

# Kant on the Nominal Definition of Truth\*

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*Abstract:* Kant claims that the nominal definition of truth is: “Truth is the agreement of cognition with its object”. In this paper, I analyse the relevant features of Kant’s theory of definition in order to explain the meaning of that claim and its consequences for the vexed question of whether Kant endorses or rejects a correspondence theory of truth. I conclude that Kant’s claim implies neither that he holds, nor that he rejects, a correspondence theory of truth. Kant’s claim is not a generic way of setting aside a correspondence definition of truth, or of considering it uninformative. Being the nominal definition of truth, the formula “truth is the agreement of cognition with its object” illustrates the meaning of the predicate “is true” and people’s ordinary conception of truth. True judgements correspond to the objects they are about. However, there could be more to the property of truth than correspondence.

*Keywords:* truth, correspondence, definition

## 1. Introduction

An aspect of Immanuel Kant’s philosophy on which there is wide disagreement among scholars is what conception of truth Kant actually had. Various expressions he used suggest that he adhered to a correspondence theory of truth. For instance, a well-known passage in the Introduction to Transcendental Logic in the *Critique of Pure Reason* has: “[t]he nominal definition of truth, namely that it is the agreement of cognition with its object, is here granted and presupposed”<sup>1</sup>. In this passage, Kant uses the term “cognition” to designate a truth-bearer. Other passages call truth-bearers “judgements”.

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<sup>1</sup> “Die Namenerklärung der Wahrheit, daß sie nämlich die Übereinstimmung der Erkenntniß mit ihrem Gegenstande sei, wird hier geschenkt und vorausgesetzt” (A 58/B 82). See also V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 822; V-Lo/Pöhlitz, AA 24: 525.08–10; Log, AA 09: 50.01–03. Besides the standard abbreviations of *Kant-Studien* (<<http://www.kant.uni-mainz.de/ks/abhandlungen.html>>), I have used the following abbreviations:

LBauch = *Logik Bauch*. In: *Logik-Vorlesung. Unveröffentlichte Nachschriften*. Ed. Tillmann Pinder. Hamburg 1998. Vol. 1. The abbreviation “RT” indicates the marginal annotations to the main text of the LBauch.

LWarschauer = *Warschauer Logik*. In: *Logik-Vorlesung. Unveröffentlichte Nachschriften*. Vol. 2, 503–659.

Quotations are from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, except quotations of Anth. These are from the translation by Mary J. Gregor (The Hague, 1974). Quotations of the writings of Kant which have not been translated into English are mine.

Alternative interpretations of Kant's conception of truth generally argue as follows. Kant sometimes relates truth to the correspondence of judgements with objects. However, those statements cannot be the basis of Kant's Critical conception of truth. This is because, transcendental idealism is a form of idealism or of anti-realism, and only realists can subscribe to a correspondence theory of truth. Kant's conception of truth is to be defined in the following terms. A judgement is true if it coheres with the laws that the mind follows when it organizes the deliverances of the senses into a world of objects, and if it is supported by the deliverances of the senses. Endorsing a view along these lines, Kant could be a coherence theorist, a verifiabilist, an assertabilist, or he could subscribe to a combination of such theories.<sup>2</sup>

A particular issue on which there is disagreement among the interpreters is Kant's stance towards the formula "truth is the agreement of a cognition (or a judgement) with its object". I shall call it "the agreement formula". Scholars generally agree that, for Kant, the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth.<sup>3</sup> However, they have given the most diverse explanations of what this means. For those who deny that Kant has a correspondence theory of truth, his claim that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth is a generic way of minimizing its importance;<sup>4</sup> it means that the agreement formula is correct, but uninformative;<sup>5</sup> or it is "a rather tortuous and implicit way of rejecting such a

<sup>2</sup> Two passages which have been brought in support of these readings are B 479 and Prol, AA 04: 290, 337. Among the scholars who ascribe a coherentist conception of truth to Kant are: Kemp Smith, Norman: *A Commentary to Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason"*. 2nd edn. London 1923 (repr. 1991), xxxvi–xxxix, 36–38; Prauss, Gerold: *Einführung in die Erkenntnistheorie*. Darmstadt 1980, 28–37, 152–171; Walker, Ralph: *The Coherence Theory of Truth. Realism, Anti-Realism, Idealism*. London 1989, esp. 2, 158, 160. Two scholars who ascribed a verificationist or assertabilist conception of truth to Kant are Posy, Carl J.: "Where Have All the Objects Gone?" In: *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 25, 1986, supplement: esp. 20, 24, 26, 30, and Putnam, Hilary: *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge 1981, 54–74.

