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## **A Correspondence Theory of Objects?**

### **On Kant's Notions of Object, Truth, and Actuality**

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#### **Abstract**

Ernst Cassirer claimed that Kant's notion of actual object presupposes the notion of truth. Therefore, Kant cannot define truth as the correspondence of a judgment with an actual object. In this paper, I discuss the relations between Kant's notions of truth, object, and actuality. I argue that Kant's notion of actual object does not presuppose the notion of truth. I conclude that Kant *can* define truth as the correspondence of a judgment with an actual object.

#### **Introduction**\*

Can an idealist endorse a correspondence theory of truth, or are correspondence theories inextricably bound to metaphysical realism? Philosophers have given differing answers to this question.<sup>1</sup> However, explicit arguments for the compatibility or incompatibility of idealism and correspondence theories are rare finds. Many philosophers, such as Hilary Putnam and Nelson Goodman,<sup>2</sup> simply assumed that only realists can be correspondence theorists. Several of their opponents pointed out that they see no reason why an idealist cannot have a correspondence theory of truth.<sup>3</sup>

A similar situation can be found in the literature on Kant. Many interpreters

assumed that Kant, being an idealist about objects in space and time, cannot endorse a correspondence theory of truth for judgments on those objects.<sup>4</sup> However, few authors provided arguments in support of this claim.

This paper discusses one of those rare arguments. It will be named “Cassirer’s argument,” from its most famous upholder. The paper argues that Cassirer’s argument fails to prove that Kant cannot have a correspondence theory of truth.

The assumption that Kant was an idealist about objects in space and time will not be questioned here. I will only argue that Kant’s conception of spatio-temporal objects is immune from Cassirer’s objection. This paper solely considers Kant’s Critical views, understood as the views that Kant endorsed from 1781 to his death in 1804.

The study of Cassirer’s argument is interesting for three reasons. First, it sheds light on the relations between Kant’s notions of object, truth, and actuality, which play a central role in his Critical philosophy. Second, it contributes to the discussion of the intricate and debated question, whether Kant had or rejected a correspondence theory of truth. Third, it provides us with some insight into the relation between idealism and correspondence theories of truth.

## **1 Cassirer’s Interpretation**

Cassirer outlines his interpretation of Kant’s conception of truth in passages like the following:

If it is possible to designate the determination of the relation between *truth* and *actuality* as the general topic of epistemology, then particular historical ages differ from each other in that they conceive of those two concepts, whose relation is to be established, in a different order and sequence. [...]

[T]here is a characteristic difference as to whether one *starts* the investigation from the one or the other concept: whether the “being” of things counts as the certain, given element, and we move from it to orientate ourselves with respect to the sense and content of the concept of truth, or whether, vice versa, one attempts to determine the ultimate significance of objective judgments moving from the validity of determinate *criteria* of truth, which are regarded as certain.<sup>5</sup>

According to Cassirer, Kant rejects the first horn of the alternative. In order to explain what truth is, “the concept of ‘object’ does not enable us to give any satisfactory answer.”<sup>6</sup> This is because, for Kant, “the explanation that the truth of a cognition means its ‘agreement with the object’ proves to be circular.”<sup>7</sup> “[I]t is not because there is a world of objects that there is for us, as their impression and image, a world of cognitions and truths; rather, because there are unconditionally certain judgments [...] there is for us an order which is designated not only as an order of impressions and representations, but also as an order of objects.”<sup>8</sup> “[I]n the Critical sense, the truth [i.e., actuality] of the object is always to be grasped and substantiated only through the truth of the judgment.”<sup>9</sup> Truth, or at least empirical truth, is to be defined as the coherence of a judgment with the deliverances of the senses and with the laws which govern their synthesis (hereafter called “the transcendental laws of knowledge”).<sup>10</sup> Actual objects are to be defined as those items whose existence is implied by true judgments. The very notion of actual object is to be defined by means of the notion of true judgment.<sup>11</sup>

If this is so, then of course true judgments correspond with actual objects, or more precisely, with the objects they are about. However, this explains at most what an

actual object is, and not what truth is. If Kant tried to perspicuously explain what truth is by means of the notion of actual object, he would formulate a circular explanation, because the notion of actual object is to be explained by means of the notion of truth. It follows that Kant cannot have a correspondence theory of truth. He can have at most a correspondence theory of objects.

## 2 Formulating Cassirer's Argument

A precise formulation of Cassirer's argument is provided below, preceded by four points.

First, following Kant's usage, truth-bearers will be called "judgments" or "cognitions." No attempt will be made to clarify precisely what Kantian judgments and cognitions are. The focus will be on those judgments which can be true or false, although some judgments, such as judgments of perception, might not bear any truth-value for Kant.

