



## CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF ISRAEL SCHAFFLER'S CONDITION OF KNOWLEDGE

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### Abstract

*This paper critically examined Israel Schaffler's conditions of knowledge, which he posits as belief, evidence, and truth. The research utilized the historical research method to explore the theory of knowledge within the field of epistemology, focusing on the acquisition of knowledge, the extent of knowledge, and the certainty of claims. The paper began by defining knowledge and proceeded to examine the traditional conditions of knowledge. Israel Schaffler's conditions of belief, evidence, and truth were then critically scrutinized. Additionally, the study critically analyzed three theories of truth: correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic. It was concluded that while belief is integral to knowledge, it is possible to hold erroneous beliefs. Furthermore, the paper argued that evidence should be sufficient but not necessarily exhaustive in supporting knowledge claims. Concerning truth, the study found that truth must exhibit consistency, correspondence to reality, and pragmatic value to be deemed valid. Moreover, the paper proposed two additional conditions for knowledge. Firstly, the understanding of the underlying principles behind mathematical equations, such as  $2+2=4$ , was deemed necessary. Secondly, the ability to apply this understanding in solving unforeseen problems in vocational and cultural contexts was considered crucial. By critically examining Israel Schaffler's conditions of knowledge and introducing supplementary criteria, this paper expanded the existing framework for understanding knowledge. The findings contribute to the ongoing discourse within the field of epistemology, providing insights into the acquisition and validation of knowledge.*

**KEY WORDS:** Critical, Examination, Israel Scheffler, Knowledge.

### INTRODUCTION

The question of knowledge has persisted throughout the history of mankind, reflecting our innate curiosity and desire to understand the world around us. What sets humans apart from other animals is our remarkable cognitive capacity. We possess the inherent ability for intellectual thought, comprehension, and the acquisition of knowledge. Epistemology, a branch of philosophy, delves into the study of knowledge, exploring how we acquire it, the scope of our knowledge, and how we can establish certainty in our claims. This paper aims to critically examine Israel Scheffler's proposed conditions of knowledge, namely belief, evidence, and truth. To accomplish this, we will begin by defining knowledge, elucidating the conditions that contribute to its attainment, and subjecting them to rigorous scrutiny. Finally, based on our analysis, we will draw a comprehensive conclusion.

### WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

Our definition of knowledge is important as it helps us understand the basis of the problem that has characterized epistemology from the ancient period. Actually the word knowledge is the noun form of the verb "to know". The verb "To know" – to know, therefore can mean any of the following, to be aware of something, to be certain about it; to learn and remember something; to have understanding or grasp of the object of knowledge; to be familiar with something; to be able to recognize or identify something; ability to distinguish between things; to have enough experience and training; to be intimate with something. While in like manner the Oxford illustrated Dictionary gives the following definition to know, "recognize, identify, to be able to distinguish, be acquainted with. Be verse in." (Oxford 2003:302).

With the above different senses of “to know” we see partly the cause of the confusion about the term knowledge. Apart from “to know” in terms of being certain of our object of knowledge, other definitions do not provide a full-prove criteria for separation of knowledge from non-knowledge. If knowledge is mere understanding, then, how do we differentiate it from learning, perception, awareness, belief, opinion? “To know” has implicit in it the requirement of certainty, assurance, indubitability. If we are mistaken about what we claim to know, we are still justified in claiming to know it, certainly not? This was the genesis of the traditional conception of knowledge.

**The Noun “Knowledge”** – There are more than one way of defining knowledge. Suffice it for us to define it as the state of awareness of a given fact, information. Knowledge can also be seen as the fact of understanding, information acquired through learning or experience. According to P. A. Angeles, knowledge is recognition of something, the familiarity or acquaintance with something, from experience. He argues that knowledge is that which is learned, that clear perception of what is regarded as fact, truth or duty. Continuing, Angeles defines knowledge as things had in consciousness (belief, ideas, facts, images, concepts, notions, and opinions) that become justified as true (Angeles 1981:123).

**Theory of Knowledge** – The Greek word for knowledge is episteme while logos mean the study or theory of knowledge. Akinpelu (1981:54) enumerates the following as the constituents of the study (a) the origin, (b) the veracity (truth, reliability, validity) of knowledge. Having defined the terms, we shall in the next section state the conditions of knowledge.