<sup>3</sup> Three exceptions are: Prauss, Gerold: "Zum Wahrheitsproblem bei Kant". In: *Kant-Studien* 60, 1969, 166–182; Prauss: *Einführung in die Erkenntnistheorie*, 164–166; Rohden, Valério: "Ceticismo versus condições de verdade". In: *Manuscrito* (Campinas, Brasil) 11, 1988, 87. Kant's texts do not support Prauss's and Rohden's reading. Kant often expresses his dissatisfaction of the fact that the agreement formula is not the real definition of truth, emphasizing that it is *only* a nominal definition (see V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 822.17; V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 525.08–10; Log, AA 09: 50.01–03). However, he never denies that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth (see, e.g., V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 525.08–10 = LWarschauer, 548.65–66; LBauch, 73.77–79). Even the passages in which Kant seems to question the agreement formula (e.g., Log, AA 09: 50.1–18; V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 822.16–30) do not deny that it is the nominal definition of truth.

<sup>4</sup> Some scholars downplay the importance of the agreement formula on the ground that it is only a nominal definition. See, e.g., Hofmann, Doris Vera: *Gewißheit des Fürwahrhaltens. Zur Bedeutung der Wahrheit im Fluß des Lebens nach Kant und Wittgenstein*. Berlin 2000, 40; Putnam: *Reason, Truth and History*, 63.

<sup>5</sup> See Steinbüchel, Theodor: "Das Wahrheitsproblem bei Kant". In: Joseph Geysler et al.: *Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie. Festgabe zum 60. Geburtstag Clemens Baeumker*. Münster 1913, 394; Walker, Ralph: "Empirical Realism and Transcendental Anti-Realism. II". In: *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 57*, 1983, 160; Teliz,

definition”<sup>6</sup>. According to some correspondence interpreters, Kant’s claim that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth proves that he regards the agreement formula as a genuine elucidation of the property of truth in terms of a relation of correspondence.<sup>7</sup> Other scholars do not infer that Kant has or rejects a correspondence theory of truth from his claim that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth. In their view, that claim means that the agreement formula illustrates the meaning of the predicate “is true” or the content of the concept of truth,<sup>8</sup> but it does not provide any test or criterion for establishing which cognitions are true.<sup>9</sup>

It is not hard to see the reason of these divergences: most scholars did not back their claims with a detailed analysis of what a nominal definition is for Kant.<sup>10</sup> In my view, the study of Kant’s theory of definition allows one to precisely understand the meaning of Kant’s claim that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth. In this paper, I will highlight the relevant features of Kant’s theory of definition, in order to explain the meaning of Kant’s claim and its consequences for the vexed question of whether Kant had or rejected a correspondence account of truth.

I will argue for the following view. Kant’s claim that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth is not a way of setting aside the correspondence formula, or of considering it irrelevant and uninformative. For Kant, to say that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth is to say that the agreement formula illustrates the meaning of the predicate “is true”, and the content of people’s ordinary conception of truth, but it does not provide any test for distinguishing true judgements from false judgements. The fact that the agreement for-

Roland: “Kant. Sistematicidad en la determinación de la objetividad. ¿Coherentismo criterial o concepción pragmática de la verdad?” In: *El Legado de Immanuel Kant. Actualidad y Perspectivas*. Ed. Graciela Fernández and Diego Parente. Mar del Plata, Argentina 2004, 146.