Second, objects, and not facts, will be regarded as the items with which judgments must correspond to be true. Kant constantly mentions the correspondence of judgments or cognitions with objects, and not with facts. Consider for instance the following passage of the first *Critique*:

T1 If truth consists in the agreement of a cognition *with its object*, then this object must thereby be distinguished from others; for a cognition is false if it does not agree with the object to which it is related even if it contains something that could well be valid of other objects. (A 58/B 83, italics added)<sup>12</sup>

Third, the fact that there are true judgments about non-existent objects will not be taken into account. If only actual objects are truth-makers of Kantian judgments, it

might be hard to find truth-makers for judgments about non-existent objects. Kant does not provide any suggestion as to how one might solve this problem, and this paper will not solve it on Kant's behalf.

Fourth, a pessimistic attitude towards circularity will be adopted. Kant states that definitions cannot be circular in his logic lectures (*L. Dohna*, 24:760<sub>6-11</sub>; *Wiener L.*, 24:924<sub>21-29</sub>; *L. Bauch*, RT 127, p. 261<sub>119-121</sub>). For Cassirer, the fact that the notion of object is defined by means of the notion of truth provides a good reason to reject a definition of truth which employs the notion of object. Kant and Cassirer do not grant that, under certain circumstances, circular definitions and explanations are acceptable. In the last thirty years, however, philosophers have produced good arguments for the claim that circular definitions and explanations are not always "vicious," but they are sometimes acceptable, or even recommendable.<sup>13</sup> This discussion of Cassirer's argument will not rely on their claim. It will adopt Kant's and Cassirer's restrictive view that no circular definition or explanation should be accepted. Then, it will argue that Kant's eventual endorsement of a correspondence theory of truth does not involve any circular definition or explanation.

Cassirer's argument can be formulated as follows:

(C1) In a correspondence theory of truth, the notion of truth cannot appear in the definition of actual object, or in the most perspicuous explanation of what an actual object is.

(C2) Kant's definition or most perspicuous explanation of the notion of an actual object employs the notion of truth.

∴ (C3) Kant cannot have a correspondence theory of truth.

Is this argument correct? C1 is not contentious, at least as long as we reject every

circular explanation. If truth is defined as the correspondence of a judgment with an actual object, and if the notion of truth appears in the definition or, in absence of a definition, in the most perspicuous explanation of the notion of actual object, the definition of truth will be circular, and therefore it should be rejected. C3 follows from C1 and C2. Then, the question to answer is whether C2 is true, or in other words, whether Kant's definition or most perspicuous explanation of the notion of actual object employs the notion of truth. It is necessary to inquire into whether the notion of truth appears in Kant's definition or explanation of the notion of object, or in his definition or explanation of the notion of actuality, for these are the two components of the notion of actual object.

### **3 Two Notions of Object**

The English word "object" corresponds to two words in Kant's lexicon: "Object" (often replaced with the modern form "Objekt" by the editors of Kant's works) and "Gegenstand."<sup>14</sup> Kant sometimes uses the term "Object" to designate phenomenal objects. For instance, he writes in the B-Deduction:

T2 *Understanding* is, generally speaking, the faculty of *cognitions*. These consist in the determinate relation of given representations to an object [*Object*]. An *object* [*Object*], however, is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is *united*. (B 137)

Here, the term "Object" designates phenomenal objects, because only phenomenal objects, but not things in themselves, derive from the unification of the manifold of intuition.<sup>15</sup>

Elsewhere, Kant distinguishes between a broad sense and a narrow sense of the

word “Object.” Consider, for instance, the following passage from the second analogy of experience:

T3 Now one can, to be sure, call everything, and even every representation, insofar as one is conscious of it, an object [*Object*]; only what this word is to mean in the case of appearances, not insofar as they are (as representations) objects [*Objecte*], but rather only insofar as they designate an object [*Object*], requires a deeper investigation. [...] appearance, in contradistinction to the representations of apprehension, can [...] only be represented as the object [*Object*] that is distinct from them if it stands under a rule that distinguishes it from every other apprehension, and makes one way of combining the manifold necessary. That in the appearance which contains the condition of this necessary rule of apprehension is the object [*Object*]. (A 189-191/B 234-236)

The last occurrence of “Object” in T3 has the same meaning which “Object” has in T2. In both passages, “Object” designates phenomenal objects. In the terms of T2, these objects derive from the unification of the manifold of intuition by means of a priori concepts. In the terms of T3, these objects derive from the unification of an apprehended manifold by means of necessary rules. The manifold of intuition of T2 is the apprehended manifold of T3. The a priori concepts of T2 are the necessary rules of T3. They are the categories, which Kant sometimes calls “rules” (e.g., in B 145).

