

Street Epistemology

My questions are in italicized bold print

Grok's responses are reg\\

If this is your bailiwick you should read my book also
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Street Epistemology

Who introduced Street Epistemology?

Peter Boghossian introduced Street Epistemology. He coined the term and outlined the method in his 2013 book *A Manual for Creating Atheists*, where he described it as a non-confrontational, Socratic approach to examining deeply held beliefs—initially focused on challenging faith-based reasoning—by questioning how people arrive at their conclusions (epistemology) rather than debating the beliefs themselves.

Multiple reliable sources confirm this origin:

Wikipedia and academic references state Boghossian coined the term in his book.

The official Street Epistemology website and community resources acknowledge the concept originated with Boghossian's work, though it has since evolved into a broader, neutral tool for critical reflection on any belief.

Boghossian himself has described it as bringing epistemology "to the streets."

While practitioners like Anthony Magnabosco have significantly popularized and refined the method (e.g., through YouTube demonstrations and founding Street Epistemology International), the introduction and naming of Street Epistemology are credited to Boghossian. The approach draws inspiration from the Socratic method but was formalized by him in the modern context.

Mr. Boghossian's while concept depends on a clear definition of the word "faith." What is that definition?

Peter Boghossian's concept of Street Epistemology in *A Manual for Creating Atheists* (2013) relies on a specific, critical definition of "faith" as an unreliable process for forming beliefs.

He provides two interconnected definitions in Chapter 2:

Faith as "belief without evidence."

Faith as "pretending to know things you don't know."

Boghossian argues that faith is not a virtue but a flawed epistemology: people use the term "faith" to justify believing claims when there is insufficient evidence, effectively claiming knowledge without proper justification. He elaborates that if sufficient evidence existed to warrant a belief, one would not need to rely on faith—one would simply hold the belief based on that evidence.

This definition is central to his method, as Street Epistemology targets the reliability of faith as a way of knowing (rather than directly attacking specific religious claims),

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aiming to encourage doubt in faith-based reasoning and promote evidence-based epistemology.

Note that this is Boghossian's stipulated definition for his philosophical and interventional purposes; it contrasts with common religious understandings of faith (e.g., as trust grounded in evidence or relationship, as in Hebrews 11:1 in the Bible). Many critics, including Christian apologists, argue it is a strawman misrepresentation of biblical or theological faith. However, Boghossian maintains it accurately describes how faith functions in practice for many deeply held religious beliefs.

Later developments in the Street Epistemology community (e.g., via practitioners like Anthony Magnabosco) have broadened the approach to be more neutral and less tied to this specific anti-faith framing.

I assume by evidence here means knowledge? or what is his definition of evidence?

Peter Boghossian does not provide a single, explicit formal definition of "evidence" in *A Manual for Creating Atheists* or his related works on Street Epistemology. Instead, he contrasts faith (as belief without evidence or pretending to know what you don't know) with reliable epistemology, which relies on reason, rationality, and evidence to justify beliefs.

From his writings and statements:

Evidence is tied to sufficient justification for a belief: "If one had sufficient evidence to warrant belief in a particular claim, then one wouldn't believe the claim on the basis of faith" (repeated across quotes from the book).

He emphasizes evidence-based reasoning, scientific skepticism, and processes that allow beliefs to be revised when new information arises (e.g., agnostics are open to belief "if provided sufficient evidence").

Reliable ways of knowing (in contrast to faith) involve proportionality: confidence in a belief should match the quality and quantity of supporting reasons or data.

No, evidence is not equated to "knowledge" in Boghossian's framework. Knowledge implies justified true belief (in philosophical terms), but evidence is the basis or warrant for belief—information or reasons that make a claim more likely true and allow for reliable, revisable conclusions. Faith, by his view, bypasses this by claiming certainty without such warrant.

Critics (including some philosophers and theologians) argue this portrayal oversimplifies or strawmans religious concepts of evidence (e.g., personal experience, historical testimony, or philosophical arguments as forms of evidence). Boghossian, however, focuses on empirical, intersubjectively verifiable standards akin to scientific evidence as the gold standard for reliability.

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Later evolutions of Street Epistemology (by practitioners beyond Boghossian) often broaden this to explore any reasoning process neutrally, without the strong anti-faith framing.

By "evidence-based reasoning, scientific skepticism, and processes that allow beliefs to be revised when new information arises" how does he understand "information"?

