Knowledge as Inferred Truth

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Abstract. It is largely admitted that the tripartite conception as Justified True Belief (JTB) is not a sufficient condition for knowledge: the JTB needs to be ‘enriched’. I rather propose here to ‘impoverish’ it by expurgating truth. First, I argue that knowledge implying truth is possible but truth is not recognisable per se, that is, knowledge implying self-awareness of having the truth (which is not to be conflated with certainty) is impossible. Borrowing from the theory of meaning I intend to redefine knowledge with the immanence principle and the implicitness principle, which impose the recognisability of the knowledge conditions. Second, I argue that since truth is not directly recognisable it must be inferred. Hence, knowledge is the product of an inference from a belief and a justification to the truth-value’s ascription of the henceforth-acknowledged belief. The seminal Gettier problems take thus an almost trivial aspect, or at least it is no obstacle to the possibility of knowledge thus defined.

Keywords: knowledge, truth (recognisability of), Justified True Belief, Gettier problems.

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Since the arguments of Gettier (1963), it is largely admitted that the tripartite conception as Justified True Belief (JTB) is not a sufficient condition to knowledge: the JTB needs to be ‘enriched’. This enrichment, so it has been argued, can be done in many ways: one can insist on the justification form an internal point of view, where what makes a justification is recognizable on reflection or is a mental states (and this is close to insist on a kind of belief as evidence), or a external point of view, where what makes a justification is a part of a reliable process (and this is close to insist on a method)\(^1\). Or, others argued, it cannot be done at all, either because these problems are ‘inescapable’ (Zagzebski 1994) or because ‘knowledge’ is impossible (Unger 1975). In this later case, it is a strong version of scepticism where certainty is a prerogative of ‘knowledge’, which is unachievable, and since nobody can ever know anything, it follows that nobody can ever be justified or reasonable in believing anything.

I rather propose here to ‘impoverish’ the JTB conception to recover knowledge by insisting that truth \textit{per se} is not recognisable and can only be inferred. First, I sustain that absolute knowledge (implying truth) is possible but that absolute transitive knowledge (implying truth and self-awareness of truth) is not. Knowledge needs thus to be redefined. I intend to do so from a distinction between a definition of knowledge implying truth as a non-recognisable component and one that implies truth as a recognisable component. I sustain, from some general arguments taken from the philosophy of science, that the first one is possible and the other not. Then I posit, for a redefinition, the application of the immanence principle and the implicitness principle taken from the theory of meaning. Hence, I argue that truth is \textit{not} directly recognisable and can only be inferred. That is, knowledge cannot imply self-awareness of truth, which is different from certainty. Truth, in this broad sense, is the conclusion of an inference, and more to say, an imperfect inference, because its necessary and sufficient conditions are never recognisable as such. The seminal Gettier problems take thus an almost trivial aspect. The focus can then (once again) be turned on justification, as the proper of a method, like those favoured in sciences. But I will not provide a detailed definition of what a justification should be.

\(^1\) For a presentation and a discussion on these issues, see Goldman (2009).
1. Human knowledge

The theft committed by Prometheus did not bring a particular attribute to men, but rather the possibility of acquiring from and for themselves the attributes provided by the arts (i.e. techniques). It announced the lost of innocence with the necessity of work and effort. In effect, if there is such a thing as the possibility to obtain knowledge of something, it is most likely to be far from evident or easy, and most often than not, it is not common. Prometheus did not convey a wonderful lightning that could be commanded at will, but a cinder needing a constant attention. Though the ‘technician reason’ should not be conflated with the human intellect in the broader sense, the capacity thus obtained was alas no guarantee of success. But it was told that something new, useful and powerful was henceforth possible – hence Zeus’ wrath.

It may be true, then, that absolute knowledge (3) is possible, in a strong metaphysical sense of a correspondence between the subject and the object or of a connection between words and things – adæquatio intellectus et rei. In that sense, knowledge implies truth. And it also implies that we can only be right or wrong – there is no middle zone or in-between or any kind of included-middle. That is, it may be the case that an assertion such as ‘the Earth is in orbit around the Sun’ is true in a correspondence point of view, regardless of any subject’s beliefs and justifications. This mere possibility is separated from the question of direct or indirect realism (Brown 1992) and from the question of the conditions from which this knowledge might be acquired. This means that the possession of truth is conceptually separated from the self-awareness of it, or, in other words, accessibility does not necessarily imply transitivity (discussed below).

The precedent questions may deserve an answer, but this is not the point here. It is sufficient to say that 3 is only possible, that is, to have a metaphysical correspondence between the subject and the object without the subject being aware of it. Once again, nothing is said about its necessary and sufficient conditions. Nevertheless, this mere possibility can account for a certain success of what might be called general human knowledge, especially the sciences. Indeed, it is generally admitted that sciences brought real theoretical and technological developments since the scientific revolution. It would be surprising nonetheless that these developments were all born from chances or miracles, or both. It seems more plausible that these developments that may be called successes (in a weak sense) are the result of something stable or robust in sciences. Of course, the question of which part can be

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2 Some would say that since 3 implies truth it should be just called ‘knowledge’. But I want here to make this link explicit because the definition of knowledge sustained here does not imply truth.
attributed to chance and to success is still open. But isn’t it the nature of a possibility to give no guarantee? The mere possibility of $\exists$ offers an explanation (albeit a weak one) of why we are sometimes “right”, that our theories are (at least in part) “adequate”, that some of our methods “work”. Unfortunately, this explanation – good or bad – does not offer a demarcation criterion between what is right, adequate or working, and what is not.