The first occurrence of “Object” in T3 employs this word in a broader sense, which does not only encompass phenomenal objects, but also every representation.<sup>16</sup> In other passages, Kant uses the term “Gegenstand,” rather than “Object,” in a broad sense. Consider, for instance, the following passages of the first *Critique*:

T4 *All representations, as representations, have their object [Gegenstand], and can themselves be objects [Gegenstände] of other representations in turn. (A 108, italics added)*

T5 The highest concept with which one is accustomed to begin a transcendental philosophy is usually the division between the possible and the impossible. But since every division presupposes a concept that is to be divided, a still higher one must be given, and this is the concept of an object [*Gegenstande*] in general (taken problematically, leaving undecided whether it is something or nothing). (A 290/B 346; see *M. Dohna*, 24:622)

Other passages use the term “Gegenstand” in a narrow sense, to designate phenomenal objects. Below is an example:

T6 The sensible faculty of intuition is really only a receptivity for being affected in a certain way with representations [...], which, insofar as they are connected and determinable in these relations (in space and time) according to laws of the unity of experience, are called *objects* [*Gegenstände*]. (A 494/B 522; see also A 106)

The laws of the unity of experience, mentioned in this passage, are the transcendental laws of knowledge. Phenomenal objects are the objects which arise, or which can be represented, as the result of a synthesis (or in the terms of T6, a connection and determination) of empirical intuitions according to those laws.

This battery of quotations supports two claims. The first claim is that Kant distinguishes between a broad sense and a narrow sense of “object”:

If one can have a mental representation of  $x$ , then  $x$  is an object in the broad

sense (see T3, T5).

If one can have a mental representation of  $x$  as the result of the synthesis of the manifold of empirical intuition according to the transcendental laws of knowledge, then  $x$  is an object in the narrow sense (see T2, T3, T6).

Objects in the narrow sense include only phenomenal objects. Objects in the broad sense include, besides phenomenal objects: items which cannot be given in any experience, like a flat geometrical figure enclosed by two straight lines (A 220/B 268), God, and things in themselves, and other items which do not derive from the synthesis of empirical intuitions, such as numbers and a priori concepts. By contrast, objects in the broad sense do *not* include items which possess incompatible properties at the same time and under the same respect, such as a square circle. This is because: an object in the broad sense is something of which one can have a mental representation; according to Kant, it is impossible to have mental representations which violate the law of contradiction (B xxvi n.); and representations of items which have incompatible properties violate the law of contradiction.

The second claim which Kant's texts support is that he does not make any clear-cut, systematical, and consistent difference in meaning between the terms "Object" and "Gegenstand." In fact, the quoted passages employ the term "Object," as well as "Gegenstand," to designate objects in the broad sense and objects in the narrow sense alike. In addition, the passages which define truth as the agreement of cognitions with objects use sometimes the term "Object," and other times the term "Gegenstand." For instance, T1 describes truth as the agreement of a cognition with its *Gegenstand*, whereas A 820-821/B 848-849 describes truth as "agreement with the *Objecte*." Kant's use of "Object" and "Gegenstand" in these passages is fully interchangeable.<sup>17</sup>

## 4 Objects and Truth

Kant's texts never characterize objects in the broad sense by means of the notion of truth. For instance, the beginning of T3 contains a characterization of objects in the broad sense without mention of truth. Objects in the broad sense include items such as things in themselves, concepts, and numbers, yet Kant's texts do not provide any reason to characterize these items by means of the notion of truth.

Kant might characterize objects in the narrow sense by means of the notion of truth. Two remarks might give some plausibility to this view. First, Kant writes that, given transcendental idealism, "the objects must conform to our cognition" (B xvi), and "the representation alone makes the object possible" (B 124-125). With these statements, Kant might be suggesting that the notion of *true* cognition or *true* representation is at the basis of his notion of phenomenal object. Second, the Transcendental Analytic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* describes mental processes that contribute to the constitution of phenomenal objects. How our mental representations can relate to objects is a leitmotiv of the Transcendental Analytic. The relation of representations to objects is also involved in the nominal definition of truth: truth, Kant writes, is the agreement of a cognition with the object *to which it is related* (A 48/B 83; *L. Pölitz*, 24:525<sub>26-28</sub>; *Jäsche-L.*, 9:51<sub>2-4</sub>). This might suggest that the Transcendental Analytic describes the constitution of phenomenal objects on the basis of the notion of truth.

Generic references to Kant's employment of a correspondence jargon – for instance, to his mention of the relation of representations to objects – might make Cassirer's view intuitively plausible. However, they are not sufficient to prove it. What would prove Cassirer's view is a mention or presupposition of the notion of truth in Kant's definition or most perspicuous characterization of phenomenal object. Yet Kant

does not employ the notion of truth in his characterizations of the notion of phenomenal object, such as those in T2, T3, T6, and A 106. The passages on the “Copernican turn” in the relation between cognitions and objects do not employ the word “truth” either.

Cassirer might well agree that Kant does not use the term “truth” in his characterizations of phenomenal objects. However, Cassirer might advance a further argument for the claim that Kant’s notion of phenomenal object presupposes the notion of truth. Cassirer might argue as follows.

Kant’s descriptions of phenomenal objects (e.g., those in T2, T3, and T6) make reference to the manifold of intuition, synthesis, and rules. The rules at issue in T3 and T6 are the transcendental laws of knowledge. The process of synthesis mentioned in T3 is a process which takes place through the application of those rules. According to Kant’s texts, a phenomenal object is an item which can be represented as the result of a synthesis of the manifold of intuition according to the transcendental laws of knowledge.