Peter Boghossian does not provide a standalone, explicit definition of "information" (or "new information") in *A Manual for Creating Atheists* or his related discussions on Street Epistemology. However, from the context of his emphasis on evidence-based reasoning, scientific skepticism, and belief revision, "new information" clearly refers to new evidence—specifically, reliable, sufficient data, facts, or reasons obtained through rational, empirical, or intersubjectively verifiable processes that could warrant changing one's degree of confidence in a belief.

Key points from his framework:

Reliable epistemologies (ways of knowing) are those that produce beliefs proportional to the evidence and are open to revision when confronted with contrary or additional evidence.

He repeatedly contrasts this with faith, which he views as leading to doxastic closure (resistance to revising beliefs, even in light of new evidence).

Examples in the book highlight atheists/agnostics as exemplars of openness: "an atheist is willing to revise their belief (if provided sufficient evidence)"; "the faithful permit no such revision."

The goal of Street Epistemology is to foster doxastic openness—a genuine willingness to adjust or abandon beliefs if new, sufficient evidence emerges that undermines the original justification.

In essence, "new information arises" means encountering new evidence (empirical observations, logical arguments, scientific findings, etc.) that is strong enough to rationally demand reevaluation. This aligns with scientific skepticism, where beliefs are provisional and updated based on the best available evidence, rather than held fixed regardless of counter-evidence.

Boghossian leans toward a naturalistic, evidence-driven standard (similar to scientific methods), implying that "information" here must meet criteria of reliability and sufficiency to justify knowledge claims—not subjective experiences, revelations, or unsubstantiated assertions often associated with faith.^{1.7} sources

So, if I understand him, evidence is based on information which is based on evidence which is based on information, etc.?

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No, that's not an accurate characterization of Peter Boghossian's framework, and it doesn't lead to an infinite regress or circularity in the way you're suggesting.

Boghossian doesn't explicitly define "evidence" or "information" in rigid, formal terms in *A Manual for Creating Atheists*. Instead, he uses them in a practical, naturalistic sense aligned with reliable epistemologies (ways of knowing), such as:

Reason and rationality

Empirical observation

Scientific methods

Logical inference

Intersubjective verification (things multiple independent observers can consistently confirm or repeat)

"New information" (or new evidence) refers to additional data, observations, facts, or reasons acquired through these reliable processes that could rationally warrant revising one's confidence in a belief.

The foundation isn't a loop of "evidence based on information based on evidence..." without grounding. Reliable evidence ultimately rests on:

Direct sensory experience

Repeated testing

Shared human observation of the world

These are treated as foundational starting points in a naturalistic, skeptical worldview (similar to how science builds knowledge from empirical baselines without needing infinite justification).

Boghossian contrasts this with faith, which he sees as bypassing or closing off such processes—leading to doxastic closure (unwillingness to revise beliefs even when reliable new evidence contradicts them). In his view, good epistemology is provisional and open: beliefs should scale with the strength of the evidence from reliable sources, and be adjustable when better evidence arrives.

This avoids regress because the chain bottoms out in observable reality and testable methods, not in undefined abstraction. It's akin to foundationalism in epistemology: some justifications (like basic perceptions or logical axioms) are accepted as reliable starting points without needing further infinite backing.

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Later practitioners of Street Epistemology have often softened the anti-faith focus, applying it more neutrally to any belief, but Boghossian's original emphasis remains on promoting evidence-based, revisable reasoning over fixed, non-evidential commitments.

So he accepts certain epistemologies as "legitimate" implying that other thought of "sources of knowledge" are not?

Yes, Peter Boghossian explicitly distinguishes between reliable (or legitimate) epistemologies and unreliable ones in *A Manual for Creating Atheists* and his broader work on Street Epistemology.

He argues that not all "sources of knowledge" (ways of knowing) are equally valid or reliable. Specifically:

Faith is singled out as an unreliable epistemology—a flawed process for arriving at truth. He defines it as "pretending to know things you don't know" or "belief without evidence," and claims it produces doxastic closure (resistance to revising beliefs even in the face of contrary evidence) rather than doxastic openness (willingness to proportion confidence to evidence and revise when warranted).

Reliable epistemologies, by contrast, are those grounded in reason, rationality, evidence, scientific skepticism, and empirical processes that allow for provisional beliefs, testing, and revision based on new evidence. These are the "legitimate" ways of knowing in his view, as they reliably track truth and avoid unwarranted certainty.

