



Street Epistemology

Tactical Conclusion

By

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We are bringing our special series about Street Epistemology to a point of tactical conclusion. I'm using four primary sources for this part of our report

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1. *A Manual for Creating Atheists* by Peter Boghossian
2. StreetEpistemology.com
3. Complete Street Epistemology Guide: How to Talk About Beliefs (Last Update: 10 May 2016)
4. Street Epistemology videos

We have been looking at Section 2.4 from the *Complete Street Epistemology Guide* (CSEG). That's the section 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 asunproven or ineffective (quackery).
- The scientific validity of an idea or system which has never been adequatelyresearched 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.

Christian Defense #4

We looked at Christian Defense #1, #2 and #3 in previous articles. Defense #1 is to teach your children not to engage with atheist street epistemologists until they train in faith defense. Defense #2 is to train your children in the basics of **faith defense**. Defense #3 is to model faith defense for your children.

We move now to **Defense #4**.

“Support your children as they defend the Gospel.”

It's important that we teach our children what to defend and how to defend it. We also need to remember that when our children defend the Gospel they are involved in spiritual warfare. They will need our support in many ways.

The Apostle Paul wrote the Philippians that he was “appointed for the defense of the gospel.” (Philippians 1:17) He wrote the Romans that he was “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the

Greek.” (Romans 1:16) Paul wrote the Galatians that “even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:8)

We and our children, like the Apostle Paul, are appointed for the “defense of the Gospel.”

So, what is the Gospel?

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

The **heart** of the Gospel is this:

- that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture
- that He was buried
- that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures

- that He was seen

This is what God has appointed us to defend – the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Notice an important aspect of the defense (*apologia*) – “according to the Scripture.” Our defense of the Gospel includes the defense of the Bible. The “Scripture” Paul referred to in the middle of the 1st century AD was what we call the “Old Testament.”

I think we sometimes forget about the importance of the Old Testament in Christian apologetics. Jesus died and rose from death “according to” the Old Testament Scriptures.

A complete apologetic will include defense of the entire Bible. How equipped are our children to do that? How equipped are we to do that?

Defending the Gospel

The Apostle Paul wrote that God had assigned him the work of defending the Gospel of Jesus Christ –

“Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.”
Philippians 1:15-17

Paul wrote the Philippians later in his life, so he had many years to develop his 'apologetic' for defending the Gospel. Along the way, as he was developing his skills of faith defense, we are given some insight into how we can train and support our children.

One important area is to understand what's on the battlefield and what's not.

Let me say that again.

It's important to understand what's on the battlefield and what's not.

Can you imagine an army fighting against things that are not on the battlefield? It can happen, so let's be careful. Soldiers and sailors have been known to get into arguments and fights that have nothing to do with the battle they were assigned to fight. Their off-battlefield fighting often put them in military prison where they are of no help to the real battle. We have a certain number of fighting days on earth and we don't want to waste one of them.

As we watch Paul move from city to city in the Book of Acts, we witness his focus on what's important .. what's on the battlefield and what's not. Here are a couple of examples of things that can get Christians off-track from fighting the battles on the battlefield.

Politics – how did Paul deal with local, regional and empire politics during his travels? Did he dig in his heels and try to make changes to every political system he came across? Did he spend his precious days trying to make political changes or did he focus on the Gospel of Jesus Christ that changes people’s hearts, minds and lives?

It’s interesting that Paul told Christians to pray for political leaders, even though most of them were pagans and some even hostile to Christianity.

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:1-4

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will [a]bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also

pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." Romans 13:1-7

Worldly Philosophy – how did Paul deal with worldly philosophy when he heard it? Did he rail against the philosophers and try to change their way of thinking through philosophical means? or did he focus on the Gospel of Jesus Christ that changes people's minds, hearts and lives?

One example is how Paul dealt with the worldly philosophies he encountered in Athens. Let's look at Acts 17 beginning with verse 16 –

"Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols."

Did pagan idol worship bother Paul? Absolutely! His "spirit was provoked within him." So, what did Paul do about it?

"Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there."