However, what seems impossible, I shall argue, is absolute transitive knowledge or reflexive and transitive knowledge ($\Re$), where the subject knows that he knows absolutely; that is, the subject has the truth about something and is aware that he has it. There is no such thing as a Zeus confirming our beliefs, propositions and theories, no “silver bullets”. In other words, a metaphysical certainty is humanly impossible (Kvanvig 1998). If so, $\exists$ is not identifiable or recognizable, and $\Re$ is inaccessible thus impossible for us. The phenomenalist projects of Descartes and Husserl have indeed tried to obtain knowledge as $\Re$ through an introspective procedure, but as such this project seems vain or at the very least unfinished and unsuccessful. Because we cannot know that we know absolutely the means by which any knowledge would be acquired are hardly (rather, impossibly) identifiable with a metaphysical certainty: if $\Re$ were possible it would suffice to reproduce the steps (which we supposed to be as recognizable as the result) that leads to the ‘truth’. Thus, the truth conditions of something like a proposition or even a rule of inference are not infallibly and humanly recognizable: it transcends our capacities of identification or recognisability. Popper (1963) associates with Xenophanes this idea that we can get the truth without any criterion of (identification or recognisability of) truth.

These are the old controversies dealing with the possibility for truth and knowledge to transcend the recognisability of truth, and with the pertinence in defining knowledge of some hypothetical being whose intellectual capacities and observing powers would exceed at will those with which we are endowed. This article may not answer directly all those controversies but rather aims to show some characteristics of a redefined notion of knowledge that may bring some light in the pursuit of truth. From this distinction between absolute knowledge ($\exists$) and absolute transitive knowledge ($\Re$) a few consequences are drawn that will bring forth a redefinition of knowledge. Thereby, the prominent feature of this redefinition – i.e. the recognisable justification – will be assessed, and finally, its implication to the Gettier problems will be discussed. I start by arguing the implausibility of $\Re$.

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3 One might wonder what could a god bring to our knowledge; it is thus supposed in that case an omniscient and honest being.
2. Born to run

If \( \mathfrak{R} \) were possible, or to say the same thing differently, if \( \Im \) were accessible and recognisable, some reductionist and/or axiomatic projects would be possible too. It would be possible, from some grand and true (i.e. self-warranting) statements and a few rules of inference (e.g. first-order logic), to generate knowledge \( \text{qua} \ \mathfrak{R} \); because from truthfulness falsehood cannot be deduced. From a Cartesian point of view, the sure foundation of the *cogito ergo sum* and of some axioms would allow generating true propositions; the definitions would produce all the concepts of a general and all embracing knowledge. And as far as it goes, from a radical empiricist point of view, if one supposes the same kind of reliability from the rules of inference, the truth of the propositions representing the sense data would bring the construction of an absolutely certain discourse about the world. But, as Quine (1960) insisted, those projects have failed and it is not attributable to rules of inference\(^4\). One could object that there are some logical and mathematical truths that could satisfy a definition of knowledge as \( \mathfrak{R} \). But the impossibility of \( \mathfrak{R} \) hypothesis imposes that they do not: it would require that the logical or the mathematical axioms and rules of inferences be absolutely certain, true in a strong metaphysical sense. They may be, but we cannot be sure.

Also, if what we call knowledge is what is meant by \( \mathfrak{R} \), then we must admit that a great deal of scientists and philosophers, if not all of them, did not have any knowledge, or so little. If there is any consensus in philosophy, or something close to it, then it is most likely that no knowledge comes out of it, because one way or the other, there would be something in contradiction with the object affected by \( \mathfrak{R} \). For instance, if Plato is considered to be mistaken, he would not have had any knowledge. Yet, what marks the history of philosophy better than the trial of knowledge? Likewise, if what we call knowledge is what is meant by \( \mathfrak{R} \), then Newton had no knowledge whatsoever, if it is to be agreed that Einstein is (or were) right. Of course, the notions of partial truth and partial knowledge can retrieve the eminence of the Ancients, but it can hardly be rendered compatible with \( \mathfrak{R} \) as long as it implies the awareness of non-partial truth. The fact (if it is one) that the Ancients were wrong is not so much tremendous, rather it is the consequence that we, most probably, all are. Moreover, it can be ventured that the very notion of conceptual progress as paradigmatic changes is incompatible with the one of knowledge in the sense of \( \mathfrak{R} \), since once \( \mathfrak{R} \) is obtained, it would make no sense to get rid of it. Thus,

\(^4\) It is possible though that this failure be attributable to a kind of ‘compartmentalization’ of the world that would require different logics, one for every ‘compartment’ – it would then be necessary to give up a universal logic (and this conclusion might not be as certain given the undefined multiple logics!).
knowledge *qua* $\mathcal{R}$ seems to imply that the vast majority of knowledge is the one associated with the latest theories of the day even though there is a great probability, in the light of history, that it would be proved wrong in the future.

