounded in love.”

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Ephesians 3:14-19

We owe our children the “truth.” Christianity is a belief system, a worldview, that is based on truth that is supported by evidence. Our children need to know that. All Christians need to know that. There is nothing about Christianity that needs to be hidden. We can talk with our children about any aspect of Christianity from a position of truth.

Training Program

A good **self defense** system is based on truth and a proven training program. Most martial arts systems have a detailed curriculum that will take students from basic to intermediate to advanced techniques (e.g. white to black belt). The same is true about **faith defense**.

Three areas we need to emphasize with our children and any young Christian are:

1. The Existence and Nature of God
2. The Reliability of Old and New Testament Texts
3. The Reality of the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The process of training should include teaching/learning and questioning/answering. Parents can and should do this in natural settings (e.g. meals, play, bedtime, trips, time with grandparents, etc), but giving children and youth some good age-related materials will also help.

You are fortunate! Parents now have multiple blog sites, books and apologetics curriculum available to help them train their children in faith defense. Here are some of the best (IMHO).

Blog Sites (alphabetical)

[Apologetics for Children](#)

[Apologetics for Kids](#)

[Apologetics for Kids Series](#)

[Apologetics Kids \(Amazon Book List\)](#)

[Apologetics Resources for Kids](#)

[Case Makers Academy](#)

[Christian Mom Thoughts](#)

[Cold Case Christianity](#)

Mama Bear Apologetics

Books (alphabetical)

Big Questions

Case for a Creator for Kids

Case for Christ for Kids

Case for Faith for Kids

Case for Grace for Kids

Chameleon's Can of Worms

Cold Case Christianity

How Do We Know God Is Really There?

How Do We Know God Created Life?

How Do We Know Jesus Is Alive?

I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist

Keeping Your Kids on God's Side: 40 Conversations to Help Them Build a Lasting Faith

More Than A Carpenter

Pig and the Accidental Oink!

Pitfalls: A Quick Guide to Identifying Logical Fallacies for Families

Possums and the Empty Tomb

Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions

Talking with Your Kids about God: 30 Conversations Every Christian Parent Must Have

Teaching Others to Defend Christianity

The Awesome Book of Bible Answers for Kids

Welcome to College: A Christ-Follower's Guide for the Journey

Curriculum (alphabetical)

[Accessible Apologetics](#)

[Advocates](#)

[ASK \(RZIM\)](#)

[Christian Middle School Bible Curriculum](#)

[GodQuest Campaign Curriculum](#)

[I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist Curriculum](#)

[Summit Middle School Bible Curriculum](#)

[The Defense Never Rests: A Workbook for Budding Apologists](#)

Christian Defense #3

“Equip your children to defend Christianity in the real world.”

Christian **faith defense training** includes both **show** and **tell**.

This has similarities with training children in self defense:

- **Teach** techniques
- **Practice** techniques
- **Demonstrate** techniques (pre-determined situations)
- **Perform** techniques (real world situations)

Head knowledge is not enough in self defense. Students must also know how to use techniques in real-world situations. Training should emphasize physical safety while allowing students to get hands-on training to build

both understanding and muscle memory. Training is age-appropriate. A class of pre-school children is not going to train the same way a high school class trains.

Head knowledge is also not enough in faith defense. Students must also know how to use what they've learned in real-world situations. Training should emphasize spiritual safety while allowing students to get training that builds understanding and spiritual memory. Training should be age-appropriate.

Example #1

Parents **teach** their children about evidence for the existence of God, reliability of the Bible, and credibility of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Parents who have not received their own training in those areas can find resources through their church and trusted Christian organizations that focus on faith defense.

Children will ask great questions when they find themselves in a spiritually safe and comfortable environment. Parents, as their faith defense instructors, should welcome every question and do their best to help their children understand the answers. As their children get older, parents can role play a variety of worldviews to help their children understand how other people think and believe.

Parents can also model how to talk with people about the existence of God, reliability of the Bible, and reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus

Christ. As children watch and listen to what their parents do and say with someone from a different religion or worldview, they will grow in their understanding of how to talk with others about Christ.

Example #2

Children's Church and Youth Leaders **teach** their students about evidence for the existence of God, reliability of the Bible, and credibility of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Children will ask great questions when they find themselves in a spiritually safe and comfortable environment. Church and youth leaders who work with children and teens should welcome every question and do their best to help them understand the answers. As the children get older, church leaders can role play a variety of worldviews to help them understand how other people think and believe.

