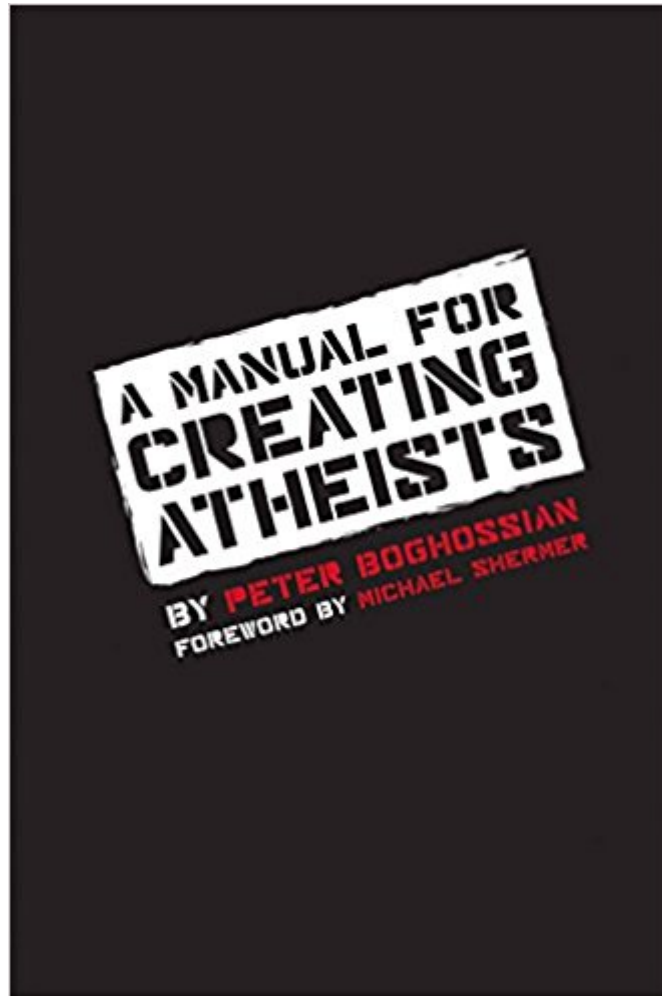




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A Manual For Creating Atheists



Synopsis

For thousands of years, the faithful have honed proselytizing strategies and talked people into believing the truth of one holy book or another. Indeed, the faithful often view converting others as an obligation of their faith--and are trained from an early age to spread their unique brand of religion. The result is a world broken in large part by unquestioned faith. As an urgently needed counter to this tried-and-true tradition of religious evangelism, *A Manual for Creating Atheists* offers the first-ever guide not for talking people into faith--but for talking them out of it. Peter Boghossian draws on the tools he has developed and used for more than twenty years as a philosopher and educator to teach how to engage the faithful in conversations that will help them value reason and rationality, cast doubt on their religious beliefs, mistrust their faith, abandon superstition and irrationality, and ultimately embrace reason.

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Customer Reviews

"Up to now, most atheists have simply criticized religion in various ways, but the point is to dispel it. In *A Manual For Creating Atheists*, Peter Boghossian fills that gap, telling the reader how to become a 'street epistemologist' with the skills to attack religion at its weakest point: its reliance on faith rather than evidence. This book is essential for nonbelievers who want to do more than just carp about religion, but want to weaken its odious grasp on the world." --Jerry Coyne, Ph.D., author of *Why Evolution is True* "Dr. Peter Boghossian's '*A Manual for Creating Atheists*' is a precise, passionate, compassionate and brilliantly reasoned work that will illuminate any and all minds capable of openness and curiosity. This is not a bedtime story to help you fall asleep, but a

wakeup call that has the best chance of bringing your rational mind back to a life."--Stefan Molyneux, host of Freedom Radio, the largest and most popular philosophy show on the web "If we want to live in world that is safer and more rational for all, then this is the guidebook we have been waiting for. Relying on extensive experience and a deep concern for humanity, Peter Boghossian has produced a game changer. This is not a book to read while relaxing in a hammock on a sunny afternoon. This is the how-to manual to take into the trenches of everyday life where minds are won and lost in the struggle between reason and madness." --Guy P. Harrison, author of 50 Simple Questions for Every Christian and Race and Reality "I wouldn't be surprised if ten years from now we realized that this book's publication was a turning point in the decline of Christianity in the West..." Tom Gilson, Christian apologist and author, Thinking Christian "A 'how to' book for the ages. Boghossian manages to take a library's worth of information and mold it into a concise and practical tome to guide through the murky waters of magical thinking, docking the reader safely on the shores of reason, logic and understanding. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this, and highly recommend it."--Al Stefanelli, author of A Voice of Reason In An Unreasonable World-The Rise of Atheism On Planet Earth and Free Thoughts-A Collection Of Essays By An American Atheist "A book so great you can skip it and just read the footnotes. Pure genius." --Christopher Johnson, cofounder, the Onion "There is nothing else on the market like this book that helps atheists talk believers out of their faith. Every atheist interested in doing so, or who talks to believers about faith at all, should read it. It's both needed and brilliant!" --John W. Loftus, author, Why I Became an Atheist and The Outsider Test for Faith "Boghossian has provided an indispensable chart book for all of us who must navigate the rising sea of magical thinking that is inundating America today." --Victor Stenger, PhD, author, God: The Failed Hypothesis and God and the Atom

"If I started reading A Manual for Creating Atheists as a Christian I would have been an atheist by the time I finished it. Peter Boghossian's book is the perfect companion to Richard Dawkins' The God Delusion. They should be bundled like an atheist software package to reprogram minds into employing reason instead of faith, science instead of superstition."--Michael Shermer, from the foreword to A Manual for Creating Atheists