<sup>6</sup> I have borrowed this expression from Capozzi, Mirella: “Realism and Truth: Putnam and Kant”. In: *Atti del congresso Nuovi problemi della logica e della filosofia della scienza*. Ed. Domenico Costantini and Maria Carla Galavotti. Bologna 1991, 158. Capozzi rejects this interpretation of Kant’s claim. Friedrich Delekat endorses this interpretation in his *Immanuel Kant. Historisch-kritische Interpretation der Hauptschriften*. Enlarged edn. Heidelberg 1966, 42. See also Hofmeister, Heimo E. M.: “The Problem of Truth in the ‘Critique of Pure Reason’”. In: *Proceedings of the Third International Kant Congress*. Ed. Lewis White Beck. Dordrecht 1972, 316.

<sup>7</sup> Some authors mainly rely on Kant’s statements on the nominal definition of truth to argue that he has a correspondence conception of truth. See, e.g., Heidegger, Martin: *Sein und Zeit*. Ed. Friedrich Wilhelm von Herrmann. Frankfurt a. M. 1977 (based on the 7th edn. 1953), 285; Heidegger, Martin: *Nietzsche*. Ed. Brigitte Schillbach. Frankfurt a. M. 1996, 462f.; Hanna, Robert: “Kant, Truth, and Human Nature”. In: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 8, 2000, 232–234.

<sup>8</sup> See Cicovacki, Predrag: “Kant on the Nature of Truth”. In: *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress. Memphis 1995*. Ed. Hoke Robinson. Milwaukee 1995. Vol. 2, 199.

<sup>9</sup> See Nenon, Thomas: *Objektivität und endliche Erkenntnis. Kants transzendentalphilosophische Korrespondenztheorie der Wahrheit*. Freiburg i. B. 1986, 19–38.

<sup>10</sup> A noteworthy exception is Nenon: *ibid.*, 19–38.

mula is the nominal definition of truth implies that true judgements correspond to the objects they are about. However, there could be more to the property of truth than correspondence: Kant's endorsement of a correspondence nominal definition of truth does not rule out belief in other theories of truth.

I will argue for this view in Section 4. Before that, I shall provide some information on Kant's theory of definition in Section 2. In Section 3, I will illustrate the relevant features of nominal definitions. My interpretation relies on the works that Kant published, on his notes on logic, and on the transcripts of his lectures.<sup>11</sup> I will not dwell on the relationship of Kant's view with Locke's distinction between nominal essences and real essences, or with the distinctions between nominal definitions and real definitions by Kant's predecessors and contemporaries. There were very diverse conceptions of definitions, nominal definitions, and real definitions in Kant's environment.<sup>12</sup> Kant's view is irreducible to any of them.

Throughout this paper, I will follow Kant's linguistic usage in calling truth-bearers "judgements" and "cognitions". I will use these two terms interchangeably.

<sup>11</sup> *Reflexionen* and lecture transcripts must be used with special philological cautions, given their peculiar nature. See Boswell, Terry: "On the Textual Authenticity of Kant's *Logic*". In: *History and Philosophy of Logic* 9, 1988, 193–203; Conrad, Elfriede: *Kants Logikvorlesungen als neuer Schlüssel zur Architektonik der Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Die Ausarbeitung der Gliederungsentwürfe in den Logikvorlesungen als Auseinandersetzung mit der Tradition*. Stuttgart 1994, 43–65; Capozzi, Mirella: *Kant e la logica*. Vol. 1. Naples 2001, 145–182. In this paper, I will make extensive use of Kant's *Reflexionen* and lecture transcripts. In doing this, I will rely mostly on statements which can be found in more than one source: several letters, *Reflexionen*, or lecture transcripts, or *Reflexionen* and lecture transcripts alongside Kant's works and letters. I will mostly rely on material from Kant's Critical period, understood as the period which begins with the publication of the first *Critique* in 1781 and ends with Kant's death in 1804. I distinguish five degrees of reliability of Kant's materials for the purpose of understanding the views that Kant held in those years, from the most reliable down to the least reliable: works that Kant wrote and published; letters; *Reflexionen*; transcripts of lectures held in the Critical period; other transcripts and the *Jäsche Logic*. I assume the following datings for the courses on which Kant's lectures are based. V-Lo/Dohna, V-Lo/Pölitz, V-Lo/Wiener, V-MP/Dohna, V-MP-K3/Arnoldt, V-MP-L2/Pölitz, and the marginalia of LBauch are based on courses held from the early 1780s onwards. LWarschauer and PhilEnz are based on lectures given around 1780. V-Lo/Blomberg and V-Lo/Philippi are based on lectures given in the early 1770s. V-Lo/Busolt and the main text of LBauch are based on lectures given in several different years, probably including pre-Critical materials.