Kant relates not only the notion of phenomenal object, but also the notion of truth, to the synthesis of the manifold of intuition according to the transcendental laws of knowledge. He relates those notions in several passages, such as two passages from the *Prolegomena*. The first states:

T7 The difference between truth and dream [...] is not decided through the quality of the representations that are referred to objects, for they are the same in both, but through *their connection according to the rules that determine the combination of representations in the concept of an object*, and how far they can or cannot stand

together in one experience. (4:290-291, italics added)

The second passage discusses whether “experience carries with itself sure criteria to distinguish it from imagination.” In this context, Kant writes:

T8 Here the doubt can easily be removed, and we always remove it in ordinary life by investigating the connection of appearances in both space and time according to universal laws of experience, and *if the representation of outer things consistently agrees therewith, we cannot doubt that those things should not constitute truthful experience.* (4:337, italics added; see 4:374-375 and A 492/B 520-521)

According to the quoted passages, once one has a mental representation of appearances, and hence once one has empirical intuitions, those appearances will represent actual objects if and only if they conform to the transcendental laws of knowledge. This is tantamount to saying that a judgment based on empirical intuitions is true if and only if it conforms to the transcendental laws of knowledge.

Kant’s reference to intuitions and synthesis in his characterizations of phenomenal objects might be an implicit reference to the notion of truth, or at least to the notion of empirical truth: empirical truth consists in the synthesis of the manifold of intuition according to the transcendental laws of knowledge,<sup>18</sup> and this very synthesis is at the basis of the notion of phenomenal object. If this is so, then Kant’s notion of phenomenal object presupposes the notion of truth. Therefore, Kant cannot define truth as correspondence of judgments with phenomenal objects, on pain of circularity.

This argument can be summarized as follows:

(1) Kant defines the notion of phenomenal object by mentioning the synthesis of

the manifold of intuition according to the transcendental laws of knowledge.

(2) Empirical truth consists in the synthesis of the manifold of intuition according to the transcendental laws of knowledge.

∴ (3) Kant's definition of phenomenal object presupposes the notion of truth.

∴ (4) Kant cannot define truth as correspondence of a judgment with a phenomenal object (on pain of circularity).

This argument is not tenable, because the link between the transcendental laws of knowledge and empirical truth is weaker than the link between those laws and the notion of phenomenal object.

In the above texts (T2, the end of T3, and T6), Kant illustrates what a phenomenal object is by making reference to the synthesis of intuitions according to the transcendental laws of knowledge. To say that  $x$  is a phenomenal object is to say that, once certain empirical intuitions are synthesized according to the transcendental laws of knowledge, they will yield a representation of  $x$ .

By contrast, the Critical Kant never writes: to say that a judgment or an empirical judgment is true is to say that it is the result of a synthesis of empirical intuitions according to the transcendental laws of knowledge. He does not even write that being true *is* being supported by intuitions and conforming to the transcendental laws of knowledge, with two sole exceptions: one sentence in *Reflexion* 5642, a personal note that Kant did not intend to publish (18:280<sub>16-18</sub>), and one sentence in a transcript of his logic lectures, the *Logic Hechsel*.<sup>19</sup> However, the latter sentence is in contrast with statements which are right above and below it in the same passage.<sup>20</sup> Thus, only one sentence from a personal note can count as evidence for the claim that the Critical Kant defined truth as agreement with intuitions and with the transcendental laws of

knowledge. This is very weak evidence.

Passages such as T7 and T8 prove at most that being warranted by intuitions, plus conforming to the transcendental laws of knowledge, is a feature coextensive with empirical truth: all true empirical judgments, and only true empirical judgments, conform to the transcendental laws of knowledge and are supported by empirical intuitions. However, claiming this is not sufficient to explain what empirical truth is. Even if all philosophers and only philosophers wore red hats, “wearing a red hat” would not be an explanation of what it means to be a philosopher. Even if all and only those vertebrates which have a liver had a heart, “being a vertebrate with a heart” would not be an explanation of what it means to be a vertebrate with a liver. By the same token, even if all true empirical judgments and only true empirical judgments conformed to the transcendental laws of knowledge and were supported by empirical intuitions, conforming to the transcendental laws of knowledge and being supported by empirical intuitions might not be an explanation of what it means to be a true empirical judgment. Being a true empirical judgment might rather mean to correspond to an empirical, or phenomenal, object.

Kant does not aim to explain what truth is in T7 and T8. Instead, he aims to provide a criterion to distinguish waking experiences from dreaming experiences. He provides that criterion in order to show that transcendental idealism does not give the same status to real objects in space and time and to the imaginary objects of dreams and illusions. Kant is keen to show this to differentiate his transcendental idealism from the idealism of his predecessors, like Berkeley. In Kant’s view, the idealism of his predecessors is unable to account for the difference between real objects and imaginary ones (see *Prol.*, 4:374-375).