Paul "reasoned" with Jews and Gentile worshipers in the synagogue and in the marketplace every day with whoever happened to be there. Paul encountered epicurean and Stoic philosophers in the marketplace.

Aaahh, you say. That's evidence Paul used human philosophy to reason with the human philosophies of his day. Are you sure about that?

The Greek word for “reasoned” is διαλέγομαι (*dialégomai*). We get the English word “dialog” from it. The idea is to consider different views on a subject – “getting a conclusion across, speaking to a conclusion.” The reasoning process includes an exchange of logic.

That's what Paul did in the synagogue with Jews and Gentile worshipers and in the marketplace with Epicureans, Stoics and other philosophers. So, did Paul use human wisdom to “dialog” with these people?

“He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,’ because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.”

While Paul certainly knew the arguments of human philosophy, his “logic” was Jesus crucified – the Gospel.

We see that clearly when Paul spoke at the Areopagus in Athens. The pagan philosophers wanted to know about the “new doctrine” Paul introduced to them as he “reasoned” with them. They viewed what he said as “strange things to our ears.” Here's how Paul addressed the philosophers. Again, we're in Acts 17. It's a good lesson for us and our children when we're reasoning with non-Christians.

“Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.’ And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’ So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”

Paul also wrote this about using human wisdom to fight the battles before us –

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Notice that Paul stayed on the battlefield and used the Gospel (Jesus Christ and Him crucified) to fight the spiritual battles he faced. He did NOT come to them with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to them the testimony of God. He said that his speech and preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, “but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” Why? “... that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Paul was not interested in fighting the wrong battles. He did not want to get off the battlefield God had assigned him. Paul focused on what God sent him to do. That’s what we need to do. That’s what we need to teach our children to do.

Read Paul's accounts of his own conversion story from Judaism to Christianity and you'll see that his focus was always on "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." That's where we need to be when we talk to people and in how we spend our time.

Faith – Experience – Testimony

Three other areas that are part of the “When To Use It” section of the *Complete Street Epistemology Guide* include:

- 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]

Let’s look at each one and see how atheists and Christians view them through different lenses.

Faith

Atheist definition of faith from Professor Peter Boghossian –

“The word ‘faith’ is a very slippery pig. We need to get our hands on it, pin it to the ground, and wrap a blanket around it so we can have something to latch onto before we finally and permanently subdue it. Malleable definitions allow faith to slip away from critique.

The words we use are important. They can help us see clearly, or they can confuse, cloud, or obscure issues. I’ll now offer my two preferred definitions of faith, and then disambiguate faith from hope.

faith/faTH/

1. Belief without evidence.
2. Pretending to know things you don’t know.”

A Manual for Creating Atheists pp 32-34

Christian definition of faith –

1. Belief with evidence
2. Knowing things you can know

Atheists and Christians view the idea of “faith” from polar opposites. I understand having been on both sides of this discussion, but the Christian viewpoint seems to have more going for it based on the definitions of terms.

Hebrew – אָמוּנָה (*emunah*) – The root word, *aman*, means “firm, secure, supported.” An example is Isaiah 22:23 – “I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, And he will become a glorious throne to his father’s house.” The word “secure” is a translation of *aman*.

Greek – πίστιν (*pistin*) – The root word, *pistis*, means “be persuaded” and carried the idea of belief and trusting based on evidence.

Latin – *fides* – The root word word means “confidence, trust.”

English – *feith* (Middle English) – “to trust, have confidence”

So, how did the definition of the word go from being persuaded by evidence to belief without evidence?

It seems to have been a slow change over centuries as people began to view religious faith as something that couldn’t be trusted. Even though the evidence for Christianity hasn’t changed in the past two-thousand years, perception of Christianity has changed.

Professor Boghossian quoted James Randi as saying this –

“No amount of belief makes something a fact.” (ibid, p 46)

I agree. Believing something doesn’t make that something true. What makes that something true is if that something is true. That goes back to the old idea of “faith” being confidence based on evidence.