Boghossian reconceptualizes the problem of religious belief not as specific doctrinal conclusions, but as reliance on faulty processes like faith. He views other purported sources—such as personal revelation, religious experience, or authority-based testimony without sufficient evidential warrant—as unreliable when they bypass evidence-based reasoning.

This stance aligns with a naturalistic, skeptical worldview where empirical and rational methods are privileged as the gold standard. He does not treat all ways of knowing as equally valid (rejecting epistemic relativism); instead, he evaluates them by their reliability in producing justified, revisable beliefs.

Note that many critics (e.g., theologians like William Lane Craig) argue this dismisses legitimate religious sources of knowledge (e.g., trust based on prior evidence or testimony). Later Street Epistemology practitioners have often broadened the approach to examine any belief's reasoning process more neutrally, without Boghossian's strong anti-faith emphasis. However, in his original framework, yes—he clearly implies (and states) that some sources are legitimate and others are not.

Reliable epistemologies, by contrast, are those grounded in reason. Define "reason."

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Peter Boghossian does not provide a single, precise formal definition of "reason" in *A Manual for Creating Atheists* or his related works on Street Epistemology. Instead, he uses the term in a standard philosophical and naturalistic sense, closely intertwined with rationality, critical thinking, evidence-based inquiry, and logical processes that reliably lead to truth.

From the context of his framework:

"Reason" refers to the cognitive faculty or process of forming beliefs through logical inference, proportioning confidence to evidence, avoiding unwarranted certainty, and maintaining doxastic openness (willingness to revise beliefs based on better evidence or arguments).

It is the reliable counterpart to faith: where faith pretends to know without sufficient warrant, reason involves thoughtful examination, skepticism toward unsubstantiated claims, and reliance on methods that track reality (e.g., science, empirical observation, and Socratic questioning).

Reliable epistemologies are "grounded in reason" meaning they employ clear, consistent, and revisable thinking—often exemplified by the Socratic method, which Boghossian heavily promotes as a tool to help people "reason away their faith."

In interviews and writings, Boghossian links reason to improving the human condition through rationality and science, wedding "reason" with "hope" (provisional, evidence-based optimism) in opposition to "faith" and "despair" (fixed, non-evidential commitment).

This aligns with classical Enlightenment views of reason as the human capacity for logical, evidence-driven thought, privileged over revelation or intuition. Critics note that Boghossian treats reason as self-evidently superior without deeply justifying its foundations (e.g., avoiding questions of why reason itself is reliable), but in his applied work, it remains a practical tool for fostering examined, non-dogmatic lives. Later Street Epistemology resources (post-Boghossian) focus more neutrally on evaluating "reasons" (justifications) for any belief without his strong prescriptive emphasis.^{1.5s37} You referenced "his framework." Define the term and explain his. Definition of "framework" in this context

In epistemology and philosophy (the contexts in which Peter Boghossian operates), a framework refers to a structured set of concepts, definitions, distinctions, and principles that organize how one understands and evaluates knowledge, belief formation, and truth-tracking processes. It is the underlying theoretical and practical system that guides analysis, argumentation, and intervention (in Boghossian's case, the conversational method of Street Epistemology).

Peter Boghossian's specific framework (as presented primarily in his 2013 book *A Manual for Creating Atheists*)

Boghossian's framework is a naturalistic, interventionist epistemology designed to reduce what he sees as harmful faith-based beliefs by targeting their underlying process rather than their content. Its core components are:

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Central distinction: reliable vs. unreliable epistemologies

Reliable ways of knowing: reason, rationality, evidence-based inquiry, scientific skepticism, empirical observation, logical inference.

Unreliable way of knowing: faith, which he defines as:

"Pretending to know things you don't know," and

Belief without sufficient evidence.

Key psychological/epistemic concept: doxastic openness vs. doxastic closure

Doxastic openness: Willingness to proportion one's confidence in a belief to the evidence and to revise or abandon the belief if sufficient contrary evidence emerges.

Doxastic closure: Resistance to revising a belief even in the face of contrary evidence —characteristic of faith-based reasoning in his view.

Reconceptualization of the problem

The primary issue with religious (and certain other) beliefs is not their specific conclusions (e.g., "God exists") but the process used to arrive at and maintain them—namely, faith as an unreliable epistemology that produces unwarranted certainty and doxastic closure.

