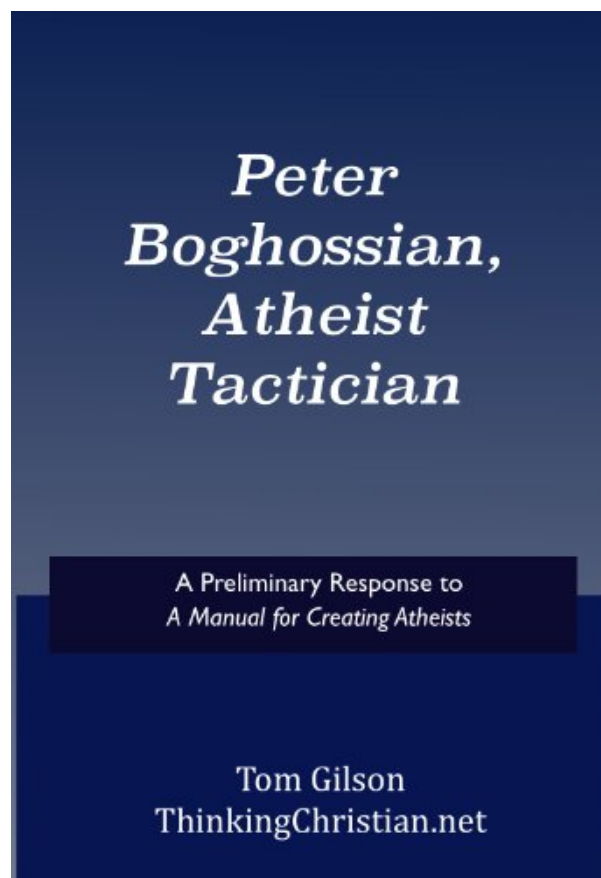


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TACTICIAN: A PRELIMINARY RESPONSE  
TO "A MANUAL FOR CREATING  
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# *Peter Boghossian, Atheist Tactician*

A Preliminary Response to  
*A Manual for Creating Atheists*

Tom Gilson  
ThinkingChristian.net

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## About the Author

Tom Gilson is the National Field Director for Ratio Christi, a monthly columnist for BreakPoint online, and host of the Thinking Christian blog.

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# **PETER BOGHOSSIAN, ATHEIST TACTICIAN: A PRELIMINARY RESPONSE TO "A MANUAL FOR CREATING ATHEISTS" BY TOM GILSON PDF**

Peter Boghossian has energized atheists with his recently published *Manual for Creating Atheists*—and for good reason, in part. He's a master of rhetoric and persuasion theory. He outshines other contemporary atheists in his understanding of strategy and tactics. He is a force for Christians to reckon with, and believers ought to be aware of him.

Other than his rhetorical and strategic skills, there's very little in him for Christians to fear. He takes direct aim at the concept of religious faith—and he misses. He wants to re-define faith as "belief without evidence," and "pretending to know what one doesn't know." When it comes to Christian faith, though, he has no real evidence to support his definitions, and his arguments against the faith are almost laughably weak.

They are weak, that is, for those who are equipped with real, solid answers—a dangerously small proportion of believers. Those who lack such equipping are really quite vulnerable. This book provides the necessary answers, along with an overall assessment of Boghossian's position and what Christians must do to be ready to respond.

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## About the Author

Tom Gilson is the National Field Director for Ratio Christi, a monthly columnist for BreakPoint online, and host of the Thinking Christian blog.

## Most helpful customer reviews

19 of 25 people found the following review helpful.

Look elsewhere for legitimate counter arguments to Peter Boghossian's book...

By Adidas1976

I don't know if all of the other reviewers read both books, but I have. Here are the 2 main reasons I gave this 1 star:

1. The author comes pretty close to making a good argument for the word "faith", taken in context within the realm of Christianity. That, however, is always the problem with Christian apologetics. They are very "religio-centric". I.E. They don't think outside the realm of Christianity. Of course you can find "evidence" for Christian faith in the bible, since it is the basis of Christianity. It is a circular argument: There is evidence in the bible for faith/Christianity/existence of God and the evidence in the bible is true because it is the word of God and we know there is a God because there is evidence in the bible and etc. etc. Take a step back. Boghossian's book is about taking a step back from a religious bubble and seeing the larger picture of

religions. The "evidence" that Gilson presents in this book would not amount to a hill of beans to a Muslim or a Hebrew or a Hindu or a etc. etc. Boghossian's book is not centered on debunking Christianity, it is broad based to cover all religions. It is not about changing beliefs, but changing the way people think. What makes Tom's arguments any more true than Islam's claim to be the one true faith?

2. Tom is very centered on the word Faith and Peter's definition of faith. Most of Peter's book, again, is challenging how people think. His chapter on faith is important, but is not the whole of the book. I get the feeling that Tom read the first 2 chapters and then penned his book. Maybe that is why part of the title is "A Preliminary Response"

A brief mentioning of poor proof reading also needs to be stated. I also like the evidence analogy of the murder scene with faith. Some how finger prints on a gun and bullet wounds on a victim are as strong as a story written down 2000 years ago by an unknown author with bias towards Christianity that was subsequently retranslated 3 or 4 times. Um... yeah.