Boghossian continued –

“The pretending-to-know-you-don’t-know pandemic hurts us all. Believing things on the basis of something other than evidence and reason causes people to misconstrue what’s good for them and what’s good for their communities.” (ibid, p 46)

I agree. No one should believe something that is not based on evidence and reason. Christianity is based on evidence and reason, so believing it makes sense.

Experience

Atheist definition of experience from Professor Peter Boghossian –

“Religion is a social experience ... Religious structures (churches, mosques, synagogues, temples) are places where people come together in friendship, love, true, and community to do things that are fun, meaningful, and satisfying, that are perceived to be productive, or that grant solace ... This is how the vast majority of believers experience their religious life—as a communal and social event that adds meaning, purpose and joy to their lives.” (ibid, p 124)

I agree that many people view their religious belief system as primarily a social experience. However, that’s not what we see in early Christianity. Being a Christian in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries was dangerous to

your health. Tens of thousands of people died horrible deaths because of their trust in Christ. It was definitely not a “social experience.”

Millions of Christians today are severely persecuted for their trust in Christ. Many are killed, others imprisoned and driven from their homes. That’s not a “social experience.” The experience of persecuted Christians is based on evidence and reason.

It’s interesting to note that Christianity is growing rapidly in countries where Christians are persecuted and shrinking rapidly in countries where Christians are not persecuted. Why is that?

Christianity is at its best when tested by persecution. People who are faced with imprisonment or death have good reason to stop trusting the reasons for their persecution if what they are trusting is not true. However, people who trust in what is true have good reason to withstand opposition even to imprisonment and death.

The apostles (e.g. Peter, James, John) are a good example of that kind of trust based on evidence. Their “experience” with Jesus Christ was physical, material. They knew Him personally, followed Him, ate with Him, watched Him work miracles and heal thousands of people of every type of disease and cast out demons; they saw Him die (John), saw Him alive after death and watched as He ascended into the sky until they could no longer see Him. They “experienced” the power of the Holy Spirit in and on their lives. They saw how God gave them power to speak in a way that everyone understood them no matter what language they spoke. They watched God

use them to heal sick people and cast out demons. Their experiences were many, varied and real.

Testimony

The *Complete Street Epistemology Guide* claims that “perceptions and memories are not generally reliable evidence on their own.” That’s a ‘truth claim’ on their part, so is it true? They give no evidence for their claim. They just make the statement as if it’s true.

People’s perceptions and memories can be both reliable and unreliable, depending on the people and circumstances. However, to say perceptions and memories “are not generally reliable evidence on their own” raises many questions and objections.

I’m assuming that the atheists who wrote the street epistemology guide include themselves as generally unreliable witnesses if they are correct that perceptions and memories “are not generally reliable evidence on their own.” Can I believe what they’re saying since they’re relying on their own perceptions and memories?

An ancient rule for eyewitness testimony for both Christians and Jews was to have at least two or three people testify about what they saw. One witness was not enough.

The Apostle Paul quoted that rule in one of his letters to the Christians at Corinth –

“By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.” 2 Corinthians 13:1

Jesus Christ spoke several years before Paul and said –

“But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’”
Matthew 18:16

Moses spoke to that centuries before Jesus spoke and Paul wrote –

“Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.” Deuteronomy 17:6

Listening to the testimony of multiple eyewitnesses was an ancient rule in both Christianity and Judaism. That’s important to note as we consider the reliability of eyewitness testimony recorded in the Bible.

Christians through the centuries have trusted the words and experiences of the apostles based on the “testimony” of their lives. This is not unusual in modern, past or even distant past testimonials. People who work in journalism and law enforcement depend on peoples testimonies every day. Testimony, oral and written, is viewed as evidence. Journalists and law

enforcement officers compare testimonial evidence with other types of evidence (e.g. physical) to determine what to write for a story or who to charge with a crime. Lawyers, judges and juries hear oral testimony and read written testimony as part of the judicial process. Testimonial evidence has been an accepted part of determining truth for thousands of years.

I had the opportunity to work as a journalist for more than 40 years and am familiar with using oral and written testimony when writing news stories. We followed an evidential process to determine whether someone's testimonial evidence was true, even as a police detective or an investigator would do.