The interpretation of knowledge as $\mathcal{R}$ must also cope with a few objections inherited from the philosophy of sciences. First, $\mathcal{R}$ can hardly be conciliated with the thesis of the impossibility of translation because it states a common ground for the translation or the possibility of a univocal dictionary from observation. If, for instance, a fact were known as $\mathcal{R}$, it would be a dead-end for any explanation – except if one thinks that ‘truth’ needs to be explained, but then the meaning of ‘truth’ would surely not be the one conveyed in ‘$\mathcal{R}$’. Second, the undetermination of theories by evidence would not be a problem if $\mathcal{R}$ were possible. A same event (e.g. a falling body) can indeed receive many incompatible descriptions (e.g. the one given by Aristotle, then Newton, then Einstein); isn’t it why there is a history of science (with e.g. paradigmatic changes) and not just a (static) story? It is more obvious in the cases of unobservable events or phenomena, where two theories can show the same empirical content but still be divergent or incompatible. It is not because two theories have the same theorems that they show the same axioms; this leads to the problem of the empirical validation of universal statement, which is impossible unless one has a universal access (all the spaces, all the times, all the matters, etc.). Hence, the investigation of reality is a work in progress, a ship at sea to borrow Neurath’s expression. In other words, Prometheus gave us tools, not the final product.

But it seems important to clarify a particular point: what does ‘possible’ mean here? Is possible for real, in theory, for us? First, ‘possible’ means here ‘allowed by the theory for an immanent subject’; even though this immanent subject is paradigmatically a human, it is possible that some humans (e.g. a comatose) do not possess the recognisability capacities required by the theory. Second, although it would be interesting to assess the possibility to comprehend the knowledge of beings with greater capacities than us humans, it is fair to say that the knowledge in question here is human knowledge. Third, since a definition of knowledge is sought and not just a description of what may be the state of knowledge or whatever in a particular point in time, the possibility must be stated by the theory (i.e. the definition). Fourth, there is no reason to assume that those considerations apply only to a special kind of knowledge, although the previous examples address what is called propositional knowledge, in contrast to familiar knowledge, know-how, interpersonal skills and manners, etc.
All of this hardly proves anything. But, if \( \mathcal{R} \) is possible, it seems very implausible that it is so at odd with the history of human intellectual production or that it went unnoticed or that only a chosen few with this power failed to convince the whole bunch. But, admittedly, the precedent arguments do not rule out the possibility (perhaps the plausibility) that some lucky and very gifted cognoscenti were able to have \( \mathcal{R} \) and kept it a secret. It is the aim of the next section to take a step further.

3. Redefining knowledge

If an absolute transitive knowledge (\( \mathcal{R} \)) is impossible, the orthodox tripartite conception of knowledge as Justified True Belief (JTB) is inadequate. In effect, if the truth of something like a proposition must be a recognisable condition of the JTB conception and if the possession of truth implies irrefutability as a metaphysical correspondence suggests, then it is flawed, as the following discussion will show (or if one is ready to step from the implausibility of \( \mathcal{R} \) to its impossibility). There is thus a need for a re-definition by expurgating ‘truth’ from it.

First of all, one might wonder if a definition is relevant if \( \mathcal{R} \) is considered as impossible. In fact, if the definition of knowledge stipulates the necessary and sufficient compatible conditions of knowledge, and if those conditions are recognisable and realisable, then \( \mathcal{R} \) is possible \( a \) \( contrario \). Then, if we are to give knowledge a definition, either knowledge is not absolute in the sense previously given, or this definition cannot include the recognisable conditions to its fulfilling. For instance, the definition of truth provided by Tarski (1944) does not give any criterion of identification or recognition of truth: ‘\( P \)’ is true if and only if \( P \). Nothing is said about the means of how to determine whether it is the case that \( P \). Another example comes from virtue epistemology like the one of Greco (1993): a ‘cognitive virtue’ provides a mechanism reliable in generating true beliefs. But, once again, there is no way to determine the reliability of the mechanism. This is analogous to find the secret of happiness in being happy. The definitions stipulating the condition of truth \( per \ vim \ definitionis \) are not only useless, but they also lead to many epistemological problems like those facing the JTB conception (which will be discussed later).

The re-definition proposed here relies on two principles, which can be seen as ‘modest’ since they are generally related with the semantics anti-realist thesis in the theory of meaning (Dummett 1978; Dubucs 2002). Since Davidson (1967), it has been an influential idea that any theory of truth that falls into the broad category of those which are theories of truth conditions can be seen as part of a theory of meaning. The
idea can be impelled to a discussion about what is a recognisable condition in a conception of transitive knowledge, that is, what conditions are needed to know that we know. Admittedly, we must be aware that the knowledge conditions are fulfilled or not, that is, it must be within our capacity to recognize that the very conditions obtain or not.

IMMANENCE PRINCIPLE: the conditions under which something (e.g. the assertion of a sentence) is justified ever ought to be recognizable (by us) when they are satisfied.

IMPLICITUDE PRINCIPLE: the definition of the conditions under which something (e.g. the assertion of a sentence) is justified ought not to explicitly refer to our recognitional abilities.