Privileged standard for justification

Beliefs should be held provisionally and scaled to the quality and quantity of evidence obtained through reliable, intersubjectively verifiable methods (empirical, rational, scientific).

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If sufficient evidence existed for a claim, one would not need faith—one would simply hold the belief on evidential grounds.

Practical intervention: Street Epistemology

A non-confrontational, Socratic-style conversational method that:

Avoids directly challenging the truth of a person's belief.

Instead probes how they arrived at it (their epistemology).

Focuses on the reliability of faith as a way of knowing.

Aims to instill doubt in faith and encourage doxastic openness and evidence-based reasoning.

Normative goal

To "disabuse people of faith" (his explicit aim in the book) by helping them abandon unreliable processes and adopt reliable ones, thereby improving individual reasoning and (in his view) reducing societal harms associated with faith-based beliefs.

In summary, Boghossian's framework is a cohesive system that:

Redefines faith as an epistemic vice,

Elevates reason and evidence as epistemic virtues,

Uses doxastic openness/closure as diagnostic criteria,

And deploys Street Epistemology as the applied tool to shift people from unreliable to reliable ways of forming beliefs.

This framework is explicitly prescriptive and hierarchical—it does not treat all epistemologies as equally valid, but judges them by their reliability in tracking truth and remaining open to revision.

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Who first used the word doxastic?

The English adjective "doxastic" (meaning "relating to belief" or "pertaining to opinion") was first used in 1794 by the philosopher and translator Thomas Taylor in his English translation of works by the Neoplatonist Proclus (a ancient Greek philosopher).

This is the earliest recorded attestation in English according to the Oxford English Dictionary. Taylor employed the term in a philosophical context to describe matters related to opinion or conjecture, drawing directly from the ancient Greek root δοξαστικός (doxastikos, "conjectural" or "pertaining to opinion"), derived from δόξα (doxa, "belief" or "opinion").

While the word gained prominence in 20th-century analytic philosophy—particularly through the development of doxastic logic by Jaakko Hintikka in his 1962 book *Knowledge and Belief*—its initial introduction into English philosophical literature dates to Taylor's late-18th-century translation. No earlier English uses have been documented in major etymological or historical sources.^{2.1} sources

Interesting! Since the Greek word δόξα used in classic writings is not defined as it is in ecclesiastical writings. Just an observation. So are we basing our epistemology not on our own experience but on Plato? Academia and not reality?

The observation about δόξα (doxa) is spot-on and important.

In classical Greek philosophy—especially Plato—the term δόξα primarily means opinion, belief, or appearance, and it is explicitly contrasted with ἐπιστήμη (epistēmē, genuine knowledge) or νόησις (noēsis, intellectual insight). In the Republic's Divided Line and Cave allegory, doxa belongs to the lower realms of cognition: it is changeable, fallible, tied to sensory appearances, and lacks the stability of true knowledge. Plato did not treat doxa as a reliable path to truth.

In later Hellenistic and ecclesiastical writings (particularly the Greek New Testament and patristic authors), πίστις (pistis, faith) is elevated in a way foreign to Plato. Hebrews 11:1 famously describes faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (sometimes translated with ἐλπιζομένων υπόστασις, “substance” or “reality” of things hoped for). Here, faith is portrayed as a positive, divinely granted means of apprehending spiritual realities that transcend sensory evidence—precisely the opposite of Plato’s demotion of doxa.

So yes: when modern analytic philosophers (and Boghossian following them) use “doxastic” to mean “pertaining to belief” (as opposed to knowledge), they are inheriting the classical Platonic usage—belief as fallible opinion—not the elevated New Testament sense of faith as trustworthy conviction in unseen divine realities.

To your deeper question:

Are we basing our epistemology not on our own experience but on Plato? Academia rather than reality?

This is a fair and serious challenge. Several points are worth distinguishing:

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No epistemology can avoid foundational commitments.

Every system of knowledge must start somewhere—whether with sensory experience (empiricism), self-evident rational truths (rationalism), divine revelation (fideism), pragmatic usefulness (pragmatism), or evolutionary trustworthiness (naturalized epistemology). Boghossian's framework starts with the reliability of reason, sensory observation, and intersubjective testing—commitments that trace back through Enlightenment thinkers to Aristotle more than Plato, but certainly within the broad Western philosophical tradition.