Distant past and ancient testimonial evidence requires careful scrutiny since the witnesses are no longer alive to be questioned about their testimony. However, that doesn't mean what they claimed cannot be trusted to be true. If ancient testimonies can't be trusted, then very little in history can be trusted because so much of history is based on written testimony. So, how can we know what testimonies are trustworthy and which ones are not?

Testing Testimonies

- **Multiple Eyewitnesses** – As we've seen in both Christian and Jewish writings, multiple witnesses (e.g. two or three) were required in making accusations against another person. We had a rule in journalism many years ago called "triangulation." We used that rule when the primary source of information was either unknown or would not allow us to identify them in the story. Journalists had to have at

least two other independent sources who were not connected to the primary source. Journalists and investigators would do well to use that rule for their stories and investigations.

- **Eyewitness location** – The first test I used as an investigative reporter was to see if eyewitnesses were where they said they were when they said they saw what they said they saw. For example, if someone said they saw who started a fire at a particular location but no one at that location remembered seeing them there – that’s a clue the information they shared may not be true. If someone told me they were at one location but other people said they saw that same person at another location blocks or miles away at the same time they claimed to be at the scene of an event in question, then the basic rule of a person can’t be in two distant locations at the same time kicks in. It’s even easier today to check out whether a person is at a particular location at a certain time because of all of the cameras operating at any given location – including stationary cameras (e.g. security cameras) and hand-held cameras (e.g. news crews cameras, personal cameras).
- **Non-identical testimony** – Another test is to check out the stories of different witnesses who said they were at a location at the same time. I rarely found witnesses with identical stories, which is a good thing. If everyone who claimed to be a witness said they saw everything exactly the same, that was a clue they may have agreed together to lie about what they saw. Every witness’ recollection of an event will be a little different because of where they were standing, when they

began watching, when they stopped watching, and how they changed positions as they were watching. Investigators expect slight variations in witness accounts because that's how humans behave.

- **Witness consistency** – Did witnesses change their stories from one interview to another? If a witness tells one story to one investigator and a different story to another investigator, or from one news reporter to another, something's wrong. Witnesses will sometimes remember more details of an event as they're recalling what they saw, but changing major details that conflict with earlier versions of their story can be a problem.
- **Supportive testimony** – Did other witness accounts support or oppose primary witness accounts? If all of the witnesses to a murder said they saw what looked like a murder, then eyewitness testimony would be supportive. However, if some witnesses said there was a murder and other witnesses said there was no murder and no dead body, that conflicting testimony would be a problem. Does eyewitness testimony corroborate or conflict?
- **Suspicious testimony** – Are there reasons to suspect witnesses may not be telling the truth? A witness who is found to have a personal grudge against someone they accused of a crime should be questioned further about their grudge. Their testimony could be tainted.

Testing Sources

The only way we can know about eyewitness testimonies to ancient events is from “source materials.” That can include written documents (e.g. letters, administrative records), archaeological finds (e.g. artifacts, monuments), etc. Are the documents and finds reliable? Can we trust that the information they present is trustworthy?

Here are some basic rules for ancient source materials.

- **Timeliness** – Do source materials date to the time period of events presented? If a 6th century AD document purports to contain first-person eyewitness testimony of something that happened in the 1st century AD, that’s a problem. How could someone living in the 6th century be an eyewitness of an event in the 1st century? They couldn’t. I wouldn’t look at that as trustworthy source material.
- **Author** – Does the writer identify himself or herself or on whose behalf they wrote? Can their identity be corroborated by other sources? What about the author’s credibility? Purpose in writing?
- **Audience** – Who was the intended audience? Why would the author write to that particular audience? Does the writing fit the audience of that time period? How would the audience have understood what was written?

- **Location** – Were source materials found in the same area where the events they record occurred? If an ancient source material is found in Canada that describes ancient events in Egypt, that would need further investigation. If someone from Egypt brought the source material to Canada and there was evidence to support that transportation of the material, then it might be accepted as a good source. However, most ancient source materials are found in the same general area as the ancient events they describe.
- **Comparisons** – How does testimony in source material compare with testimony in other source material? If one source document includes information about interaction between nations, do source materials from other nations from the same time period include information that would support or conflict with the primary source material?