Both principles refer to the notion of justification as what makes something ‘true’, but no particular definition of ‘truth’ will be given for now – except for the Tarski’s definition where it is clear that its applicability is not guaranteed and it is admittedly neutral about the realist/anti-realist debate. The first principle admits the desirability of knowledge and truth, hence the need for a useful definition in which the conditions should not transcend our ability to recognize their fulfilling. As Dummett (1978: 227) says, it flows from the very nature of the case. The second principle rules out any trivial and uninstructive solution. In both of them, the notion of recognisability is taken as a kind of primitive concept.

In the JTB conception, all three conditions do not satisfy the immanence principle: although a belief, with no regards for its truth-value, is recognisable by the subject, so is the justification, this is not the case with the truth. It seems prima facie that truth does not satisfy the same criterions as a belief or a justification. For one thing, truth cannot receive an ostensible definition or an extensive definition – it cannot be fingered nor counted. This is why an externalist account of knowledge relying uniquely on truth for a justification is implausible. Also, the truth-value of a proposition is different from its comprehension: one can understand a proposition without knowing if it is true or not. As stressed by Russell (2005), comprehension requires only the proposition’s intension whereas the cases where extension is known are pretty rare. It thus seems unreasonable to give an empirical criterion of identification of truth: a true proposition does not flash or scream when you read it. This is not to say, of course, that the reasons for ascribing a truth-value to a proposition have no empirical basis. In Tarski’s example, the truth-value of “snow is white” is not implied in the (recognisable) form of the sentence and a reference to object-language is necessary in order to ascribe a truth-value (Tarski 1944).
knowledge as inferred truth

The biconditional in the Tarskian definition of truth does not require the establishment of relationship with the world other than the legitimacy of the sentence to which the truth-value is applied. In the words of Quine (1992), ‘true’ is transparent.

Obviously, there have been many conceptions of truth, the most significant for the contemporary literature being the correspondence, coherence, pragmatist, deflationist and Tarskian theories of truth. Despite the vivid controversies it does not seem that the conception of knowledge here and its discussion thereof require a strong commitment to a particular definition of truth. The whole idea here is that ‘truth’ as adaequatio intellectus et rei is not a recognizable property. And this is more evident, so it does not make any difference here, if truth is not a property at all, like in a deflationist conception. A few points should suffice to show what is expurgated from the orthodox definition of knowledge. First, the truth predicate or truth-value is often thought of as a property of a proposition or of a sentence and correlatively of beliefs as representations. The question is then how to recognize whether a proposition or a sentence has this property or not. The project of identifying this property only in the form of the language in an externalist way is vain and implausible. So truth represents essentially and minimally a relation. Second, this relation is one of a kind of satisfaction or correspondence with a factual or formal reference, often characterized as a content-to-world relation. Still, the further characterisation of this relation and of this reference is not a straightforward task. Nevertheless, once we admit that the truth of something like a proposition is a relation between something and something else, it cannot be directly recognized. Third, not to be directly recognisable means that no specific difference can be attributed by comparison; for instance, the form of a sentence or representation is not sufficient – and nothing can constitute a sufficient condition to its recognisability. If, as Frege said, truth is the only transcendent fact, there is no way we can reach it, or at least here, it does not satisfy the immanence principle.

The implicitness principle forbids a recognisability of a justification solely stipulated, or obtained per vim definitionis. This can be applied to the conditions of knowledge. For instance, in the JTB conception, the conditions of belief, justification and truth must be recognizable by us. Insofar as it is not in principle, R is impossible and we fall back on J, still conjectured as possible. Yet, ‘truth’, in many epistemological problems, is often stipulated; it is quite different to say ‘let’s say P is true’ and ‘P is true’. In other words, the deducibility of truth is different form its

5 Unless one is disposed to attribute knowledge towards tautology; and even in that particular case something like the identity principle is supposed as a justification. Nothing intrinsic to the syntax or the semantics can prevent a sentence to false or true. This is why an adequate theory of truth is “risky” (Kripke 1975: 692).
recognisability. In the first case we are concerned about the connexion between propositions and in the second about their truth-value. The inference from some premises to a conclusion guarantees the truth of the conclusion only if the premises are true. But this condition is a matter of recognisability, not deducibility. Then, if truth cannot be recognised directly the way or the process leading towards it must be recognisable. Such a process, I contend, is an inferential process. That is, a process from some premises to a conclusion. But because truth is not recognisable as such, the result of this process cannot be truth per se. On the other hand a mere ascription of truth can. That means that the result cannot be separated or detached from the process. Truth, or rather its ascription, is thus the result of an inference, that is, a kind of transition from some premises to a conclusion. This is enough for now. Let’s return to the notion of knowledge.

