

# Can Knowledge Be Objective? Challenges of the Three- Condition Concept of Knowledge

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In our [last article](#), we classified knowledge as a power-laden concept. When a concept is “power-laden” or has a “power load,” it is not neutral, but evaluative. Thus, we can distinguish two sets of concepts: evaluative and value neutral. We will refer to the latter as “descriptive” or “non-evaluative” in this work. For example, the concepts “tree,” “metal,” “medicine,” “engineer,” and “non-interference” are “non-evaluative,” while the concepts “justice,” “truth,” “intelligent,” “love,” and “freedom” are evaluative. The concepts “tree” or “non-interference” have no value; they are value neutral. But “justice” and “freedom” have a (positive) evaluation. All evaluations have two values – “good” and “bad.” All evaluations are variations (different forms) of “good” and “bad.” For example, when we speak of “good” / “bad” relationships between people, we speak of morality, when we apply it to the functionality of things, we talk about quality, etc.

We automatically endow with “power loads” something that we value with these two values. In this article, we call this “the imperative connotation of concepts.” We claim that the concept of knowledge is based on the value of “good,” and therefore, it is an imperative concept, and we will try to show it in detail in this article.

What do we mean by saying “the imperative connotation of concepts”? Let us present the basic claims that will be our starting point:

1. "Good" and "bad" are not concepts, they cannot be defined (without giving way to [naturalistic fallacy](#) ).
2. "Good" and "bad" are positional acts. We can paraphrase them with expressions like "be" / "don't be" that recognize or do not recognize something's existence. To call something "good" means to consent to its existence. We want to possess something that we value as good. And on the contrary, we want something that we value as bad not to exist, we don't recognize its existence, we don't agree with its existence.

Accepting or failing to accept the existence of something can have different forms of expression. These are not always available with redundant. "Good" / "bad" is a linguistic expression of recognition of something's right to exist, it is a language act. But it does not express a specific concept – we cannot say what its content is.

1. Thus, evaluative concepts, i.e., "good" / "bad" express a position / will as acts of recognition or non-recognition of right to existence, and we will call this expression of will in them to be imperative. Evaluative concepts are imperative.
2. Evaluative concepts lead to interpretive competition, unlike descriptive concepts. This, in turn, is related to the imperative nature of these concepts.

It is clear that knowledge is an evaluative concept. This can be seen in the common sense that knowledge is something to be striven for. On the other hand, this evaluativeness is described in the truth condition, which is the unchanging foundation of (three-condition traditional and post-traditional) definitions of knowledge. According to the classical three-condition definition, knowledge is defined as a justified true belief. The post-Gettier justification condition in this definition was contested. There are approaches that do not consider justification as a basic condition. But there is no (successful) approach that can challenge the truth condition and exclude it from the definition of knowledge. Truth is an evaluative concept.

Knowledge is also an evaluative concept because it depends on the truth condition.

### **But what is the problem with knowledge being an evaluative concept?**

The evaluative nature of knowledge seems problematic from two aspects. On the one hand, it is inconsistent with the claim of the possibility of objective knowledge (which is described in the truth condition of knowledge). How can an object that is fundamentally evaluative and thus an act of position / will, be objective and neutral? What is interesting is that both the evaluative character of knowledge and the claim of objectivity and neutrality rest on its truth condition. The second problem is that truth itself is not an unambiguous concept; there is [no consensus](#) on what truth is. The relationship between truth and reality is one of the most controversial topics in epistemology. How can the claim of objectivity based on an ambiguous concept be justified? Can knowledge be objective at all?

In all approaches that accept justification as one of the basic conditions of knowledge, this condition is the basis for the claim of objective knowledge. Let's look at the classic definition of knowledge: knowledge is defined as a justified true belief. Here, justification should provide a connection between the consciousness of the subject of knowledge (which includes belief) and the truth that exists regardless of consciousness (we exclude the internalist approach here). This is the problem of the definition of knowledge, a problem which arises because of the justification condition. Since the idea that the truth of our beliefs is accepted as a connection with a reality is a matter of debate and is not accepted unconditionally. More precisely, only the correspondence theory [accepts](#) such an understanding of truth. For example, the coherence theory explains truth in a completely different way and does not accept reality independent of us as the truth condition. According to this approach, truth is the

compatibility of our beliefs with other beliefs (belief systems) and not with a reality independent of us. Extending the list, we can add the semantic truth theory, the redundant truth theory, and so on, which introduce different concepts of truth. The definitions of the justification condition of knowledge, mainly the pre-Gettier classical definition of knowledge, do not take into account these different directions of interpretation of the concept of truth. At the very least, the pre-Gettier definition does not allow a clear understanding of which of these interpretations is taken as a starting point. The new paradigm brought by Gettier also does not clarify this issue because the problem described by Gettier – the possibility that the fulfillment of justification and truth conditions can be the result of coincidences – fails to reinterpret the concept of truth.

From the presentation of both classical and most post-Gettier approaches, we can assume that truth is understood as a concept consistent with the correspondence theory. However, the truth condition and the concept of truth are not separately questioned by them. On the contrary, the condition that must be fulfilled to get to the truth – the justification condition of knowledge – is problematized. Our acceptance of truth in the three-condition definition of knowledge in the context of the correspondence theory naturally projects the problems and unanswered questions related to the correspondence theory onto the concept of knowledge. And basically, the issue regarding the nature of the relation of correspondence remains relevant: What similarities are there between belief and a reality independent of us, which are different substances, such that we can speak of a correspondence between them? The fact that this question remains unanswered seems problematic precisely in the context of approaches focused on the justification condition of knowledge.

In the three-condition definition of knowledge, the problem of the unclear delineation of the truth condition's

interpretation is also manifested when it is necessary to explain formal knowledge. For example, when analyzing empirical knowledge with mathematical and logical knowledge, we cannot be guided by the same concept of truth. The justification condition for logical and mathematical knowledge is not the same as the justification condition for empirical knowledge. The reality we refer to for formal knowledge such as mathematics and logic, does not imply the physical reality we refer to for empirical knowledge. In this case, we have to rely on one concept of truth for formal knowledge (Coherence Theory?) and on another concept of truth for empirical knowledge (Correspondence Theory). This in itself is very problematic and must be argued in a space outside this article.

In this article, we showed two problematic aspects of the classical three-condition definition of knowledge and the definition of knowledge in approaches focused on the justification condition from these (Gettier and later justification-focused) conditions. The first of these is the inconsistency of the claim of objective knowledge and its evaluative character. As we have shown above, knowledge is an evaluative concept because it expresses a position. That at least calls into question the claim of the objectivity of knowledge.

Another concern is that there is no single consensus on the truth condition, which is one of the three conditions of knowledge. The definitions of knowledge, however, do not take into account the ambiguity of the truth condition, and it is not known which of the confirmatory factors, that are central to the truth condition, are referenced. This, in turn, presents the justification condition in a context that is problematic.