Kant’s criterion to distinguish waking experiences from dreaming experiences

also serves as a criterion to distinguish true judgments about empirical objects from false judgments about those objects:

If you can formulate a judgment  $p$  as the result of a synthesis of empirical intuitions according to the transcendental laws of knowledge, then  $p$  is true. If you can formulate the negation of a judgment  $p$  as the result of a synthesis of empirical intuitions according to the transcendental laws of knowledge, then  $p$  is false.<sup>21</sup>

This criterion is fully compatible with a correspondence conception of empirical truth. Kant claims that the nominal definition of truth is: “truth is the agreement of a cognition with its object.”<sup>22</sup> This claim entails that true judgments correspond with the objects they are about. That definition, being only “nominal,” does not provide a criterion to distinguish true from false judgments.<sup>23</sup> The possibility of formulating a judgment as the result of the synthesis of empirical intuitions according to the transcendental laws of knowledge provides a test or criterion to establish which empirical judgments satisfy the correspondence nominal definition of truth.

In effect, the great majority of the sentences that start with the expressions “truth consists in” and “truth is” in Kant’s Critical corpus make reference to objects. They state that truth is the agreement of a cognition with the object it is about, or they lay out slight variations of this formula. At least eleven of those passages do not prefix this formula with: “the *nominal definition* of truth is,” “the *nominal essence* of truth is,” “the *concept* of truth is,” or “the *meaning* of ‘is true’ is.”<sup>24</sup> Hence, Kant uses that formula to explain what truth, the very property of truth, literally is.

If this is correct, then the explanation of what a phenomenal object is mentions the transcendental laws of knowledge, and the definition of truth employs the notion of

object (be it a phenomenal object or an object in the broad sense). It follows that Kant does not explain what a phenomenal object is by means of the notion of truth. Vice versa, he explains what truth is by means of the notion of object. Thus, in the argument outlined at pp. 12-13, (2) and (3) are both false. It is false that, for Kant, truth consists in the synthesis of the manifold of intuition according to the transcendental laws of knowledge, and it is false that Kant's notion of phenomenal object presupposes the notion of truth.

## **5 Actuality and Truth**

Although Kant does not define the notions of object or of phenomenal object by means of the notion of truth, he might define the notion of actuality by means of the notion of truth. If he does, then he cannot define truth as the correspondence of a judgment with actual objects, on pain of circularity.

However, Kant does not employ the terms "truth" and "true," when he explains what actuality is. Kant's Critical works contain two major explanations of the notion of actuality. The first is in the postulates of empirical thinking in general (A 225-226/B 272-274). The second is in the section of the first *Critique* on the transcendental ideal of God (A 597-601/B 625-629). These texts contain no occurrence of the word "true," but one occurrence of the word "truth." The occurrence of "truth" is in a sentence on the transcendental truth of the categories (A 222/B 269). That sentence does not make any reference whatsoever to the truth of judgments or cognitions. The transcripts of Kant's metaphysics lectures from the Critical period do not employ the notion of truth to explain what actuality is either.<sup>25</sup> They only state, on one occasion, that the truth of judgments corresponds to the actuality of objects, without adding any further comment on the relation between these two notions (*M. Schön*, 28:493<sub>32-33</sub>). If Kant intended to

define actuality by means of the notion of truth, he could at least be more explicit.

Nevertheless, a supporter of Cassirer's view might formulate the following argument for the claim that the notion of truth is implicit in Kant's notion of actuality. The second postulate of empirical thinking characterizes the actuality of a phenomenal object as its agreement with the formal and material conditions of experience (A 218/B 265-266). The formal conditions of experience are the transcendental laws of knowledge. The material conditions of experience are the deliverances of the senses. Kant characterizes empirical truth in very similar terms. Empirical truth is the coherence of a judgment or cognition with the transcendental laws of knowledge and the deliverances of the senses. If this is so, then Kant's explanation of actuality mentions the material and formal conditions which constitute his characterization of empirical truth. This is a disguised reference to empirical truth in the explanation of actuality.<sup>26</sup> Thus the notion of actuality, and thereby the notion of actual object, presupposes the notion of empirical truth. It follows that Kant cannot define truth as correspondence of a judgment with actual objects, on pain of circularity.

This argument fails for two reasons. The first reason is that Kant does not explain what truth is in terms of agreement with the transcendental laws of knowledge and the deliverances of the senses. As we have seen in Section 4, Kant claims at most that empirical truth on the one hand, and the agreement with the transcendental laws of knowledge and the deliverances of the senses on the other hand, are coextensive features. This is compatible with several alternative accounts of what truth is (for instance, a correspondence account and a coherence account).