I wish now to present the notions of \( \mathfrak{I} \) and \( \mathfrak{E} \) in formal epistemology, where knowledge includes the axioms of reflexivity and transitivity. Reflexivity, on one hand, stipulates that knowledge implies truth and is expressed as: \( \exists x P \rightarrow P \). The truth of \( P \) is thus necessary to knowledge. Of course, this property is valid in the sets where the accessibility relation is reflexive: each possible world is accessible to itself. This hypothesis, according to Stalnaker (2006), is evident and uncontroversial in epistemological logic. But, what exactly is the support of this logical implication? There is none. It says: if you know, then you have the truth. This is exactly the kind of stipulation forbidden by the implicitness principle. The conditions to truth and knowledge are not recognisable but stipulated. Our recognition abilities are in this case implicit. Transitivity, on the other hand, stipulates that if a subject \( x \) knows that \( P \), then \( x \) knows that he knows that \( P \); this is also known as the KK-principle and it is expressed as: \( \exists x P \rightarrow \exists x \exists x P = \mathfrak{E} x P \). According to the immanence principle, this axiom implies that \( x \) must be able to recognise that she knows, and since her knowledge is absolute in the sense that it is true (\( \mathfrak{I} \)), then \( x \) is able to recognise the truth.

If, as briefly argued earlier, \( \mathfrak{I} \) is possible but unrecognisable and \( \mathfrak{E} \) is inaccessible, then both reflexivity and transitivity axioms cannot be true. In effect, if \( x \) knows \( P \), then, if \( x \) is aware of his knowledge it cannot imply truth or, if it implies truth, \( x \) cannot be aware of it. In other words, if \( x \) knows \( P \), then, if this knowledge is transitive, then it cannot be reflexive; or if this knowledge is reflexive, then it cannot be transitive. That means, a subject can have a true belief, but she cannot recognise the truth of her belief, which is different from recognising her belief of having the truth, that is, she may be convinced. Furthermore, at least conceptually, the
recognisability of truth is different from the recognisability of a proof or a justification leading to a strong belief.

So, if truth is only inferred, what is the basis of this inference, what are the premises? First, let’s say that what may be ascribed a truth-value is a belief in a broad sense, which encompasses thought, representation, proposition, sentence, etc. It goes without saying that the set of beliefs is larger that the set of true beliefs. And, of course, the motivation is to distinguish the two sets, to separate opinion from knowledge. But, unfortunately, it is not possible to circumscribe the later or to separate it from the former; at least, this is what is argued here (and we must admit that this applies also to what is said here). Yet, a belief implies generally and uncontroversially, a subject. This is the case in the knowing self of Descartes, in the JTB of Gettier (1963) and others, in the biological approach of Bunge (1983), and in the state of mind of Williamson (2000). At the very least, this supposition rules out the possibility of a kind of platonic belief. Moreover, it is rather uncontroversial to suppose that a belief is recognisable, at least to the subject itself. There may be cases where this is not so, but such beliefs surely do not qualify to an eventual ascription of truth-value or as a condition of an inference to the truth (which, once again, must be recognisable). Thereby, one condition of an inference to the truth is a recognisable belief by a subject.

Second, if the set of beliefs is larger that the set of true beliefs there must be something else than a belief to the inference to the truth, there must be something else than the premise representing the belief. From the JTB point of view, it is obvious that this must be the justification: from the set of all beliefs, only those that are justified can be an instance of knowledge. It may be opposed that a belief can be true without any justification. In that case, it is dubious that it might qualify as a condition (i.e. premise) to the inference because it will not be recognisable or the conclusion will be stated in the premises. So, anything that is recognisable as supporting the inference from a belief to its truth-value’s ascription is potentially a justification (and more will be said on this later). The characterisation of such a justification is no side issue, but it must be recognisable (immanence principle) and not just stipulated (implicitness principle). Thereby, another condition to an inference to the truth is a recognisable justification.

But, if truth is not recognisable per se, the result of the inference cannot be truth, strictly speaking, otherwise this result would not be recognisable as well. Hence, the belief and the justification are recognisable, so must be the result of the inference from those premises – and this again cannot be truth per se, otherwise it would be possible to produce recognisable absolute knowledge as $\exists$, which has been denied.
Still, the possibility to get the truth is possible as with knowledge as \( \mathfrak{K} \). Then, if the antecedent (i.e. premises) cannot be sufficient to support the inference to the truth, it must be at least sufficient to support the inference to the so-called result (i.e. conclusion). And if the antecedent is no guarantee to the truth of the consequent, it can be sufficient to a *pretention* to the truth of the consequent. That is to say that the JTB conception is impoverished since it looses the truth to just a pretention of truth. This can be expressed differently: if the consequent of the inference is the truth, then the justification is never sufficient, but only considered as sufficient. Also, the pretention to the truth is correlative to give one’s acknowledgement or assent and this is why an acknowledged or assented belief might be distinguished from a mere belief, or even as not a belief at all (see, e.g., Bunge 1983). In brief, a belief and a correct (but yet undefined) justification support an inference to a pretention to the truth of that henceforth acknowledged belief.