#### Conditions of Knowledge

Longnoe Buenyen has defined conditions of knowledge, thus, “These are the necessary and sufficient criteria for some information or fact to be regarded as knowledge.” (Buenyen 2000:87). Contemporary philosophers have continued the quest for firm and solid grounds for our knowledge, and philosophy now supplies “a paradigm definition of knowledge which lays down criteria that claims to knowledge must satisfy if they are worthy of the label knowledge.” To know that something is the case, first, one must believe that it is the case, secondly, one must have adequate ground for this belief, and lastly, what is believed to be the case must in fact be true.

Scheffler gives the following lucid and succinct explanation of these conditions of knowledge as quoted by Sharma: A person (X) knows that Q (a proposition or item of information) if and only if:

- (i) X believes
- (ii) X has adequate evidence
- (iii) Q is true (Scheffler 1965:98).

That is:

- (i) X = Peter believes that his ‘school result will improve this year’
- (ii) Peter has adequate evidence that Q = ‘school result will improve this year’
- (iii) And on the basis of adequate evidence (Q is true) ‘the belief comes true!’

All conditions must be satisfied before it can be said that a person knows something in the sense of having ‘strong’ knowledge.

Joseph M. Musa concurs with Scheffler when he states that the conditions necessary for prepositional knowledge (“knows that”) which philosophers are concerned with are believe, adequate

evidence and truth. In this connection, he continues, X knows a proposition (m) if and only if:

- Believes m
- Has adequate evidence for m
- M is true (Musa 2008:45).

Buenyen agrees with Scheffler and Musa’s position when he states, “the definition sets out three conditions for ‘knowing that,’ and they have been and will be referred to as the belief condition, and the truth condition.” Illustratively, he puts the definition this way:

Pam knows that  $2+2 = 4$ , if and only if

- (i) Pam believes that  $2+2 = 4$  (Belief Condition)
- (ii) Pam has adequate evidence that  $2+2 = 4$  (Evidence condition) and
- (iii)  $2+2 = 4$  (Truth condition).

Thus knowledge is justified true belief (Buenye 2000:90)

#### Critical Examination of the Conditions of Knowledge

In this section, we shall critique the three conditions of knowledge identified by Scheffler, namely believe, evidence and truth.

1. **The Belief Condition of “Know that”** – According to Scheffler for us to know something, we must believe it, because it becomes very absurd to claim that I know X but I do not believe X. The believe condition of knowledge could be challenged on the ground that we can believe wrong things, for an example, to see a rope and believe that it is snake does not constitute knowledge (Buenye 2000:95)

Buenyen defines belief as: “assent to or acceptance of the truth of a proposition, statement, or facts. It also means acquiescence in the existence of truth of something.” (Buenye 2000:97). While responding to questionnaires by Buenyen, one respondent unequivocally argues that “belief is the realm of faith and faith is outside the demands of empirical evidence...” He thus stressed that belief does not (at all) constitute a condition of knowledge, calling such a move as “extremely dangerous”. However, Buenyen argues, the operational definition of ‘belief’ above renders it absolutely verifiable empirically, and to drive home this point, a closer look at this ‘belief’ condition, lays down that if Pam knows that  $2+2 = 4$ , he believes that  $2+2 = 4$ ? What sort of thing is belief? These questions touch on some of the puzzling problems in epistemology. Buenyen says, part of the problem about “belief” can be illustrated by reference to Charles Sanders Peirces constructing doubt and belief. Peirce emphasizes the qualitative differences between the two arguing that doubt is “an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief”, the latter being “a calm and satisfactory state which we do not wish to avoid. But we have a take pierce to task in his second bit of his definition by stating the feeling of a hypothetical widow that “I wish to avoid believing that my loving husband has just died.” Peirce must counter that bit of his view of belief or it stands demolished. He, however, continues by pointing out that doubt is a particular stimulus which reminds us of the irritation of a never and reflex action pounded thereby differentiating it from belief which according him”... does not make us act at once, but puts us into such a condition that we shall believe in a certain way, when the occasion arises.”

Rather than a comparison with the nerve irritation, Peirce suggests that what we require in the case of belief is to “look to what we called nervous association for example, to that habit of the name in

consequence of which the smell of peach will mark the mouth water.

We shall then assume that belief is an abstract thing, in the nature of habit or readiness, a disposition, as it were, to act in certain ways under certain circumstance. Belief may thus be judged as revealed in word as well as in deeds, and so can be subjected to empirical investigation. Belief is therefore a theoretical state which characterizes the orientation of a person in the world.