The second reason is that the second postulate of empirical thinking does not explain what actuality is. The second postulate of empirical thinking is one of the synthetic principles of the pure understanding. These principles explain under which

conditions the mind must apply each category to the deliverances of the senses:

T9 For they are nothing other than propositions that subsume all perceptions (according to certain universal conditions of intuition) under those pure concepts of the understanding. (4:302)

T10 These higher principles alone provide the concept, which contains the condition and as it were the exponent for a rule in general, while experience provides the case which stands under the rule. (A 159/B 198, trans. modified)

The second postulate of empirical thinking explains under which conditions the mind must apply the category of actuality to the deliverances of the senses, already subsumed under the transcendental forms of intuition and the categories of quantity, quality, and relation. The second postulate prescribes:

apply the category of actuality to  $x$  if and only if  $x$  conforms to the transcendental laws of knowledge and you have empirical intuitions of  $x$ .

The  $x$  ranges over representations of empirical objects.

This formula implies that one must class every item which conforms to the transcendental laws of knowledge, and of which one has empirical intuitions, as actual. It does not imply that being actual means satisfying those conditions. In effect, according to Kant, God is actual (A 695-696/B 723-724), but it does not satisfy those conditions, because we cannot have empirical intuitions of God. If the above formula provided an explanation of what actuality is, that explanation would apply only to the actuality of phenomenal objects. "Actuality" would have a different meaning when applied to God. Therefore, "actuality" would be an ambiguous term. However, Kant

never states that “actuality” is ambiguous. He gives a non-ambiguous explanation of actuality, based on the notion of absolute positing, in the section of Transcendental Dialectic entitled “The Ideal of Pure Reason.” That explanation extends over phenomenal objects, as well as over non-phenomenal items such as God.<sup>27</sup>

If this is so, then the second postulate of empirical thinking is similar to passages T7 and T8. Those passages provide a test to establish the truth of empirical judgments, but they do not provide a definition of empirical truth. Likewise, the second postulate of empirical thinking provides a test to establish whether a phenomenal object is actual, but it does not explain what being actual is.

To sum up, the above argument for the claim that Kant defines actuality by means of the notion of truth fails. This is because of two reasons. First, truth is not the agreement of a judgment with the formal and material conditions of possible experience. Second, actuality is not the agreement of an object with the formal and material conditions of possible experience. As Kant characterizes neither the notion of actuality, nor his two notions of object by means of the notion of truth, Cassirer’s argument must be rejected. Other arguments may be more successful than Cassirer’s in proving that Kant’s idealism is incompatible with a correspondence theory of truth.

In conclusion, the study and refutation of Cassirer’s argument alone does not enable us to conclusively establish whether Kant can endorse a correspondence theory of truth. However, it suggests that we should not trust short arguments from a certain ontological outlook to a particular theory of truth. In absence of general arguments for the incompatibility of idealism with a correspondence theory of truth, the answer to the question of whether an idealist ontology is compatible with a correspondence theory, and the evaluation of any argument for this claim, require a careful examination of the ontology and theory of truth at stake. A detailed examination is also necessary to

establish if Kant, or recent upholders of various forms of idealism, internal realism, and anti-realism, can consistently endorse a correspondence theory of truth.

## NOTES

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The *Critique of Pure Reason* is cited with the page numbers of the first edition of 1781 (“A”) and of the second edition of 1787 (“B”). Other writings by Kant are cited with the abbreviation of the title, the volume number of the Academy Edition, the page number, and, eventually, subscripted line numbers. Citations from *Reflexionen* also indicate each *Reflexion*’s number and the dating established by Adickes. The *Logik Bauch* and the *Logik Hechsel* are not included in the Academy Edition. They are cited with the abbreviation of the title, followed by the page number and, eventually, the line number of Tillman Pinder’s edition: I. Kant, *Logik-Vorlesung. Unveröffentlichte Nachschriften* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998). The following abbreviations have been used:

*Jäsche-L.*            *Jäsche Logik.*

*KU*                    *Kritik der Urteilskraft.*

*L. Bauch*            *Logik Bauch.* The abbreviation “RT” indicates the marginal notes to the main text of *L. Bauch*.

*L. Busolt*            *Logik Busolt.*

*L. Dohna*            *Logik Dohna-Wundlacken.*

<i>L. Hechsel</i>	<i>Logik Hechsel.</i>
<i>L. Pölitz</i>	<i>Logik Pölitz.</i>
<i>M. Dohna</i>	<i>Metaphysik Dohna.</i>
<i>M. K<sub>2</sub></i>	<i>Metaphysik K<sub>2</sub>.</i>
<i>M. L<sub>2</sub></i>	<i>Metaphysik L<sub>2</sub>.</i>
<i>M. Mrongovius</i>	<i>Metaphysik Mrongovius.</i>
<i>M. Schön</i>	<i>Metaphysik von Schön.</i>
<i>M. Volckmann</i>	<i>Metaphysik Volckmann.</i>
<i>Op. post.</i>	<i>Opus postumum.</i>
<i>Prol.</i>	<i>Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können.</i>
<i>Refl.</i>	<i>Reflexionen from Kant's Handschriftlicher Nachlaß.</i>
<i>Wiener L.</i>	<i>Wiener Logik.</i>