From the preceding discussion, there are of course a few consequences to the definition of knowledge. First, as argued here and stressed by Bunge (1983: 73), knowledge is not necessarily ‘correct’ (i.e. absolute), that is, it does not necessarily imply truth\(^6\). Second, as an outcome is not detachable from the process, knowledge is not detachable from its justification; that is not to say, though, that we cannot distinguish one from the other. Third, if truth is not recognisable as such, it is pointless to ask whether knowledge is better than a true belief or not because the ascription of truth to that belief is nothing more than the product of a justification and acknowledgement and, taken together, it constitutes knowledge. Therefore, our definition of knowledge \( \mathfrak{K} \) can then be formalized, from a belief \( B \) and a justification \( J \), as:

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[B \land J \rightarrow \Box B^* = T] : \mathfrak{K},
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where \( T \) is for ‘truth’ and \( \Box \) means ‘probable’ (i.e. the inference does not guarantee the truth \( T \) of \( B \)); then ‘\( \Box B^* = T \)’ is read as ‘the assented belief \( B^* \) is inferentially seen as true and may be true or is probably true’. Consequently, something inferred as true may be known and something (henceforth) inferred as false might have been known but is not anymore in absence of the assented belief. It is thus possible to

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\(^6\) An important but corollary question is: if \( \forall \) is impossible, then is ontological realism ruled out? I will not go into details here, but there seems to be different ‘attitudes’ about this: for instance, some would say that the impossibility to *say* (as \( \forall \)) what the world is rules out the possibility of its *existence*, etc. I would say that our justification supporting our inferences about the existence of the world (i.e. reality) are ‘better’ than the ones supporting the converse, but this does not eliminate e.g. the possibility of a ‘brain-in-a-vat-world’ or of Descartes’ evil demon or Russell’s ‘five-minute-old-world’. Still, this kind of arguments rules out *ex hypothesi* all possibility to get a justification on empirical grounds, or at least all empirical information blurs the difference between ‘our’ world and those alternative worlds, and leaves open only the *a priori* field. And one might wonder if an *a priori* justification of a statement about the world is a ‘good’ justification.
have known something false because at that time one had what is needed for knowledge. But it must emphasized that the notion of ‘knowing something false’ is not that appalling since it presupposes the availability of a ‘better’ justification on which the falsity is showed (discussed below).

4. Justification
The debates about epistemic justification have been centred on a few dichotomies such as objective/subjective, internalist/externalist, fiabilist/evidentialist. Indeed, that justification is the central mark of knowledge or even its replacement has been argued before. Perhaps the idea that the justification is the demarcation criterion between opinion and knowledge can be traced back to the Pre-Socratics. But this link may be broken, as with Lewis (1996). Yet, if knowledge does not imply truth, this link can be confirmed. But then the ‘burden of proof’ falls back to a definition of justification, at the risk of being vague, or worse. All I want to do in this section is to argue for the importance of justification for knowledge without giving any detailed definition.

There are (at least) two reasons to focus on justification (see, also, Goldman 1988). First, a justification is public whereas a belief is private. It may be true, though, that a belief (in a narrow sense) might be ‘public’ through the advances of cognitive sciences (regardless of the ‘qualia’ problem), and that a belief (in a broad sense) can be public through a material support like a book or whatever. Yet, a ‘public belief’ is still insufficient to support an ‘inferred truth’ and a justification is still needed. As mentioned, the belief condition is primarily an exclusion of the autonomy (i.e. ‘platonicity’) of knowledge, but also, more implicitly, a reaffirmation of the recognisability condition (immanence principle). As such, a justification can be discussed, approved, refuted, etc., and thus received all kind of intersubjective and independent supports, and this may be more difficult in the case of something like a virtue. In that sense, a justification as evidence is objective though not necessarily true.

Second, a justification offers a minimum of repetitiveness and reliability, a kind of recipe (see Goldman 1988). If knowledge is worth something, then the means by which it can be achieved are worth something too. And if a justification is recognisable (ex hypothesis), then it can serve as a means to obtain knowledge as K (maybe as 3 and not as 9). As a recognisable mean, a justification is thus a method.

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7 For instance, ‘2 – 1 = 0’ is false but objective. ‘Objective’ refers here to something in an impersonal manner, and it is different from ‘impartial’, ‘neutral’ or ‘disinterested’.
which differs from a capacity or a virtue in the sense that it is objective and public. A justification, if reliable, provides by definition a kind of guarantee (i.e. stronger probability) of success, but not a guaranteed success. Moreover, the understanding or at least the recognisability of the steps of the method brings a better confidence in the result than a kind of black-box giving an ‘inductively-seen-as-good’ success. This is the kind of reliability a method can bring, that is, a confidence of a counterfactual success and not mere luck; every mathematician agrees that the path is (at least) as valuable as the result and every shooter prefers to use a tried technique than a blind try. Finally, a justificatory method, because it is recognisable, can be transmitted and eventually improved, and this is more difficult in the case of a capacity or a virtue. That being said, it is fair to say that the application of a method requires some capacities: even though the respect of a rule of inference is independent of anyone’s mind, its recognition as such is not.

So, what characterise a ‘good’ justification, one that can support the ‘inferred truth’ necessary for knowledge? This issue should be addressed in due course, but I will not go into details here, my point being that justification is necessary for knowledge but is no guarantee for truth. Obviously, although a good justification must be recognisable, it cannot be unambiguously defined. Why? Because, once again, it is impossible and is accessible but unrecognisable. It would be in principle possible to have an unambiguous definition of justification, but only if it were possible (which it is not), given that it would then lead to a recognisable result, or if it were possible (which it is not), given that it would then lead recognisably to truth. In other words, in the first case, the justification would then by definition support an inference that would invariably fall short of a true belief. But a true belief is ex hypothesis possible, even though unrecognisable. Moreover, a clean-cut definition of a justification that allows identifying the extension of what justifies would tend to the infinite regress of justifying this identification (i.e. the inclusion in the extension). Hence, a characterisation of an epistemic justification amounts to characterising a method and this method cannot be precisely defined as encompassing all ‘good’ justifications.