<sup>12</sup> For some philosophers, like Christian Wolff, a nominal definition is a "distinct enumeration of the features sufficient to recognize the defined thing and to distinguish it from others" (*Philosophia rationalis sive Logica*. Frankfurt a. M. 1740 [repr. 1983], § 197, see §§ 193f.) A real definition explains the genesis of the defined thing. A definition which illustrates the essence of the defined thing is nominal. On this view, the nominal definition of truth could indicate the essence of truth. For other authors (e.g., Walch and Crusius), it is a real definition which unfolds the essence of the defined thing. Instead, a nominal definition explains the meaning that we attach to a certain word. On this view, a nominal definition might give only a superficial or incomplete analysis of truth. Only a real definition explicates what truth ultimately is. See Walch, Johann Georg: *Philosophisches Lexicon*. 4th edn. Leipzig 1775 (repr. 1968), *sub voce* "Definition"; Crusius, Christian August: *Weg zur Gewißheit und Zuverlässigkeit der menschlichen Erkenntnis*. Leipzig 1747 (repr. 1965), § 37.

## 2. *The Features of Definitions*

The section of the Doctrine of Method of the first *Critique* on definitions begins with an explanation of the verb “to define”: “[a]s the expression itself reveals, *to define* properly means just to exhibit originally the exhaustive concept of a thing within its boundaries”<sup>13</sup>. Logic transcripts characterize a definition as a “logically perfect concept”, that is, a “distinct, complete, and precise concept”<sup>14</sup>. More accurately, definitions are distinct, complete, and precise expositions of concepts.<sup>15</sup> They are judgements which exhibit the content of concepts. Other texts indicate three more features of definitions: originality, truth, and reference to an object.<sup>16</sup> Before explaining what these features mean, I need to introduce some elements of Kant’s theory of marks.

For Kant, concepts are either simple and unanalysable, or complex and analysable. Simple concepts are, e.g., SOMETHING, BEING, and THING.<sup>17</sup> Conceptual analysis reveals the content [*Inhalt*] or intension of complex concepts. The content of a concept consists of its marks [*Merkmale, notae*]. “A mark is a partial representation insofar as it is a ground of cognition of the whole representation”<sup>18</sup>. Marks are either concepts, or intuitions. Only those marks which are concepts are relevant to Kant’s theory of definition. Hence, I shall consider only this type of

<sup>13</sup> “*Definieren* soll, wie es der Ausdruck selbst giebt, eigentlich nur so viel bedeuten, als den ausführlichen Begriff eines Dinges innerhalb seiner Grenzen ursprünglich darstellen” (A 727/B 755).

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 570.19–33; V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 756.14–19; V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 912–913; Log, AA 09: 140.25–28; Refl 2925 (1769–72?), AA 16: 578. In the passage from the Doctrine of Method, the expression “within its boundaries” indicates the requirement of precision. It recalls the etymology of “definition” from the Latin “*finis*” (boundary).

<sup>15</sup> On Kant’s concept of exposition [*Exposition, Erörterung*], see B 38; A 729/B 757; Refl 2925 (1769–72?), AA 16: 578; V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 572.09–10; Log, AA 09: 143.

<sup>16</sup> On originality, see, e.g., A 727/B 755 n.; A 730/B 758. On truth, see, e.g., V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 921.29–30; V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 570.34–35. On reference to an object, see A 729/B 757 and the end of this section.

<sup>17</sup> See V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 754.30, and V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 805.34. I use small capitals to indicate concepts wherever there is a risk of ambiguity. Kant seems to regard generality as a criterion for distinguishing simple concepts from complex concepts: SOMETHING, BEING, and THING are simple concepts because they are the most general concepts. The *Jäsche Logic* classes REPRESENTATION as a simple concept for a different reason: because we can define a representation only by employing other representations (AA 09: 34.05–07; see V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 752.02–03; LBauch, RT 19, 222). I will leave it to the readers to judge whether this argument is convincing.