## 2. Evidence – The Evidence Condition of “Know-that” –

The second, Scheffler proceeds that for a phenomenon to constitute knowledge, there must be evidence for it, for example, if one claims that he knows that  $2+2 = 4$ , it must be the case that he possesses evidence for that. That the case possesses evidence for that. That is adding two tables to other two tables to give four tables. The problem with the evidence condition is the determination of the extent of the evidence. Could it be complete, satisfactory or adequate evidence? It is to such evidences, that judges pass their judgment, when they declare that, it has been proven beyond reasonable doubt, sufficient but not exhaustive.

In the demonstrative or illustrative definition of “know that”, Pam was required to have adequate evidence that  $2+2 = 4$ . The purpose of this evidence condition is to formulate more clearly the notion that “knowing” in the strict or strong sense is much more than mere true belief. In addition, it further demands that Pam should have the ability to justify or support the belief in a relevant manner.

Historically, the emphasis on the “evidence” condition could be traced back to Saint Augustine’s theory teaching. Saint Augustine debunks the notion that the teacher transmits knowledge through words only. According to him words are merely symbols referring to reality, and that knowledge is merely a question of having words. Knowledge, he argues, requires in addition, a person in confrontation with the reality which the word stands for. In the absence of such confrontation, Pam, a student may at best attain belief and not knowledge. Therefore, Saint Augustine maintains that the teacher cannot be considered literally to be transmitting knowledge to the students through his words. Rather Saint Augustine continues, the teacher should provoke the student to face or confront reality for himself in such a manner as to achieve knowledge. As he laconically points out, “the import of words, to state the most that can be said for them consists in this: they serve merely to suggest that we look for realities” if a person tells me that  $2+2=4$  but I, on my part fail to find the realities to which  $2+2=4$  refers as best, I can believe that but I cannot be said that  $2+2=4$ . Knowledge is therefore, envisaged a stronger concept than belief.

The ‘evidence’ condition, therefore, helps to differentiate genuine knowing from mere true belief, by relating to relevant evaluation of the belief by the believers, for the extra strength of knowing consists, precisely, in the knower’s having adequate evidence for the belief in question.

Assuming that the issue of the evidence condition is understood, there are still a number of points that need further clarification. For example, if Pam our hypothetical student is required to have adequate evidence that  $2+2=4$ , the question that arises whether simply there is evidence at Pam’s disposal which is indeed adequate for  $2+2=4$  or Q? Suppose also that “Q” is an inference or formula which in Pam’s experience has been disproved clearly

after having been confirmed in a great number of cases (for example, the earth is regarded as flat). We would not stamp Pam’s evidence in these respects as adequate, his overwhelming positive instance notwithstanding. Rather we will state that Pam is duty-bound to consider his negative evidence as the ground of rejecting the inference or formula. If Pam clings to his “belief” of “Q” (the earth is flat) in spite of prohibitive contradictions and even assuming he later withdrew the evidence and supposing “Q” to be indeed true, we would deny what he knew that he knew in the first instance that “Q” was true.

Another area of the evidence condition which calls for clarification is its implied reference to standards. After all, adequacy in addition to our operational definition is a period tradition to tradition or from individual to individual. In any of these cases, the application of a given set of standards is open-ended. For some reasons, strictness is slackened. For instance, in appraising a child’s knowledge, we normally use our standards of adequacy more leniently than in evaluating knowledge possessed by adults.

Summarily then, the concept of ‘adequacy’ involves standard which in some cases are applied very strictly; while in others more appropriately which leads to several interpretation of ‘know that’ there is need to be aware of such multiplicity to enable us understand the appropriate clarification should it become necessary.

## 3. Truth- the “true” condition of “know that”:

Finally, Scheffler advance that a third criterion of knowledge truth, correspondence, coherence and pragmatic. Truth is that which is consistent with fact or reality. It is that which is not false or erroneous truth can be fulfilled can agree with reason. Truth also refers to the unmistakable principles or laws or acclaimed standards or conditions. Truth is that which is real, correct, and genuine. For instance, if Pam is admitted to know that  $2+2=4$  he must indeed not be mistaken this indeed is the point of the truth condition of knowledge. Truth is what works that is  $2+2=4$ .

