



## Thinking Dirt: A Conceptual Discourse on Dirt

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Dirt does not exist, as it is a judgement of matter. Dirt is a universally used word, and ubiquitous in the English-speaking world. Dirt's precise meaning is varied, nuanced, and frequently obscure because of misdirected metaphorical associations.

**Aim:** This deconstructs matter and puts forward a working concept of dirt.

**Discussion:** Dirt assumes other different meanings. It may be used as a noun, adjective, adverb, in phrases or in combination with other words.

**Conclusion:** Dirt is unwanted matter out of place.

**Keywords:** *Dirt; Filth; Grime; Matter; Rubbish; Soil; Waste*

### Introduction and Background

The word 'Dirt' is an interesting, fascinating, and among the oldest and most complicated words used in the English language. Traditional use of the word dirt as an adjective relates to unclean matter or state which needs to be washed or cleaned. It may imply something is sully or tending to be obscene, despicable, or dishonorable. Dirt as an adjective becomes: Dirty, dirtier, dirtiest and dirtied. Dirt has been coupled to many link-words: we encounter dirt-bike, dirt-cheap, dirt-dauber, dirt-farm, dirt-farmer, dirt-poor, and dirt-road. Dirty is commonly combined to other objects: Dirty-bomb, dirty-linen, dirty-minded, dirty old-man, dirty-pool, dirty-rice, dirty-tricks, dirty-war, dirty-word, and dirty-work [1].

The etymology of the word 'Dirt' is derived from the Old English (*dritan*), before Middle English (1250-1300 as '*drit*', excrement, which changed to *dirt*) and was subsequently replaced and reinforced by a parallel borrowing from French [1-3]. Historically it was integrated into English culture and literature: Mud, soil, or earth was colloquially called dirt in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, and also used by authors like Pepys (in his diaries), deFoe, C.G. Gordon, and Melmouth. who included the word 'dirt' in their writings [3].

### Provenance

Weather states are often dirty and described as dirty when strong winds, excess downpours of rain, huge snowfalls, sleet, thick

fog or violent storms are experienced. A color may be described as dirty or muddy if a pure hue is modified with black, grey or another color. Anything from an object like a house, linen, a face, food, road, marks, journey, story, trick, fellow, night or complexion.... to activities for nefarious aims, like dirty-tricks, doing someone's dirty-work implying he is an underling..... may be described as 'dirty'. As a noun dirt indicates that a state or thing is dirt, meaning worthless. To fling dirt at people is to vilify, and costing or assessing a price at below value, is described as cheap-dirt, or reversed as a descriptor it becomes dirt-cheap. A dirt-track is a pathway often a circle or stretch made of gravel stones, loose soil or undisturbed dirt.

**Other concepts of dirt:** The word has subtle changed meanings and implications when it is used in many varying contexts [1]:

- Dirt as any foul or filthy substance such as grime, mud, dust or excrement.
- Dirt as ground, earth or soil especially when loose or not modified.
- Dirt can be something or someone that is vile, mean or worthless.
- Dirt can be moral filth vileness or corruption.
- Dirt can be obscene or lewd language, like to talk dirt.
- Dirt can be informal gossip especially of a malicious, lurid or obscene nature.

- Dirt can be private or personal knowledge which if made public would create a scandal or ruin the reputation of person, company or group. Synonyms used for this are: scandal, slander, rumor, scuttlebutt.
- In mining dirt can be a crude broken-up ore, waste-material, or the stuff from which gold is extracted by washing.
- Eating dirt implies to accept blame, guilt criticism, or insults without complaint. To be humble or abase oneself.

But what is the essential, original conceptual idea that all these usages have in common? What is the core notion and understanding that has allowed dirt to chameleonize into so many implications of meaning?

### Aim of the Study

This discourse analyzes, deconstructs and recalls the physical state of matter and puts forward a fundamentally derived working concept of what dirt is, what it implies and when the word dirt is used in context mainly as a noun but also as an adjective or adverb.

### The state of matter

In physics there are four states of matter observable in everyday life [4]. It is understood that transfer of energy is required to change matter from one form into another [5]. Although matter exists in four major states, as a gas, liquid, solid and plasma, only the first three are most important. This is because the plasma state is often misunderstood, and on Earth does not freely exist under usual living conditions. Plasma states are quite commonly seen when generated by either lightning, electric sparks, fluorescent lights, neon lights, in plasma televisions, in the Sun's corona, some types of flame, and stars....all of which display illuminated matter in the plasma state [4-6].

Accordingly, although matter does exist in four major states, as a gas, liquid, solid and plasma, for the purpose of this analysis on dirt, matter will be deemed only as three pragmatic factors, and to exist as a solid, a liquid or a gas.

**Metamorphosing notions:** Dirt becomes a descriptor of notions relating to anything that is undesirable or unwanted. The resorting to deeming any matter as dirt results from an unconscious judgment call rejecting the placement of what is on hand. This may also be for a substance, action or thought. There is a mental transfer of

unwanted and undesirable properties to these, and the word dirt is appended. This may relate to matter, thoughts, or actions. Examples are cited in the provenance and concepts above.

### Discussion

It is important to understand, and have clear working concepts especially in biomedical situations, the meaning of dirty, and its descriptors. All matter and biological material are constituted by chemistry as atoms and molecules, and accordingly if located in places where they wanted, or are found in Nature, none can be considered as dirt or dirty. Matter in its natural expected location is not dirt or dirty. For example, fecal material in the rectum is just that, namely feces in the rectum, and it only assumes the description of dirty when placed in other locations where it is not desired. Soil, often colloquially called earth, is mis-named as dirt and although it be variable in the context of soil, dirt is a combination of organic and/or inorganic matter made up of chemicals, gases, liquids, and often micro-organisms.

**Synonyms:** Words with similar meaning to dirt are: Dirt mud, soil, dust, clay, earth. All may transform to dirt when a judgement-call is applied as undesirable or out of place.

**Antonyms:** These are words which express contrary assessments of dirt; They describe the most desirable, best or ideal state. Consequently, we have antonym descriptors like dirt-free and opposite implications of dirty including: Clean, good, fresh, tidy, neat, spotless, unsoiled, sparkling, hygienic, sanitary uncontaminated, unpolluted, sterile, tidy neat and orderly.

### Concluding Remarks

Providing any precise water-tight definition is hugely challenging, as rare exceptions may be conceived to invalidate it. Consequently, working concepts are created which should satisfy the vast majority of situations, optimally reflect the true meaning, minimize confusion, avoid ambiguity and sustain clarity.

There is no such thing as dirt. Dirt is some matter or action, unwanted, and out of place.

### Author's Statement

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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