<sup>18</sup> “Ein Merkmal ist eine Teilvorstellung, sofern es ein Erkenntnisgrund der ganzen Vorstellung ist.” (V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 725). See also Refl 2283 (1776–89?), AA 16: 299; LBauch, RT 58, 235; Log, AA 09: 58.14–17, based on Refl 2279 (about 1770–78), AA 16: 297–298; Refl 2282 (1776–89?), AA 16: 298. On marks as grounds of knowledge, see also V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 533.25–26; V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 824.03–04; V-MP/Dohna, AA 24: 630.28. On marks as partial representations, see also Refl 2286 (about 1780–89), AA 16: 299–300; V-Lo/Busolt, AA 24: 633.36.

marks.<sup>19</sup> They are partial representations, because they jointly constitute the content of complex concepts. For instance, the concept PHILOSOPHER could have among its marks HUMAN BEING, SEEKER OF WISDOM, ANIMAL, and RATIONAL. Marks are grounds of cognition of concepts because, in order to know the content of a complex concept, one needs to know which marks it has.

Marks are either necessary, or contingent. “Necessary marks cannot be separated at all from the concept of a thing”.<sup>20</sup> To separate a mark from a concept means to deny that it belongs to that concept. The concept B is a necessary mark of the concept C if one cannot deny with a true judgement that an object which falls under C has the feature designated by B. If B is a contingent mark of C, one can deny with a true judgement that an object which falls under C has the feature designated by B. For instance, OLD and HUMAN BEING could both be marks of John’s concept of philosopher. One can deny with a true judgement that a certain philosopher is old, hence OLD is a contingent mark of John’s concept of philosopher. One cannot deny with a true judgement that a philosopher is a human being, hence HUMAN BEING is a necessary mark of PHILOSOPHER.<sup>21</sup>

Necessary marks are either mediate, or immediate. Given a complex concept C, some of its necessary marks are also marks of other necessary marks. Kant calls them mediate marks. For instance, ANIMAL and RATIONAL are marks of PHILOSOPHER, but they are also marks of HUMAN BEING, which is in turn a mark of PHILOSOPHER. Hence, ANIMAL and RATIONAL are mediate marks of PHILOSOPHER. A mark of C which is not in turn a mark of a mark of C is an immediate mark of C. Necessary immediate marks are called *essentialia*. Necessary mediate marks are called *attributa*.<sup>22</sup>

The essence of a concept, or logical essence, is “the complex of all marks that first constitute a certain concept”<sup>23</sup>. It is the conjunction of all its *essentialia*, or, on a more liberal reading, the conjunction of all its *essentialia* and *attributa*.<sup>24</sup> For

<sup>19</sup> On intuitive marks, see Smit, Huston: “Kant on Marks and the Immediacy of Intuition”. In: *Philosophical Review* 109, 2000, 254–256.

<sup>20</sup> “Nothwendige Merkmahe können vom Begriff eines Dinges gar nicht getrennet werden” (V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 838; see ÜE, AA 08: 236–237 n.; V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 535.10–13; V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 727).

<sup>21</sup> Log, AA 09: 60, and Refl 2310 (1752–56), AA 16: 310, characterize contingent marks in a different way, which is in contrast to MSI, AA 02: 417.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 838.27–839.02; V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 535.15–23; V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 727.24–38. Kant distinguishes analytic and synthetic *attributa* in ÜE, AA 08: 229–230. Analytic *attributa* are the ones I described. Synthetic *attributa* are necessary marks of a concept which are neither included in its essence, nor entailed by the *essentialia*. They belong to objects in virtue of the synthetic a priori conditions of experience. For instance, PERMANENCE is a synthetic *attributum* of SUBSTANCE in virtue of the first analogy of experience.

<sup>23</sup> “[...] den Inbegrif aller Merkmahe, die einen gewissen Begriff zuerst ausmachen” (V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 839; see Log, AA 09: 61).