But for us to know something, that thing must be true for we cannot say that I belief that  $2+2=4$  and that I have adequate evidence to proof that  $2+2=4$  and to conclude that it is not true. Correspondence- what you see correspond with what you have counted. There are five people in the class, you counted and indeed there are five people, coherence- how things unite to function. Reason is used to arrive at a conclusion. Pragmatic- this is an action philosophy anything that works is true. If it solves your problem whether is good or bad, it is true. For example, smoking in order to solve a problem, if it works, it is true. Having defined and state the three theories of truth, we shall now examine them:

**The correspondence theory of truth** - according to common sense opinion this is a comparatively simple job. Truth should just be a matter of comparing any bit of information, facts and opinion with reality, then of course, it meets the condition this traditionally is the correspondence theory of truth. There is no doubt that the theory proceeds on metaphysical or ontological theory that there is an objective world independent of a human knower. The pupil has learned the truth when his ideas or impressions correspond to or agree with this external reality. Hence the correspondence is a matter of external rather than internal relations. On this ground alone truth is objective. It was even there before the search for it began. Thus the person engaged in educational research literally

'finds' the truth: "he discovers it in the sense of removing or cutting through the cover of ignorance or misunderstanding which obscured its location during the period of search. Hence, truth is not temporal; it is eternal, immutable. Any variability or ambiguity about it is apparent only, the result of human error in comprehending.

This is the correspondence theory of truth. It is perhaps also the idea of truth with which some Nigerian pupils come to school. Thus the major part of such a child's moral injunction at home may have been always to tell the truth. One may ask, does this moral upbringing mean besides the fact that the pupil should make his statements of events agree with or correspond to fact? He must learn to differentiate between telling an imaginative or fictitious story and a story that corresponds with events as they occur.

However, we do not think that the question of verification of statements can be as clear as the supporters of the correspondence theory affirm. The first critical question that comes to mind is this: How can we compare our ideas with reality? We know only our own experiences. How can we get outside our own experiences so that we can compare our ideas with reality as it is actually is. The correspondence theory, they say, assumes that we know not only our judgments but also the actual circumstances apart from our experiences.

To us, the theory of correspondence seems to assume that our sense data are clear and accurate, that they disclose the nature of the world just as it is. In challenging this contention, we should point out that as shown earlier in perception were diminished or increased or if we possessed fewer or more sense organs, the world may appear quite different. Since we cannot know an object or event apart from our sense data, it is perhaps foolish to talk about whether or not our judgments correspond with the things as it is in itself.

Another point we will raise, is that we have knowledge of meanings (definitions), relations and values, as in mathematics, logic and ethics. Some of the ideas that we want to verify have no objects outside the area of human thought with which we can make comparisons and check correspondence theory of truth does not seem to apply. Yet the knowledge in these fields possesses a high degree of certainty.

**The Coherence theory of truth** – The coherence or consistency theory to which we now turn is that some philosophers are of the view that truth is at times is polluted by human judgment. In addition, such philosophers demand to know how we can be certain that our impressions or ideas actually correspond to reality. They think that successive and constant contacts with the same articles often result in greatly different reactions even by the same observer. In situations like this, how are we to arrive at the truth? Whatever our conclusion, we must realize that any conclusion arrived at it is just another idea or impression. Obviously, for the philosophers who pose such questions, the condition of truth is bound to be something much more than the correspondence actuality. Their own response is that the idea of truth being the exact correspondence to reality is a mirage. It can never be grasped by the human mind. Therefore, to them the best that can be done is to search for truth as the consistency or coherence between our impressions or ideas about reality. This is the 'coherence' or 'consistency' theory of truths.

Most of those engaged in educational research or educational measurement use consistency or coherence rather than

correspondence. It is their corner-stone or 'objectivity' and 'reliability'. To such researchers, experimental or test results are objective if successive impressions of one investigator's impression who themselves are working under similar conditions. The truth of scientific knowledge of education thus lies in the attainment of this type of consistency among observations.

While inconsistency and incoherence is disturbing and lead men to seek unity, it could be pointed out that we can construct false as well as true coherent systems. We are of the view that the theory does not distinguish between consistent truth and consistent error. To say that a judgment is true if it is consistent with other judgments that are accepted as true could lead to a dangerous circularity in which we have a number of false statements each one of which claims to be true because it is consistent with the others. Numerous past systems (The world being regarded as flat, for instance) which though logically consistent then, were apparently false.