Here are 3 facts that Peter outlines in his book that are a good starting point for "stepping out of the bubble" when thinking about religion. (I am paraphrasing. Peter does a more eloquent job). I don't think you can make a logical/sensible argument against them:

- a. There are many, many religions in the world.
- b. Most, if not all, religions claim to be the true word of God with the proper way to get to heaven
- c. Many claims of one religion disagree with, or are in direct contradiction with, the claims of other religions

What can you say to those facts? All religions can't be right. But they all can be wrong...

SO, is it worth one star? I guess for the fact that it doesn't really negate Peter's book and, hence, fails at what it sets out to do. It falls into the trap of religious people all over the world. "My religion is true because I believe it to be true. And here is my "evidence" from my holy book! (Evidence that all other religions can also produce to prove their religion is true.)

I wouldn't recommend this to an atheist looking for a good retort to religious views. It is too focused on the Christian point of view.

I think the author needs to un-focus on Christianity and find more broad based reasons for faith that don't need to rely on the Bible (which the majority of people don't believe is the definitive religious book) I'd be interested to read the author's response on the rest of Peter's book. The critical thinking aspects especially.

"Live like today is your last but learn as though you will live forever." - Ghandi (Paraphrased)

13 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Makes irrelevant arguments, argues against a straw-man

By bryan

I downloaded this book for free from the Thinking Christian website. I started to write a 5-part blog post rebutting the book point by point in its entirety, but my work was accidentally erased, so I'm just going to summarize things here, very briefly.

In this book, Tom argues that in the Bible, faith is connected to evidence: for example, when Jesus provides evidence of his Resurrection by appearing before the disciples. This was then the impetus for their faith, Tom says. But by appearing before the disciples, Jesus wasn't giving them faith in anything. Jesus was giving them direct \*knowledge\* of his Resurrection and Lordship. It is unclear what role faith plays here.

The evidence left for the rest of us, however, is doubtful: ancient, anonymous, contradictory hearsay, the extraordinary nature of which greatly defies our ordinary experience, written in a time when superstition was rampant and critical thinkers were hard to come by. So even if faith is connected to evidence for biblical characters, The evidence left behind for the rest of us is insufficient for belief. The faith of biblical characters and faith for the rest of us are of categorically different natures. Biblical characters had sufficient evidence, we do not. So if skeptics are right in saying the evidence for Christianity is poor, Dr. Boghossian is right in saying that faith is belief without evidence (more on that below). Since the Manual is a book written for skeptics, assessing that evidence was not a central concern for the author.

Mr. Gilson then spends a considerable amount of pages arguing against Dr. Boghossian's definition of faith as "belief without evidence." How can this be, if Christians have appealed to evidence throughout the centuries? But if Mr. Gilson had read the text closer (or perhaps interpreted the author more charitably), he would have realized that Dr. Boghossian couldn't have meant that literally, and so could have saved himself considerable time and ink.

Dr. Boghossian acknowledges Christian evidences in the book: Aquinas five proofs, the Kalam argument, Intelligent Design, Pascal's Wager, etc. He's read the works of Christian apologists Alvin Plantinga and William Lane Craig. In Boghossian's own words, he says, "faith is the word when one does not have \*enough\* evidence", and that believers believe in the Resurrection on "\*insufficient\* evidence." So it is clear that when Dr. Boghossian defines faith as "believe without evidence", he means "belief without \*sufficient\* evidence."

Why not define it this way, then? Let me answer a question with another question--do flat Earthers have evidence for their views? They say they do, but in reality, we all know they do not. So it is appropriate to describe their beliefs as without evidence. Since Tom attacks a definition of faith that Dr. Boghossian does not defend, he is attacking a straw-man, and broad swaths of his book can be ignored.

This review has gone on long enough, but one final point to illustrate Gilson's credulity and insufficient standards for evidence. Tom says he "know[s] Jonah survived his fishy experience, and Jesus walked on water, the same way most of us know that the core of the earth consists of a molten nickel-iron mix: through the reliable testimony of competent, credible, and trustworthy authorities. When someone clearly knows what he is talking about, and can be trusted to tell the truth, it's perfectly rational to believe what he is saying."

No, really. That's what he said.

People of a skeptical bent will immediately realize the illegitimacy of this move, based on the principle of extraordinary claims rationally requiring extraordinary evidence. Just because we can rationally accept "testimony" from experts regarding mundane, ordinary claims, does not mean we can rationally accept extraordinary claims on the basis of testimony. My mother is a competent, credible, and trustworthy person. But if she tells me she saw a cow being abducted by a UFO while she was driving through Kansas, it would be irrational for me to accept her testimony without compelling evidence.

It doesn't matter if Jesus attested to Jonah's events. Since historian Richard Carrier published the peer-reviewed monograph, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, which questions the existence of Jesus from a Bayesian standpoint, open-minded people can't even have confidence Jesus even existed anymore, especially since, as followers of Carrier's blog know, the book so far remains unsuccessfully rebutted.

Tom Gilson is a smart person, and one of the world's best Christian apologists. I've been reading his blog for

a long time and he often causes me to think deeper on some issues. But this book is a waste of paper, and not at all a threat to Dr. Boghossian's thesis. Which is unfortunate, because I genuinely would like to believe in a creator God--I used to, as I am former Christian and apologist, writing my own book before I fell from grace. But I can no longer on insufficient evidence.

5 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Only argument against the entire book it responds to is ...

By Clint Udy

Only argument against the entire book it responds to is the definition of faith. Try using it against many atheists and it doesn't work.

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