Plato is not the ultimate foundation here.

The privileging of evidence-based, revisable belief over fixed conviction is closer to Aristotelian empiricism and modern scientific method than to Plato's rationalism. Plato himself was skeptical of sensory experience; Boghossian and most contemporary skeptics treat controlled sensory experience and repeatable observation as the bedrock.

Personal experience is not dismissed—it is filtered.

Boghossian does not deny that people have personal experiences (religious experiences, intuitions, etc.). He argues that personal experience alone is not a reliable guide to truth because it is private, non-falsifiable, and often contradictory across individuals. He insists experience must be cross-checked against intersubjective evidence and logical coherence—exactly the move science makes.

The critique cuts both ways.

Religious epistemologies that treat personal revelation, sacred scripture, or inner testimony of the Spirit as authoritative also rest on foundational commitments (e.g., the reliability of divine self-disclosure). These are no more “direct reality” than sensory observation; they are mediated through human interpretation, tradition, and subjective states.

In short: Boghossian's framework is not “pure reality” unmediated by theory—no epistemology is. It is a deliberate choice to privilege methods that have proven extraordinarily reliable at producing consensus, predictive power, and technological control (science, logic, critical inquiry). Whether that choice is ultimately justified—or whether reality discloses itself more reliably through other means (contemplation, revelation, tradition)—remains the enduring philosophical dispute. Plato himself would likely say that none of us, in this life, escape the realm of doxa entirely.

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If I understand you, then, you see faith as a personal understanding of God's existence but filtered by religious tradition not empirical science? Science employed an inductive approach based on sense perception to understanding a materialistic world. So, if God did exist and only spoke to His believers through their consciousness or spirit, this realm would be denied because it is outside Boghossian's purview?

Yes, you've captured the essence of the critique very accurately—and it highlights the core disagreement between Boghossian's naturalistic epistemology and a theistic one.

To clarify and expand:

Faith in the theistic sense

1. Many believers (especially in the Abrahamic traditions) understand faith not as "belief without evidence" but as a form of trustful knowledge or personal encounter grounded in:
 - Direct experiential awareness of God (through conscience, prayer, the "inner witness of the Spirit," transformative encounters, etc.).
 - Historical testimony and tradition interpreted as reliable.
 - A cumulative case of reasons (cosmological, moral, teleological arguments, etc.) combined with personal confirmation.
3. In this view, faith is a distinct faculty or mode of apprehension attuned to a non-material realm—much like sense perception is attuned to the material. Hebrews 11:1 and Romans 8:16 suggest faith operates in a spiritual domain that transcends (but does not necessarily contradict) empirical verification.

Boghossian's framework and its limits

4. Boghossian explicitly privileges empirical, intersubjective, revisable methods (essentially the inductive approach of modern science) as the reliable path to truth. Anything that cannot be tested, falsified, or proportionally justified by such methods is, in his view, unreliable epistemology—hence his definition of faith as "pretending to know things you don't know."

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If God exists and primarily discloses Himself through personal, subjective, spiritual means (consciousness, inner voice, transformed heart, etc.), then yes—this entire realm falls outside Boghossian's evidential purview by design. He would classify such experiences as:

- Private and non-falsifiable.
- Prone to contradiction across traditions and individuals.
- Therefore unreliable as a basis for knowledge claims about objective reality.

6. In his system, such experiences might be psychologically real but epistemically unwarranted for asserting "God exists" as a truth about the world.

The deeper philosophical issue

7. This reveals a prior commitment in Boghossian's framework: methodological naturalism (only natural causes and empirical methods are admissible in explaining reality). If one rejects that commitment—if one holds that reality includes a spiritual dimension accessible through different faculties—then Boghossian's dismissal of faith-based knowledge begs the question.

From the theistic perspective, it's not that believers are avoiding evidence; it's that Boghossian has narrowed the definition of legitimate evidence to exclude the very domain in which God is claimed to act and speak.

In short:

- Boghossian would say spiritual experiences, no matter how vivid or transformative, do not constitute reliable evidence for God's existence because they lack intersubjective verifiability and proportionality.
- The theist can reply that Boghossian has ruled out the possibility of spiritual evidence a priori by limiting knowledge to the empirical-inductive sphere—making his critique circular against anyone who accepts a broader ontology.

The dispute ultimately rests on foundational worldview commitments that neither side can fully adjudicate within the other's framework.