Boghossian explains that his book intends to create a generation of what he calls "Street Epistemologists," people who are equipped with an array of dialectical and clinical tools to help the religious abandon faith and embrace reason. He writes that

Street Epistemology embraces the same values as the ancient philosophers: tough-minded, plain-speaking, known for self-defence, committed to truth, unyielding in the face of danger and fearless in calling out falsehoods, contradictions, inconsistencies and nonsense. The job of the Street Epistemologist will be to pick up where the "Four Horsemen of the Non-Apocalypse" left off. Dawkins, Dennett, Harris and Hitchens made clear how religion is harmful. Now, the Street Epistemologist will go further using the tools Boghossian gives in this book. He or she will actively go out and inoculate people who have been infected with the "faith virus", faith being defined as "pretending to know things you don't know". These are lofty ideals but Boghossian then begins to do just that: to equip the reader with a set of tools that helps in dissecting faith and its truth claims. What is very helpful in this book, is that it not only has theory but it also has frequent examples from Boghossian's own experience as an educator and philosopher. He includes both failed and successful interventions with notes, so it is possible to learn from his successes and failures. He also demonstrates how to successfully refute often heard arguments from believers, such as "you can't prove God doesn't exist" or "you have faith in science". While these refutations probably aren't new to people familiar with atheist arguments, these refutations could certainly help people who still have faith or are on the fence about their belief. Boghossian includes plenty of sources to bolster his argument and includes a lot of references for further study to help deepen your understanding as a Street Epistemologist. The more familiar you are with apologetics and the better versed you are in philosophy, the more effective you become at exposing the falsehood of faith-based truth claims. Much of the book is rooted in the Socratic method (elenchus), a way of examining what someone believes and to help people become aware of their own ignorance. Boghossian argues that this method is effective at exposing that faith is a failed epistemology, seeing as it not based on reason and logic. Through the Socratic method, believers are supposed to realise that they actually don't know what they thought they knew, for instance "The Bible is the word of God". I particularly enjoyed chapter 8, where Boghossian argues against the validity of cultural relativism, especially in academic circles. I tend to agree with him that in the current climate, it is frowned upon to judge cultural practices and ideas as if somehow, all practices and ideas are equally valid. It should be obvious that this is not the case and that some ideas are worse than other ideas. It shouldn't be frowned upon to say that but unfortunately many people these days seem unable to differentiate between criticism on an idea and an attack on

a group of people. So is there nothing I don't like about this book? There is one thing. It's not much but I do have some issue with the fact that Boghossian not only refers to faith as an actual virus but poses that we should treat it as such, containment protocols and all. Let me be clear here: I have no problems with suggesting ways to combat the influence of religion on the world and I agree that this is necessary. However, a virus is an actual, physical agent, a pathogen which makes people (usually) physically ill. Calling faith a virus is, in my opinion, a statement that weakens his argument because it misrepresents what faith is: a set of ideas that is not based on reality, thus making it more akin to a delusion than to a disease of the body. If we are going to argue against faith and use reason and logic as our weapons, we should not use comparisons that misrepresent faith. That being said, this is perhaps more a matter of taste than a real objection because faith does share some characteristics with viruses. Overall, I think "A manual for creating atheists" is a well-written and very helpful book for anyone who is dedicated to reason and logic and is not afraid to follow them, wherever they lead. I haven't tried any Street Epistemology yet per the instructions outlined by Boghossian but I am not unfamiliar with the Socratic method so I think they will prove helpful. I also appreciate the way Peter Boghossian bolsters the morale of his Street Epistemologists to be, warning them that they will face adversity by exposing faith as a failed epistemology but encouraging them to speak plainly and boldly, just like the philosophers of old.

The book is really more geared toward creating critical thinkers and atheism is just a natural outcome of this process. I suppose the book title may have been chosen for its "provocative" meaning. In any case, the book is extremely helpful for teaching the reader how to encourage people to think critically without being confrontational. This book has completely changed the way I approach talking to people about religion, pseudoscience and woo. It also has great advice for teachers on helping students think critically. A must buy for anyone interested in critical thinking.

When I started I didn't like this book and I still don't agree with everything he says, at least I'm not sure if I agree yet. I had heard the author was arrogant and offensive. While you could certainly take him that way, I find his proposed method of devaluing faith claims (essentially nothing more than the Socratic Method) to be honest, sincere, and empathetic. If you find yourself debating with friends and family, or even complete strangers, and more often than not you get nowhere or even create a greater disconnect this book will give you help hints to avoid such dead ends.

I really like this book because it tells you how to use Socratic epistemology to incrementally change the mindset of people who think of faith as a positive attribute. A key to changing this mindset is using the Socratic method to get people to think differently about how they view belief about things without good evidence. I would recommend this book for anybody who would like to make a positive impact on society by helping it to become more reasonable and rational.

I first want to be very clear that I believe this book is poorly labeled. Some may rush to it due to its title - many more may rush AWAY - please don't! Peter Boghossian's book is very clear about epistemology, and particularly about the means of Socratic discourse that can help in freeing anybody - theist, atheist, political wonk, you name it - from beliefs that are not based on reason. Lots of talk of what "doxastic openness" is, how to achieve and maintain it, how to encourage it in others. If you are willing to challenge everything you believe, in order to have a set of beliefs that as-closely-as-possible match reality, then this is your book. But beware - it's not for the faint of heart; challenging our more core assumptions and cherished beliefs is not a weekend task, nor one that will leave you unchanged.

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