Church and youth leaders can also model how to talk with people about the existence of God, reliability of the Bible, and reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As children watch and listen to what their youth leaders do and say with someone from a different religion or worldview, they will grow in their understanding of how to talk with others about Christ.

Example #3

Christian School Leaders **teach** their students about evidence for the existence of God, reliability of the Bible, and credibility of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Students will ask great questions when they find themselves in a spiritually safe and comfortable environment. Teachers and other school leaders should welcome every question and do their best to help students understand the answers. As children get older, teachers and school leaders can role play a variety of worldviews to help them understand how other people think and believe.

Teachers and other Christian school leaders can also model how to talk with people about the existence of God, reliability of the Bible, and reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As children watch and listen to what their teachers and school leaders do and say with someone from a different religion or worldview, they will grow in their understanding of how to talk with others about Christ.

Example #4

Christian parents and teachers take their children/students with them as they defend Christianity in real-world situations.

It's one thing to tell students what you would do if talking with an opponent of Christianity. It's another thing to show students what faith defense looks like in a real-world situation.

Practice

Self-defense techniques are taught slowly, methodically and carefully so students understand what they're doing, why they're doing them and what effect the techniques will have on other people. The students practice the techniques with the teacher and other students in a controlled and safe environment to gain an understanding of how each defense works. Practice sessions will expand in speed and intensity based on how well students are able to execute the skills in a way that is safe, efficient and effective.

The same is true with faith defense. Faith defense is based on developing critical thinking skills. One perspective of those skills comes from academia – (University of Michigan)

- Analyzing
- Applying Standards
- Discriminating
- Information Seeking
- Logical Reasoning
- Predicting
- Transforming Knowledge

Another perspective of those skills comes from the Bible where reason and logic are highly desired and used.

“And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.” Acts 19:8

- Isaiah 1:18
- Acts 17:2, 17
- Acts 18:4, 19
- Acts 19:8-9
- Acts 22:1
- Acts 24:25
- Acts 26:24-25
- Philippians 1:7
- 1 Peter 3:15

Atheists often tell Christian young people that their “faith” in God is no more than wishful thinking and that they have no evidence for God’s existence. The truth is that Christian young people have access to a massive vault of evidence they can use to defend belief in God’s existence, in the credibility of the Bible, and the reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Once Christian young people learn about the evidence, they need to understand how to use that evidence in a process that is reasonable and logical. Christian parents, grandparents, teachers, pastors and other adults in young people’s lives should be able to help their young students practice what they know in a safe environment.

Practice may include role playing between student and teacher and student and student. That's similar to self defense training. The topic is selected and two people choose different views of the topic. Examples of topics would be –

- Existence of God
- Reliability of Bible
- Reality of Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Examples of differing views of the topic would be –

- Christian / Atheist
- Christian / Agnostic
- Christian / Hindu
- Christian / Buddhist
- Christian / Muslim

Role playing is just one method of training. There are many others. Be creative and enjoy the process with your students!

Demonstrate

Demonstration in martial arts/self defense is based on pre-determined situations. Students know who will attack them, the nature of the attack (e.g. empty hand, stick, knife, gun) and the speed of the attack (eg. slow, medium, fast). Students won't know exactly how their partner(s) will attack, so their responses should demonstrate how well they understand defending against a variety of attacks.

Demonstration in faith defense is based on pre-determined situations as well. Let your children/students know in advance who will approach them and with what worldview they will approach. What students won't know is what argument(s) their dialog partner will include. It is a test of how well they understand the worldview.

Perform

Performance in martial arts/self defense is based on real world situations. Students will not know who will attack them, will not know the nature of the attack nor the speed of the attack. It is the ultimate test of their learned skills in a controlled environment. Safety to everyone involved is vital.

Performance in faith defense is also based on real world situations. Students will not know what worldview(s) their partner will approach them with nor whether their partner will be a friendly or unfriendly opponent. It is the ultimate test of their learned skills in a controlled environment. Safety to everyone involved is vital.

What's At Stake

What's at stake in self defense are basic temporal values of life and safety.

What's at stake in faith defense are eternal values of salvation and obedience to God.

What's at stake is the future of our children.

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