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8 This is similar to the distinction made by Goldman (1986, in 1988) between belief-forming processes (psychological) and belief-forming methods (algorithmical).

9 The question whether competence is better than mere luck, or not, amounts to our confidence or assumption of a deterministic (at least partially, i.e. non chaotic) world. This is the kind of guarantee from a causal power or whatever of that ilk one would or should want. This is precisely what Democritus was asking for when he said that he would prefer to find a causal law than the King of Persia. And when the luck is repetitive, don’t we search for an explanation?
This conclusion should not be seen as appalling. Because a precise definition of a good justification, sufficient to support an “inferred truth” as previously defined (that is, an inference to an acknowledged belief seen as true), amounts to defining a method (of knowledge) such as science or philosophy. This is indeed ambitious. In both cases there is a wide array of supports for an inferred truth. For instance, in sciences, regardless of one’s epistemological obedience, it could be a generalisation, a law, a cause, etc., but also a fact or a set of facts. This is why a justification can be factual or formal, mediate or immediate. To give a more particular example: ‘all bodies falls down’ is a sentence that can be considered as a belief too; its justification, roughly, can be ‘it is observed and inductively derived’ or ‘it is a consequence of the law of universal gravitation’. Mathematical theorems and the like are other examples: despite the certainty they may give, they rests on some axioms and rules of inference, which status might seem certain too, but still not necessarily true. The problems of evaluating these justifications and assessing their value are not easy, of course – it trickles down inter alia to the rationalist/empiricist debate. And it seems indeed problematic because it is then difficult to choose which justification(s) should be adopted or dropped for the attribution of knowledge as K. Although it is problematic, the cure seems worse than the disease.

Effectively, paraphrasing Nietzsche, the force of a belief does not make its truth. In other words, conviction, certainty and assented belief do not imply truth per se. The recognisable strength of a belief is often conflated with a recognisable truth. Yet, the confusion between the two can lead to dogmatism; that is, pseudo-knowledge supported uniquely on a belief, as strong as it is, or on a strong confidence in a justification veiling its vulnerability despite its quality. For instance, if R were possible, the best person to govern the society would be recognisable and the Plato’s republic would be at hand; after all, if there is such a person and I can know (as R) who she/he is, of course I want her/him to govern. Moreover, the inaccessibility of R imposes not so much a kind of modesty but rather scrutiny towards the justification: are its rules of inference valid (after all there is a variety of logic and their developments continue event though one might be critical about it), what is its empirical basis (if there is one), is its coherence alone sufficient, what weight put to forms (derivation) and facts (observation)? Also, some situations may impose more or less scrutiny because knowledge as K does not require the elimination of all logically possible alternatives (Goldman 1976). Even though a reliable justification

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10 In the former distinction, Leibniz would say vérité de fait and vérité de raison; and in the later Williamson (2000) would say explicitly evidence-based and implicitly evidence-based, and Goldman (2009) would say inferential rule of justifiedness and noninferential rule of justifiedness.

11 Of course, if the rules of inference are taken to be true, then the deduced theorem is ‘true’ in the sense of deducible.

12 Kaplan (1985) also argues that we should insist on a proper conduct of inquiry and not on knowledge as JTB.
may reasonably be more likely to lead to \( 3 \), it will surely not lead to \( 9 \). And the only recognisable elements of this process will be the justification itself along with the assented belief as the result of an inference, but not its truth per se.

5. Gettier problems’ trivialization

The abandonment of the truth condition in a redefined conception of knowledge allows us to avoid the Gettier problems. The Gettier problems arise in the theory of knowledge when a JTB is true only by chance: since justification does not guarantee truth, it is possible for there to be a break in the connection between justification and truth, but for that connection to be regained by chance. As alleged here, there is nothing that guarantees truth, at least in any recognisable or transitive way. If our epistemic tools are fallible, then it is not surprising that they fail indeed. The Gettier problems fall thus prey to confusion in the statement of their cases.

When the case’s statement stipulates that ‘P is true’ and ‘Q is false’, it supposes a subject able to know as \( 9 \), which is impossible, or it supposes a super-subject able to know as \( 9 \), which is out of reach or incommunicable because transcendent. Then, ‘P is true’ is taken as such without any analysis of its justification; for instance, if ‘P is true’ means ‘Jones has ten coin in its pocket’, what is the justification? Did the subject see it, was it a clear look, did someone reliable tell her so, etc.? Even though they may be regarded as sufficient or good justifications, none of them can guarantee the truth of P in a strong sense, but rather an ‘inferred truth’ (as discussed before). This means that the absence of guarantee for truth from any justification whatsoever forbids the backward passage from truth (here stipulated) to the justification. If a ‘good’ justification can be associated with something other than the truth (in fact, considered as such), a ‘bad’ justification can also be associated with something like the truth. In other words, in absence of guarantee, you can be wrong with good reasons and right with bad reasons, because to be right and then wrong, and vice-versa, is to contrast at least two justifications, one better than the other(s). But there is no such thing in the absence of a justification. When faced with two cases, one ‘true and justified’ and the other ‘true by luck’, the assessment relies on something supporting the ascription of the truth-value and that something cannot be infallible too. The confusion then relies on the possibility of getting \( 9 \) and on a stipulated truth supposedly linked to a univocal and infallible justification.

