



MEET THE SKEPTIC

A Field Guide to Faith Conversations

BILL FOSTER

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*only **pages 23-27** are included to assist you in developing your essay.

4: THE 4 KINDS OF SKEPTICISM

Generally speaking, a person's total worldview consists of how they see the world in three broad categories: SPIRITUAL, MORAL, and SCIENTIFIC. These three areas represent life's big questions such as: *What happens after we die?* (Spiritual); *Are right and wrong absolute?* (Moral); *How did life come about?* (Scientific), etc. So SPIRITUAL, MORAL, and SCIENTIFIC skepticism are three of the four kinds of skepticism you can expect when you engage a skeptic.

The fourth kind is *BIBLICAL*. The Bible is the lens through which believers view the other three categories. Although skeptics don't use the Bible to shape their worldview or to guide their life, most will give an opinion about it when given the opportunity. Therefore, when we engage skeptics we bring a biblical worldview into the conversation and create the possibility that it will be questioned.

Keep in mind that the point of the categories is not to label or categorize *people*^{*}, but rather to make us aware of what kind of *skepticism* they are expressing at the time, and therefore, what kind of conversation we are engaging.

dig up the Root Ideas not the weeds

For each of the four kinds of skepticism, there is a Root Idea that feeds the various objections within that category. What we're calling the Root Idea is the false premise. A false premise feeds objections like a root feeds a weed. Pulling a dandelion will only dislodge its feathery seeds and leave the root eventually creating more dandelions. Similarly, if we respond to each objection a skeptic raises, he just raises another one to take its place. Our goal is to dig up Root Ideas not debate the many objections (pull up the weeds) growing out of them.

For example, suppose a skeptic says the History Channel showed archaeological proof of "missing books" of

^{*}It goes without saying that people are complicated. A skeptic could express ideas belonging to any one or all four of the categories.

the Bible. If you knew about this particular finding you could debate its authenticity, or you could question a bias by the History Channel. But these options would create a surface-level ping-pong match. Instead, question the likely Root Idea which is, *“The Bible is man-made”* (p. 26) to get to a more meaningful level of his worldview.

The following is a brief description of each kind of skepticism, its Root Idea, and a Probing Question to expose it:



SPIRITUAL

You’ve encountered a SPIRITUAL objection if it involves:

- Questions about God
- Other religions/cults
- The afterlife
- The supernatural

Sample objections:

“People can get to heaven by many paths.”

“Your imagination creates your destiny.”

“Meditation brings me closer to enlightenment.”

The Root Idea behind most SPIRITUAL objections is:

“Good works get you heaven.”

A Probing Question to ask is:

“How good is good enough (to get you to heaven)?”



MORAL

You’ve encountered a MORAL objection if it involves:

- Truth
- Peace (at the expense of truth)
- Fairness/justice
- Autonomy (self-rule)
- God’s justice / The Bible’s fairness
- Sex (unmarried sex, homosexuality, abortion)
- War (justified or not?)
- “Art” (as a label to protect all forms of expression)

Sample objections:

“How can you say your values are better than someone else’s?”

“There are no moral absolutes.”

“How could a good God send anyone to hell?”

The Root Idea behind most MORAL objections is:

“People should decide for themselves what is right or wrong.”

A Probing Question to ask is:

“What is your standard for right and wrong?”



SCIENTIFIC

You’ve encountered a SCIENTIFIC objection if it involves:

- Divorcing reason from faith
- The universe (Big Bang, etc.)
- Evolution

Sample objections:

“God is an irrational crutch people use to explain things they don’t understand.”

“The Big Bang started the universe.” (“Creation in six days is a nice story for kids.”)

“There are so many similarities between humans and apes...it’s easy to see that we evolved.”

The Root Idea behind most SCIENTIFIC objections is:

“The natural world is all that there is.”

(Nature can do godlike things.)

A Probing Question to ask is:

“How much faith is required for that belief?”



BIBLICAL

You’ve encountered a BIBLICAL objection if it involves:

- The Bible’s authority
- The Bible’s reliability
- The Bible’s relevance

Sample objections:

“The Bible authors were just men with their own biases.”

“We can’t trust the Bible because it has been corrupted by many years of copying and translation.”

“The Bible no longer applies to our modern world.”

The Root Idea behind most BIBLICAL objections is:

“The Bible is man-made.”

(It originated with man rather than God.)

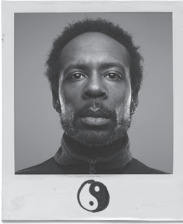
A Probing Question to ask is:

“If God gave us a book, how would we know it really came from him?”

Specific questions about Bible passages are not included in the BIBLICAL category. One reason is that many skeptics already have a tainted view of the Bible before they read any of it. If you quote from it to prove a point, they have no reason to believe that it is any more authoritative than any other book. The BIBLICAL category is set up to reshape their understanding of its authority, reliability, and relevance before debating its content.

The second reason specific questions about Bible passages are not included in the model is that they should be somewhat covered by our DAILY STUDY OF THE BIBLE, not by additional techniques such as those described in this book. If you encounter someone who sincerely wants an explanation of a particular passage (not just using the Bible as a front for another kind of objection), set aside this model, let the Bible speak for itself, and be ready to put it in context for them. See *BONUS POINT II* for five areas of the Bible to study to prepare for the most common questions.

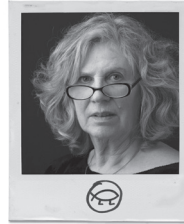
THE MEET-THE-SKEPTIC MODEL OVERVIEW



SPIRITUAL



MORAL



SCIENTIFIC



BIBLICAL

- 1) **REMEMBER 4 CATEGORIES**
- 2) **CLARIFY WORDS**
 - Clarify the objection (*How so?, etc.*)
 - Define Red-Flag words
- 3) **DIG UP ROOT IDEAS**
 - Ask Probing Questions

You may or may not be able to do all of the above in one conversation, but doing any one of them will bring the exchange to a meaningful level much quicker than playing ping-pong with their objection.

Now let's look at the first Root Idea beginning with the SPIRITUAL category.



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