<sup>24</sup> Kant states that *essentialia*, but not *attributa*, are constitutive parts [*Bestandstücke, constitutiva*] of the logical essence. However, *essentialia* as well as *attributa* belong [*gehören, pertinent*] to the logical essence. *Essentialia* belong to the logical essence as its constitutive parts. *Attributa* belong to the logical essence as consequences [*Folgen, rationata*] of the

Kant, as we shall see, the content of our concepts does not always capture the most basic features of the items which fall within their extension. The essential marks of our concept of water might not designate the essential features of water. As a consequence, the essence of concepts should not be mistaken for the essence of things, or real essence. Real essence is “the primary *inner* ground of all that necessarily belongs to a given thing”<sup>25</sup>.

Now we can turn to Kant’s list of the features of definitions. The first feature is distinctness. A concept is clear to someone if one is conscious of the difference between that concept and some other concept.<sup>26</sup> A concept is distinct to someone if its marks are clear, that is, if one is able to distinguish its marks from each other.<sup>27</sup> A definition is distinct if it distinguishes, or enumerates, the marks of a concept.

Kant mentions two types of distinctness: extensive distinctness and intensive distinctness (also called profundity or thoroughness [*Gründlichkeit*]). A concept is extensively distinct to someone if one is able to distinguish its *essentialia*. A concept is intensively distinct to someone if one is able to distinguish its *essentialia* and *attributa*.<sup>28</sup>

A definition should be extensively distinct, but it should not be intensively distinct. It should enumerate the *essentialia* of a concept, but it should not enumerate its *attributa*, their *essentialia* and *attributa*, and so on.<sup>29</sup>

*essentialia*. See, e.g., ÜE, AA 08: 299; V-Lo/Pölitz, AA 24: 535.19–23; V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 727.24–31, 728.04–08; V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 838.39–839.02; V-Lo/Busolt, AA 24: 634.38–635.09; LBauch, RT 61, 236. This explanation only fits analytic *attributa*, because synthetic *attributa* cannot be derived from the *essentialia*. See Capozzi, *Kant e la logica*. Vol. 1, 512–518.

<sup>25</sup> “[...] der erste *innere* Grund alles dessen, was einem gegebenen Dinge nothwendig zukommt” (Br to Reinhold, 12 May 1789, AA 11: 36). Kant’s distinction between logical essence and real essence recalls Locke’s distinction between nominal essence and real essence, as Reinhard Brandt noted. See his “Materialien zur Entstehung der *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (John Locke und Johann Schultz)”. In: *Beiträge zur Kritik der reinen Vernunft 1781–1981*. Ed. Ingeborg Heidemann and Wolfgang Ritzel. Berlin 1981, 48; cf. Tillmann Pinder’s footnote in LBauch, 112.

<sup>26</sup> This definition of clarity is originally from Kant. Kant adopts it because he is dissatisfied with Meier’s definition of clarity. See Meier, Georg Friedrich: *Vernunftlehre*. Ed. Günter Schenk. Halle/Saale 1997 (based on the 1752 edn.), § 80; Meier, Georg Friedrich: *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre*. Halle 1752 (repr. in AA 16), § 124; and Kant’s criticism in B 415 n. and Anth, AA 07: 137. Nevertheless, one can find Meier’s definition of clarity in several Kantian texts, such as V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 805.19f. and Refl 1677 (1750s), AA 16: 79. On the difference between Kant’s theory of definition and the theories of Leibniz, Wolff, and Meier, see Pelletier, Arnaud: “La théorie kantienne de la définition dans les *Leçons de logique*”. In: *Les sources de la philosophie kantienne aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XXVII<sup>e</sup> siècles*. Ed. Robert Theis and Lukas K. Sosoe. Paris 2005, 175–184.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., V-Lo/Pölitz, AA 24: 536.35–36, 540.12; V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 702.20–21; V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 805.27–28, 834.12–13, 841.39–842.1, 847.15; Log, AA 09: 62.01–02. Simple concepts have no marks, so it is impossible to know them distinctly. See V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 805, and V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 702, *contra* Leibniz, Georg Wilhelm: *Meditationes de Cognitione, Veritate et Ideis*. In his *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*. Ed. Leibniz-Forschungsstelle der Universität Münster. 6th Series. Vol. 4. Berlin 1999, 587.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., V-Lo/Pölitz, AA 24: 540.7–25; V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 835.18–21, 847.15–28.

<sup>29</sup> See V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 834.30–36, 913.21–24; V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 759.18–20.