Quotations of the first *Critique* and the *Prolegomena* are from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. All other translations are mine. Some of the emphases are mine. Some quotations are from Kant's lecture transcripts. The following datings will be assumed for the lectures on which they are based. *L. Dohna*, *L. Pölitz*, *M. Dohna*, *M. K<sub>2</sub>*, *M. L<sub>2</sub>*, *M. Mrongovius*, *M. Volckmann*, *Wiener L.*, and the marginalia of *L. Bauch* are based on lectures given from the early 1780s onwards. *L. Hechsel* and *M. Schön* are based on lectures given around 1780. *L. Busolt* and the main text of *L. Bauch* are based on lectures given in several different years, probably including pre-Critical materials. *Jäsche-L.* is based on *Reflexionen* written in Kant's Critical and pre-Critical time, passages from one or more lecture transcripts, sentences of the textbook

which Kant used in his logic lectures, and Jäsche's own additions.

<sup>1</sup> Among those who claim that only realists can be correspondence theorists are L. BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 159-160; G. Vision, *Modern Anti-Realism and Manufactured Truth* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 11, 17-18, 25; R. Walker, *The Coherence Theory of Truth: Realism, Anti-Realism, Idealism* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 3, 6, 20; P. Engel, *Truth* (Chesham: Acumen, 2002), pp. 14-15. In favor of the possibility of idealist correspondence theories are, among others, M. Devitt, "Aberrations of the Realism Debate," *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 61 (1991), pp. 43-63; R. Kirkham, *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 133-134; M. Willaschek, *Der mentale Zugang zur Welt. Realismus, Skeptizismus und Intentionalität* (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 2003), pp. 53-54; G. Vision, *Veritas: The Correspondence Theory and Its Critics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), pp. x-xii, 14-16.

<sup>2</sup> See D. McDermid, "Putnam on Kant on Truth: Correspondence or Coherence?" *Idealistic Studies*, vol. 28 (1998), pp. 17-34.

<sup>3</sup> Two excellent discussions of arguments against the compatibility of realism and correspondence theories are W. P. Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), chap. 3; and G. Volpe, *Teorie della verità* (Milan: Guerini, 2006), pp. 124-127.

<sup>4</sup> The following authors, among others, claim that a correspondence theory of truth requires mind-independent truth-makers, while discussing Kant's philosophy: J. S. Beck, *Einzig-möglicher Standpunct, aus welchem die critische Philosophie beurtheilt werden muß* (Riga: Hartknoch, 1796), pp. 8-14; G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der*

*Logik*, vol. 2: *Die subjektive Logik (1816)*, ed. F. Hogemann and W. Jaeschke as vol. 12 of G. W. F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1981), p. 26; J. N. Mohanty, “Kant on ‘Truth,’” in *Realism: Responses and Reactions. Essays in Honour of Pranab Kumar Sen*, ed. D. P. Chattopadhyaya, S. Basu, M. N. Mitra and R. Mukhopadhyay (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 2000), p. 246; *contra*: K. L. Reinhold, *Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisherigen Mißverständnisse der Philosophen*, ed. F. Fabbianelli (Hamburg: Meiner, 2004), vol. 2, pp. 179-202; G. Schulz, *Veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei. Untersuchungen zur Wahrheitslehre des Thomas von Aquin und zur Kritik Kants an einem überlieferten Wahrheitsbegriff* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), pp. 8, 148; J. Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 216-217.

<sup>5</sup> E. Cassirer, “Erkenntnistheorie nebst den Grenzfragen der Logik” (1913), in his *Gesammelte Werke. Hamburger Ausgabe* (ECW), ed. B. Recki (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998-), vol. 9, p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>8</sup> E. Cassirer, *Kants Leben und Lehre*. 2nd enlarged ed. (1921), in ECW, vol. 8, pp. 143-144; trans. J. Haden (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 148.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274; English translation, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> See E. Cassirer, “Erkenntnistheorie nebst den Grenzfragen der Logik und Denkpsychologie” (1927), in ECW, vol. 17, pp. 13-81.

<sup>11</sup> See E. Cassirer, *Kants Leben und Lehre*, pp. 143-144, 274; English translation, pp. 148, 285.

<sup>12</sup> Some scholars suggested that Kantian objects are to be identified with states of

affairs. This suggestion will not be discussed in this paper. See R. Hanna, “The Trouble with Truth in Kant’s Theory of Meaning,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 10 (1993), p. 3; R. Hanna, *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 98; A. Savile, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason. An Orientation to the Central Theme* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> See J. A. Burgess, “When is Circularity in Definitions Benign?” *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 58 (2008), pp. 214-233.

<sup>14</sup> Kant sometimes uses the terms “Objecte” and “Gegenstande,” rather than “Object” and “Gegenstand,” for the dative singular case. See, e.g., A 353, B 67, and B 69 n. for “Objecte”; A 127, A 385, and A 630/B 658 for “Gegenstande.”