The confusion can also be illustrated in the semantic theory of truth: the truth of P is in suppositio formalis whereas its justification is in suppositio materialis. To be sure, it is enough to look at the satisfaction of the three conditions of the JTB conception:
they are satisfied if (1a) ‘P is true’ is true, (2a) ‘x believes that P’ is true and (3a) ‘x is justified in believing that P’ is true. The redundancy in (1a), contrary to (2a) and (3a), is evident. This is so because truth can only be stipulated or inferred. The expression ‘‘P is true’ is true’ is equivalent to ‘Q is true’ where Q represents or is the name for ‘P is true’; the question is then: is it the case that Q? Although the conditions to which (2a) and (3a) can receive a truth-value are intuitively clear, it is less obvious in (1a) and in the case of the later question about Q. To all means and intends, the truth-value of Q cannot be recognised directly, that is, solely by its form. But it seems this is what is required, because the truth of P (in fact, a mere stipulation) presupposes a privileged access to the truth (which cannot be).

The contrast can also be illustrated as follows: (1b) ‘P is true’ is true if and only if P is true; (2b) ‘x believes that P’ is true if and only if x believes that P. Nevertheless, the contrast does not make the point completely; after all, the truth of (1b) could be determined medially with the truth of something else such as the truth of P. But this is precisely the point: there will always be something like the satisfaction of another condition between the two components (formal and material) of a sentence like (1b), so that either there is a regressio ad infinitum or a mere stipulation of truth. The former is not realisable and the latter is not even a condition. There is thus confusion between deducibility of ‘truth’, from stipulated truth-valued propositions, and recognition of ‘truth’: the first one is no guarantee for truth and the second is impossible.

In sum, a conception of knowledge where the truth condition can be ‘check-listed’, which amounts to stipulation, or obtained regardless of its justification is flawed. Accordingly, it is trivial if it fails to apply to situations where there should (intuitively) be occurrence of knowledge. If conditions (2a) and (3a) are satisfied, the truth condition (1a) can be satisfied or not. This is no surprise since justification is fallible and insufficient to guarantee any truth. As stressed by Zagzebsky (1994: 69), it is always possible to devise Gettier cases as long as the property that converts true belief into knowledge is analysed as strongly linked with the truth. But this link can be broken, as in the present conception. The result, as I argued, is the possibility to have knowledge, even the truth, but not in any recognisable way. Gettier cases are thus trivialised since knowledge as K implies \([B \& J \rightarrow \Box B^* = T] \Rightarrow [B \& J \& (T or not-T)]\). The result is also the possibility to have known something false.

The apparent paradox in the assertions that ‘x knows P’ and ‘P is false’ comes from contraposition of these two sentences in a common point of view – in brief, from the reader’s perspective. That is, it presupposes this kind of point of view or perspective is always available. If this perspective were available to x the latter
would probably consider reassessing P and thus its knowledge of it granted a sufficient justification. And when this perspective is available to the reader, as it is, the paradox presupposes that she has sufficient justification to support these assertions. In the end, it all comes down to assessing evidences and justifications, and some may appear better than others, but no one is a guarantee for truth: to pretend that something is false and something not is to compare to justification. This is what happens in Gettier’s examples, where the reader is presented with some ‘truth’ with an alleged infallible justification or an alleged forceful stipulation.

6. Conclusion
The ‘naked truth’ is more prudish than we thought or perhaps the modesty is on us, because we cannot see it directly. It has been sustained here that absolute knowledge, implying truth in a strong sense, though possible is not recognisable as such. Thus absolute transitive knowledge (\( \exists \)) is impossible or inaccessible. This means that truth is not recognisable per se, it can only be inferred from the conditions accessible to the subject. And this is why the JTB conception is inadequate. The solution is not to ‘enrich’ this conception but to ‘impoverish’ it, since it looses the truth to just a pretention to the truth. (But truly, you cannot loose what you never had; still, it would be more precise to say here that you cannot miss what you never recognised having.)

Two principles – the immanent principle and the implicitness principle – have been stated to frame a re-definition of knowledge. From there, it was assumed that knowledge presupposes a subject with beliefs in a broad sense, encompassing representations and propositions; and the other (recognisable) element is the justification of that belief. Since truth is not recognisable per se, it was argued that an inference to truth is recognisable and the result of this inference is not, once again, truth, but a pretention to the truth, correlative to an assented or acknowledged belief based on the justification. The justification, though important, recognisable and improvable, cannot be defined unambiguously because it will amount to defining a method giving either a recognisable truth by the very process of the method (which is impossible ex hypothesis), or an impossibility of truth by definition (which is also impossible ex hypothesis). Knowledge is then defined as a belief with a correct justification supporting an inference to a pretention to the truth of that henceforth assented or acknowledged belief. From this point of view, the Gettier problems get trivialized. Since a justification is necessary but offers no guarantee to the truth, a supposedly good justification can indeed fail. And since, truth is not recognisable per
se, it leads to confusion in the formulation of the problems where an absolute point of view for truth is available.

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