The second feature of definitions is completeness, and more precisely, *extensive* completeness. To say that a definition is extensively complete means to say that it enumerates all the *essentialia* of the defined concept.<sup>30</sup>

The third feature of definitions is precision. The exposition of a concept is precise if no one of the marks it mentions is analytically entailed in another,<sup>31</sup> and if it does not mention any mark more than once.<sup>32</sup>

A complete and precise exposition of a concept is called adequate.<sup>33</sup> Definitions are adequate expositions of concepts (or, as Kant sometimes writes, adequate concepts). An exposition of a concept which is not complete or precise is called a description.<sup>34</sup>

The fourth feature of definitions is originality. The exposition of a concept is either original, or derived. The exposition of a concept is original if it mentions its *essentialia*.<sup>35</sup> If HUMAN BEING is an *essentiale* of PHILOSOPHER, and RATIONAL is a mark of HUMAN BEING, an original exposition of PHILOSOPHER will mention HUMAN BEING, but not RATIONAL. An exposition of PHILOSOPHER which mentions RATIONAL will be derived. In fact, one can infer that philosophers are rational from the statement that philosophers are human beings.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> By contrast, a definition should not be *intensively* complete. The exposition of a concept is intensively complete if it mentions all of its marks, including its *essentialia* and also its *attributa*. Definitions should not mention the *attributa* of the defined concept. Brigitta-Sophie von Wolff-Metternich noted that definitions need be extensively complete, but not intensively complete, in her book *Die Überwindung des mathematischen Erkenntnisideals. Kants Grenzbestimmung von Mathematik und Philosophie*. Berlin 1995, 144 n. 10.

<sup>31</sup> In this regard, precision is the counterpart of exhaustiveness. See V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 912.36–913.05.

<sup>32</sup> Kant does not usually include the absence of synonyms or repeated terms among the requirements for precision. He only requires that no mark is analytically entailed in another (e.g., in V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 912.36–913.05; V-Lo/Blomberg, AA 24: 264.11–16). Nevertheless, I take a definition which mentions a mark more than once to be imprecise, because it contains superfluous elements.

<sup>33</sup> See V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 913; V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 540.17–18; LBauch, RT 70, 240; Log, AA 09: 63.07–09, *contra* Leibniz's, Wolff's, and Meier's definitions of adequacy: cf. Leibniz, *Meditationes de Cognitione, Veritate et Ideis*, 587; Wolff, *Philosophia rationalis sive Logica*, § 95; and Meier, *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre*, § 147.

<sup>34</sup> The following passages ascribe incompleteness or imprecision to descriptions: Refl 2956 (about 1776–89), AA 16: 586; V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 572.20–22; V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 758.07–09, 760.24–25; V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 917.24–25; LBauch, 158; V-Lo/Philippi, AA 24: 455.18–21; Log, AA 09: 143.04–05. According to V-Lo/Blomberg, AA 24: 267.37–268.03, a description is “comparatively complete”, and a definition is “absolutely complete”.

<sup>35</sup> See A 727/B 755 n., A 730/B 758. As we have seen above, a definition is extensively distinct if it mentions the *essentialia* of the defined concept. Hence, every original exposition is also extensively distinct, and vice versa.

<sup>36</sup> “Ursprünglich”, the German word for “original”, is the translation of the Latin term “primitivus”. Definitions are original [*ursprünglich*] because they mention the *essentialia* of concepts, and these belong primitively [*ursprünglich*] to their essence. Expositions which mention *attributa* are called derived [*abgeleitet*] for two reasons: because they mention derived [*abgeleitete*] marks, and because it is possible to deduce [*ableiten*] those expositions from expositions which mention only the *essentialia*. On the present reading, definitions need not only mention simple marks.