Logical?

Finally, *The Complete Street Epistemology Guide* claims – “Testimony is particularly vulnerable to errors and omissions by the reporter, intentional or not.” Again, they offer no evidence for their truth claim. They just make the claim. Is their testimony particularly vulnerable to errors and omissions, intentional or not? Or is it just the people with whom they disagree? If so, we would ask if that is logical?

Peter Boghossian and his army of street epistemologists emphasize the use of logic and reason in their discussions with people of religious faith. That sounds good until we look at their methodology for having those discussions. Making sweeping generalities without providing evidence supporting their position doesn't bode well with people who think critically.

Success?

What does **success** look like to an atheist street epistemologist?

We've been looking at the tactics of street epistemology for almost six years – since Peter Boghossian published his *Manual for Creating Atheists*. Boghossian's stated purpose for the writing the manual was to teach atheists how to “talk people out of their faith” (*A Manual for Creating Atheists*, Chapter 1).

So, do atheist street epistemologists view success when are able to talk someone out of their faith in Christ? If so, would an unsuccessful encounter be when they were unable to talk someone out of their faith in Christ? Or is it more nuanced than that?

Part 3.1.5 of the CSEG (Complete Street Epistemology Guide) is titled – *Know what success looks like* –

“Take care to view your interactions as a potential learning experience for all parties, and not as some sort of “conquest”. Instead, strive to “sow seeds of doubt that will blossom into ever-expanding moments of doxastic openness” [AMFCA, pg 51]. Think of your questions as a pebble in the interlocutor's shoe that will cause them to revisit the conversation all day long.

Ask yourself : In holding this dialogue, what do I want for myself, for the interlocutor, and for the relationship? What would a successful dialogue look like?"

Notice that the CSEG refers to Boghossian's book (AMFCA) as foundational to atheist street epistemologists' beliefs and practices. Read *A Manual for Creating Atheists* and you will discover what's behind atheist street epistemology.

So, what is it that atheist street epistemologists want to do when they meet a Christian?

"But the Street Epistemologist doesn't just tear down fairytales, comforting delusions, and imagined entities. She offers a humanistic view ... *A Manual for Creating Atheists* offers practical solutions to the problems of faith and religion through the creation of Street Epistemologists—legions of people who view interactions with the faithful as clinical interventions designed to abuse them of their faith." (AMFCA, Chapter 1)

Atheist street epistemologists view their conversations with Christians as "clinical interventions designed to abuse them of their faith." Make no mistake about what you may hear from atheists to the contrary – they have one purpose: to abuse Christians of their faith. That means talking them out of their faith.

So, how do atheist street epistemologists view success from these “clinical interventions”? It would seem from what we read in the *Manual for Creating Atheists* that success is when Christians are talked out of their faith. Does that happen the first time an atheist street epistemologist approaches a Christian for a “clinical intervention”?

Instant conversion from Christianity to atheism is not necessary for atheist street epistemologists to view their “intervention” successful. Using the CSEG 3.1.5, here are success points for them –

- View your interactions as a potential learning experience for all parties, and not as some sort of “conquest”.
- Strive to “sow seeds of doubt that will blossom into ever-expanding moments of doxastic openness”.
- Think of your questions as a pebble in the interlocutor’s shoe that will cause them to revisit the conversation all day long.

Sowing seeds of doubt. That’s how atheist street epistemologists view success with their “interventions.” If they can get a Christian to doubt something about what they believe (e.g. existence of God, reliability of Bible, reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ), they will view that “intervention” as a success. However, what if the Christian does not evidence any doubt in their faith during the “intervention”?

“Redefine what “success” means. Even if you do not achieve any detectable change in your interlocutor’s confidence, you may still have planted some seeds in their mind that they will ponder later. Your interaction may have dispelled previously held, negative opinions about atheists for example.” CSEG 5.2

That means atheist street epistemologists will view just about any conversation (intervention) with a Christian as a success – because they redefine what success means to cover any outcome.

