

### **Do you know you are reading this question?**

To be able to answer the proposed question I must take a similar stance to Descartes as a foundationalist. To be able to read the question, my existence is necessary. As Descartes proposed, '*cogito ergo sum*', I think, therefore I am. Now that I have assumed the existence of my mind, I must discover the knowledge that I am reading the question.

I believe I am reading this question. The subtle difference between belief and knowledge is explained by Quine through the clever use of a metaphor. In "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" Quine asserts that our beliefs form a proverbial web. The central core of the web is contextually well established. Some beliefs are so firmly entrenched at the centre of the web, they can seem not to be open to criticism. This common mistake leads us to believe that they are analytic truths. Analytic truths are true by definition. Quine later said in reference to his web of belief, "It is a pale grey lore, black with fact, and white with convention. But I have found no substantial reasons for concluding that there are any quite black threads in it, or any white ones." This is referring to there not being a strand of certainty in the web. This seems problematic, as accommodating Quine's assertion that the web is actually how we perceive things, as to grant the assertion; we must accept that the 'web' gives us an insight into how our beliefs operate. Allowing this assertion would be granting a perfectly black thread, or matter of fact; beyond revision. It then appears that if we are to understand belief in the web, we have a theory of truth which is contingent on our willingness to accept it. For the question proposed to be considered true, we must accept Quine's theory.

This is problematic, as in our quest for truth, through our beliefs, we realise that the theory is contingent on our willingness to accept it. The claim itself appears to be a belief within the web. This creates the problem due to Quine assuming the existence of the web prior to exerting its existence. Quine's epistemic holism is therefore circular and open to criticism. He requires what he is trying to prove to reach his conclusion, thus assuming the very thing he is trying to prove.

Quine also seeks justification through foundationalism. A foundationalist takes the stance that the structure of all knowledge is similar to development of a building, with the necessary foundations being laid for a study structure to be built upon. Foundationalists see a structure with certain beliefs at the bottom, on which superstructural beliefs are built upon. Such as knowledge being discovered through certainty. Descartes is another example of a foundationalist; his stance on the structure of knowledge was within the foundationalist camp. Descartes began by discovering certainty, and then discovering all knowledge using certainty as a base. He did this by discovering his existence as a necessary truth, '*cogito ergo sum*', I think, therefore I am. Once Descartes had the certainty of his existence, he believed that this was his foundation for all knowledge. He attempts to discover the external world, which becomes very problematic for him, for reasons similar to the Cartesian circle. In which Descartes requires certainty to prove the existence of God, but for Descartes to gain that certainty he needed the guarantee of God to prove that he was not being deceived. In relation to my knowledge that I am reading the question, It is seemingly impossible to justify the existence of the question with certainty.

Reliabilism is another method Quine explored to be able to justify knowledge. It is true to say that many of the beliefs we hold and would generally count as knowledge are seemingly difficult to provide the justification for. Such as general knowledge that Germany is a

relatively young unified country; you have no clear idea of what justification I would demonstrate to support such a claim. It has been proposed that such knowledge is justified by the testimony of reliable authorities on such topics. It would seem sensible to accept such knowledge of my beliefs due to a reliable figure of authority having proposed them. It appears that there is reason to think that we have well justified beliefs even though we are not aware of how they are justified. Such as someone knows that they are reading the question, yet they are not able to justify clearly as to why they hold that belief. A common response would be that it is possible to provide a justification if required through the aid of research, yet I feel justified prior to any additional justification. Many scholars have proposed the problem of a malicious demon which creates non-veridical perceptions of actual sense data in people's minds. All of their perceptual beliefs which are believed to be stipulated to be qualitatively equal to ours are therefore false. This renders belief of our perceptions of the world unreliable. Even though we share similar justified perceptual beliefs due to their experiences being identical to ours, the beliefs of the people in the deceptive world must also be justified, which shows reliabilism fails. This is due to reliability not being the necessary case for justification as a justified belief may be caused by a notion what is unreliable.

Ultimately, justification, reliabilism and foundationalism all fail due to a lack of certainty. To be able to know that I am reading the question I must take a different approach. I attempt to follow the path of Hume, Ayer and Wittgenstein on what constitutes a valid proposition and linguistic analysis, as a backbone for certainty.

My interpretation of Hume's "Enquiries", is that it lays the foundations of empiricism on which Wittgenstein built upon. At the time Hume wrote the "Enquiries" the concept of metaphysics was not yet labelled as metaphysics. Hume refers to what I interpret as metaphysics as 'jargon'. Hume attempts to 'banish' metaphysics, as do Wittgenstein and Ayer. He states that it is often the case that questions are asked which are seemingly unanswerable and it is necessary to enquire 'from what impression is that supposed idea derived.' This is due to Hume's belief that every idea begins in impressions. I interpret this as Hume inferring that, for it to be an idea that is discussable it must first have begun in experience. This experience must then be empirically verifiable in order for it to be sensible. In relation to the question, 'Do you know you are reading this question?' It must first be tested to see if it is a valid proposition and not a pseudo question. The question is open to verification and therefore is considered a valid proposition.

The sceptic would instantly doubt the possibility of correctly perceiving the question, but within the language-game described by Wittgenstein, reasons such as justification and doubt can be dismissed. This is due to doubt only having meaning relative to the internal criteria within the language-game, which defines when doubt may be raised meaningfully and when it is merely nonsensical. It follows the path that evidence, and justification for doubt must be dismissed or will venture outside the set area of intelligibility established in any language-game in which doubt exists. This is due to the fact that, we do not allow it to be anything else and therefore, scepticism can be dismissed. The language-game has rules which are defined by people, which provides certainty within language. This is related to conventionalism brought about by Ayer. The dismissal of scepticism within language further allows for certainty as sceptical doubt has been dismissed.

Conventionalism is held up by two pillars. The first being that analytic truths are certain, because, "we do not allow them to be anything else". And that the *a priori* methods, analytic truths and tautologies owe their certainty to the observation that, "they are devoid of factual content". Ultimately what occurs is that all language begins with ostensive verification where noises, the spoken language, represent collections of sense-data. This apparent sense-data is then labelled by a community which agrees that there is the quantum shift from experience to analytic truth, due to the language game not allowing the tautology to be anything else, on pain of contradiction. Ayer is criticised due to his definition of analytic being far too liberal as no restrictions are placed upon the legitimacy of the process which produces the definitions, so it is possible for us to label anything 'incorrectly', as in Malcom's words, "if we went around defining tables as chickens, it would not be too difficult to prove that tables lay eggs." This is possible by Ayer's initial criterion, as anyone can define anything as anything. This claim can be easily rebutted by emphasising that Ayer's central claim that all language must first begin with ostensive verification. Which is only when a community agrees that a public object can be publically labelled. Thus, due to the community having agreed on the language which labels the words with the meaning they contain, I can answer the question, 'Do you know you are reading this question?' With complete certainty that I am actually reading the question, due to the fact that we do not allow it to not be the case that I am not within the definition of the words and the structure of the question.