Critics of the coherence theory say also that the theory is 'rationalistic and intellectualistic' and deals mainly with the logical relations among propositions. Because of this it fails to furnish an adequate test for the judgment of everyday experience. If therefore the test of coherence is to be used, then it needs to be stated more with reference to factual consistency that is the agreement between judgment and a definite environmental situation. This of course, is really a correspondence and not a coherence test. Hence, other critics of these tests of truth suggest a different approach – the test of utility, to which we not turn.

**The Pragmatic theory of Truth** - In place of trying to attain truth by the correspondence theory, or attacking it from the flank or side, as done by consistency or coherence, the instrumentalist propose to test truth of ideas (opinions, facts, theories, call it what you like) by investigating into what the practical results of acting on them would do. Ideas only became true or false when used to clear up some confusion or ambiguity which has occurred to block educational practice. If they clear up and bring normality and continuity of instruction, then they are true; if otherwise, then they are false. As they pragmatist William James says, the truth what works. Truth does not exist, rather it happens. Truth is never immutable, eternal, but is always in the process of being made.

Although we are advocating instrumentalism as one of the basic educational methods to take us to the fulfillment of conditions of knowledge, It must be stressed clearly that it does not mean that we are unaware of the attendant problems, behind its criticism was the idea the instrumentalist made knowledge and truth thoroughly dependent on human needs and interests. Such subjectivism seems to the critics monstrous and destructive of critical thought.

However, in discussing truth in the realm of a problem or project as stated above we hasten to warn that we must be careful about the ingredients which penetrate in and the decisions which are eventually made. The pupil and teacher, for example, generally have an aim a purpose which motivates the attempts to find a solution for the project. For this reason some instrumentalist progressive educators have slipped into thinking that a solution works if it helps to attain this aim or purpose. If this is the case, then the search for truth is in danger of being conditioned by the interest or values motivating the educational program.

Sharma and Hayland (1981:134) have stated in their critic of the conditions of knowledge that, of course, not all knowledge is

proportional (factual) or knowing ‘that’ something is the case. Schools are also charged with developing attitudes, values, skills, and ‘know-how’ for which evidence of the sort outlined above is not so crucial. In this area we speak of ‘training’ or instruction’. For instance, in the development of writing skills or physical fitness, and this training is a necessary part of the total educational process. But ‘education’ is a much wider concept than training and as R.S. Peters suggests, is chiefly characterized by the development of knowledge and understanding to which the conditions of knowledge must apply.

Having critique the three conditions of knowledge by Scheffler, that is believe, evidence and truth. Bueylen is of the opinion that two other conditions be added that is, we understand the principles underlying  $2+2=4$ , and can use  $2+2=4$  in solving unforeseen problems. Therefore, he states our positive operational definition of propositional knowledge “know that” as now as follows:

Pam knows that  $2+2=4$

If and only if

- i. Pam believes that  $2+2=4$
- ii. Pam has adequate evidence (or the right to be sure) that  $2+2=4$
- iii.  $2+2=4$
- iv. Pam understand that the principle underlying  $2+2=4$ ; and
- v. Pam can use  $2+2=4$  in solving (vocational and cultural) unforeseen problems.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has undertaken a critical examination of Israel Scheffler's proposed conditions of knowledge, namely belief, evidence, and truth. While belief is an essential component, it is important to acknowledge that our beliefs can sometimes be misguided or incorrect. Regarding evidence, it is crucial for it to be substantial and persuasive, but it need not encompass every possible piece of information. As for the truth condition, it must satisfy three aspects: consistency, correspondence to reality, and pragmatism. Furthermore, this analysis has introduced two additional conditions that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of knowledge. Firstly, one must possess an understanding of the fundamental principles underlying concepts such as the equation  $2+2=4$ . This comprehension goes beyond mere belief or memorization and encompasses a deeper grasp of the underlying principles. Additionally, the ability to apply this understanding practically in solving unforeseen problems, both in vocational and cultural contexts, serves as a valuable criterion for assessing knowledge. The capacity to utilize knowledge effectively in real-world scenarios demonstrates its practical applicability and reinforces its significance. By incorporating these additional conditions, we have broadened the framework for evaluating knowledge, recognizing the importance of comprehension, problem-solving ability, and practicality. This expanded perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in the acquisition and application of knowledge. While Scheffler's conditions of belief, evidence, and truth provide a solid foundation, the inclusion of a deeper understanding of underlying principles and the practical application of knowledge enhances our understanding of what constitutes true knowledge. By embracing these additional conditions, we can strive for a more robust and encompassing conception of knowledge in our pursuit of understanding the world around us.

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