<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Kant mentions the objective validity of cognitions right after T2, and only cognitions of phenomenal objects, but not cognitions of things in themselves, are objectively valid for Kant. For a different interpretation, see H. E. Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, rev. and enlarged edition (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 173-174.

<sup>16</sup> Another occurrence of “Object” in a broad sense is in *Refl.* 6350 (1796-1798), 18:676<sub>6-10</sub>.

<sup>17</sup> *Contra* H. E. Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 147 (this passage lacks in the 2004 ed.); M. Barale, *Kant e il metodo della filosofia*, vol. 1: *Sentire ed intendere* (Pisa: ETS, 1988), pp. 278-295; H. Smit, “Kant on Marks and the Immediacy of Intuition,” *Philosophical Review*, vol. 109 (2000), pp. 239-242.

<sup>18</sup> More precisely, to say that an empirical judgment  $p$  is true is to say that  $p$  can be formulated as the result of a synthesis of the manifold of intuition according to the

transcendental laws of knowledge.

<sup>19</sup> See p. 326: “the truth of cognition is the agreement of cognition with the laws of the understanding”.

<sup>20</sup> That passage starts with the statement, “truth is the agreement of a cognition with the object” (p. 324). It illustrates an argument which presupposes that a cognition must agree with its object to be true (pp. 324-325). After that, there is the following sentence: “a) the agreement of a cognition with the object [and] b) the agreement of a cognition with itself belong to truth” (p. 325). The text explains that the agreement of a cognition with itself is a necessary, but insufficient condition for the agreement of a cognition with its object. On the whole, these statements describe truth as the agreement of a cognition with its object, and not as “the agreement of the cognition with the laws of the understanding” (p. 326).

<sup>21</sup> Kant might prefer a weaker version of this criterion. For a discussion, see my “Kant on the Comparison Argument about Truth” (forthcoming).

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., A 58/B 82; *L. Pölitz*, 24:525<sub>8-10</sub>; *Wiener L.*, 24:822.

<sup>23</sup> Nominal definitions do not entail a criterion of application: see *L. Pölitz*, 24:573<sub>20-24</sub>; *Wiener L.*, 24:919<sub>24-30</sub>; *L. Bauch*, 167<sub>555-168</sub><sub>562</sub>.

<sup>24</sup> See A 58/B 83; A 157/B 196-197; A 191/B 236; A 237/B 296; A 820/B 848; *Refl.* 2254 (1780-1789? 1776-1779??), 16:287; *L. Dohna*, 24:709<sub>29-30</sub>, 718<sub>18-20</sub>; *L. Hechsel*, 324<sub>368-369</sub>; *L. Bauch*, RT 33, p. 226; *L. Busolt*, 24:627<sub>17-28</sub>.

<sup>25</sup> See *M. Volckmann*, 28:412-414; *M. Schön*, 28:493-494; *M. L<sub>2</sub>*, 28:554-555; *M. Dohna*, 28:630; *M. K<sub>2</sub>*, 28:724; *M. Mrongovius*, 29:820-822.

<sup>26</sup> For Ralph Walker, “the principal function of the section on the postulates of empirical thinking is to adumbrate what we should nowadays call an account of truth”

(“Empirical Realism and Transcendental Anti-Realism, II,” *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, vol. 57 [1983], p. 159; see R. Walker, *The Coherence Theory of Truth*, p. 61).

<sup>27</sup> See A 597-601/B 625-629, esp. A 598-599/B 626-627: “being” “is merely the positing [*Position*] of a thing or of certain determinations in themselves.” If I “say *God is*, or there is a God, then I posit no new predicate [in relation] to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates, and indeed posit the *object* in relation to my *concept*.” In Kant’s view, the same will hold if one replaces “God” with the name of a phenomenal object. Kant constantly explains actuality as the absolute positing of an object: see *KU*, 5:402<sub>5-10</sub>; *Op. post.*, 21:571<sub>19-20</sub> = 22:549<sub>11-13</sub>; *Refl.* 6245 (about 1783-1784), 18:525<sub>5-6</sub>; *Refl.* 6276 (about 1785-1788), 18:543; *M. Volckmann*, 28:412<sub>32-37</sub>, 28:413<sub>12-18,21</sub>; *M. Schön*, 28:493<sub>37-494</sub><sub>1</sub>; *M. L<sub>2</sub>*, 28:554<sub>12-20,31-34</sub>, 28:557<sub>14-16</sub>; *M. Dohna*, 28:630<sub>2-4</sub>; *M. K<sub>2</sub>*, 28:722<sub>36-723</sub><sub>2</sub>, 723<sub>21-23</sub>; *M. Mrongovius*, 29:822<sub>8,27</sub>. An interpretation which identifies actuality with Kant’s notion of *positio*, and which classes the second postulate as a criterion of actuality, is G. Schneeberger, *Kants Konzeption der Modalbegriffe* (Basel: Verlag für Recht und Gesellschaft, 1952), pp. 65-79.