Evaluating the “Intervention”

The CSEG manual lists this process for atheist street epistemologists to go through after talking (clinical intervention) with a Christian –

“Reflect on your performance. Consider follow-up dialogues that can go much deeper than a one-time chat. Also, remember to take care of yourself.

Try reflecting on the dialogue and noting the details soon afterwards. If you recorded the audio or video of your dialogue, consider waiting a day to watch or listen to the recording. The distance helps you reflect on the dialogue from a fresher perspective. Here are some important items to document after a dialogue:

Basic data about the dialogue

- Date, time and location
- Name of the interlocutor
- Classification of belief or belief system investigated (e.g., “Christianity”, “UFOs”, “Energy Healing”)
- Foundational belief and ways of knowing
- Before-and-after confidence

Summary of the dialogue

- Important questions that you asked and the interlocutor’s responses
 - Their method(s) for justifying the belief
 - How they first came to believe it
 - Their definition of faith (if discussed)
- Turning points and important moments in the dialogue
- How you ended the dialogue
- The interlocutor’s feedback regarding the dialogue

Reflective evaluation

- Whether rapport was good and what affected it
- Specific strategies you used (defeasibility, outsider test of faith, etc)
- Explanation of what worked well (or not) about each of your major questions.
- Indicators of change in the interlocutor: Becoming aware of unreliable way of knowing, willingness to revise beliefs, contemplating change

- Goals for follow-up dialogues with the interlocutor
- Recommendations for dialogues with future interlocutors

Continue the relationship

There's no requirement that you maintain contact after your talks, but if you wish to do that, consider exchanging contacts with the interlocutor and setting up a lunch, dinner, coffee or other occasion to follow up with them and continue the dialogue. If the interlocutor is contemplating their beliefs and ways of knowing, you can offer to stay in touch and be available to talk with them. Prepare well if you are planning to meet with an interlocutor again. Review your last meeting notes or recording. Brainstorm appropriate follow-up questions and possible directions to explore next. If you posed a parting thought, ask if they have any new ideas based on that. If the interlocutor is someone you already see on a regular basis, consider approaching sensitive topics incrementally over time. Pay close attention to maintaining rapport, as there are greater consequences if the dialogue goes poorly in an established relationship than with a stranger." CSEG 8

Clinical Intervention

The fact CSEG uses the term “clinical intervention” is important to note. They are following the lead of their leader, Peter Boghossian. Boghossian includes an entire chapter to the subject of *interventions*. Here are some of the highlights that demonstrate what atheist street epistemologists are doing when they talk with Christians –

“This chapter will provide you with tools and intervention strategies to begin your work as a Street Epistemologist. It covers basic principles of effective dialectical interventions designed to help people abandon their faith ... 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’re referred to in a clinical context, change their beliefs and/or behavior. Subjects start with a faith-based belief or a faith-based epistemology. You administer a dialectical treatment with the goal of helping them become less certain and less confident in their faith commitment (or perhaps even cured of faith entirely.) You will, in a ver real sense, be administering a dialectical treatment to your conversational partners in a similar way that drug addicts receive treatment for drug abuse ... You will not be treating drug addicts—you will be treating people who have been infected with the faith virus.” A Manual for Creating Atheists, Chapter 4

Boghossian and his 'legion' of atheist street epistemologists believe Christians are mentally ill. Let me repeat that: Boghossian and his 'legion' of atheist street epistemologists believe Christians are mentally ill. They believe Christians are infected with a "faith virus" and need help to get rid of it.

"Even if my interactions are only three or four minutes, they still present an opportunity to help someone jettison faith and live a life free of delusion." Peter Boghossian, *A Manual for Creating Atheists*

Street Epistemology Series

We invite you to read the beginning of this special series titled — *Street Epistemologists 'On Guard'*. You will also find other free eBooks about Street Epistemology at FaithandSelfDefense.com.

We also invite you to share this series with students, parents, pastors and educators.

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