A definition, considered as a sentence, should be true. A definition should not only indicate all *essentialia* of the *definiendum* in the most economical way. It should also avoid ascribing to the *definiendum* marks that it does not possess.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, a definition should be a definition of an object. A distinct, complete, precise, original, and true exposition of a concept with an empty extension is not a definition in proper sense for Kant. He writes that “I can always define” concepts like MERMAID, which result from the arbitrary combination of features of experienced objects. In this case, however, “from the concept I do not even know whether it has an object, and *my explanation could better be called a declaration (of my project) than a definition of an object*”<sup>38</sup>. Elsewhere, Kant states that only real definitions, that is, definitions of concepts with a non-empty extension, are definitions in proper sense.<sup>39</sup> Nominal definitions are actually only descriptions, that is, incomplete or imprecise definitions of concepts.<sup>40</sup>

We have seen that definitions are extensively distinct, complete, precise, original, and true expositions of concepts. In addition, at least one object must fall within the extension of the defined concept.

<sup>37</sup> See V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 921.29–30; V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 570.34–354. Checking whether a definition is a true sentence is one of the operations that Kant recommends to examine definitions. See, e.g., V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 759.03; V-Lo/Busolt, AA 24: 659.14–15; Log, AA 09: 145; V-Lo/Philippi, AA 24: 458.18; Refl 2980 (1764–70?), AA 16: 599.01. Kant distinguishes the truth of a definition as a sentence (*als Satz*, that is, more precisely, as an assertoric judgement) from the truth of a definition as a definition. A definition is true as a definition if it is a true sentence and it is also distinct, complete, and precise. For instance, “ground is that on the basis of which I cognize why something is” (“Grund is das, woraus ich erkenne, warum etwas sey”) is a true sentence, but it is a false definition, because it is not distinct. It is tautological, because “*why* means as much as *through which ground*” (“*warum* heißt so viel, als *durch welchen Grund*”: V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 921).

<sup>38</sup> “[...] ich weiß daraus [aus dem Begriff] nicht einmal, ob er überall einen Gegenstand habe, und *meine Erklärung kann besser eine Declaration (meines Projects) als Definition eines Gegenstandes heißen*” (A 729/B 757, italics added).

<sup>39</sup> See V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 919.24–31; V-Lo/Philippi, AA 24: 460.04–05. Nenon claimed that Kant identifies definitions with real definitions (*Objektivität und endliche Erkenntnis*, 20–35). See also Capozzi, Mirella: “Kant on Mathematical Definitions”. In: *Italian Studies in the Philosophy of Science*. Ed. Maria Luisa Dalla Chiara. Dordrecht 1980, 429.

<sup>40</sup> See V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 758.06–09, 760.13–14; Refl 3005 (1776–78), AA 16: 610; V-Lo/Busolt, AA 24: 659.01–04. Passages in the *Reflexionen* and logic lectures claim that it is not possible to define empirical concepts, but only to describe them (see A 727/B 755; Refl 2949, 2951, 2957, 2959, 2961 [all 1776–89], AA 17: 584–587; V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 572.39–573.1, 574.04–05, 574.9f.; V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 920.37–38; V-Lo/Busolt, AA 24: 657.5–10, 658.19f.) Other passages claim that it is possible to formulate nominal definitions, but not real definitions, of empirical concepts (see Refl 2945 [1776–1804?], AA 16: 583; Refl 2994 [1770s], AA 16: 606.22–26; Refl 2995 [1770s], AA 16: 607.16–17; LBauch, RT 126, 260). In certain cases, both claims are very close to each other (in Refl 2936 [1770s], cf. AA 16: 581.05–06. with 581.10–11 and 581.21–22; in V-Lo/Philippi, cf. AA 24: 457.01–02 and 460.09–11 with 460.21–22 and 459.30; in LBauch, cf. 158.319–159.323 with 159.341–160.346 and 162.404f.) If nominal definitions were truly definitions, these statements would be conflicting. Kant’s texts will be consistent if nominal definitions are descriptions. Moreover, it is possible to interpret A 727/B 755 as implying that nominal definitions are actually descriptions.

### 3. *Nominal Definitions and Real Definitions*

Kant usually illustrates what nominal definitions are by contrasting them with real definitions. Two contrapositions between nominal definitions and real definitions are important to understand Kant's claim that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth. Firstly, nominal definitions explain the meaning of words. Real definitions illustrate the essence of things. Secondly, nominal definitions do not provide any test to distinguish items which fall under the defined concept from those which do not. Real definitions provide such a test.

#### 3.1 Definitions of Names and Definitions of Things

"Nominal definition" [Namenserklärung] literally means "definition of a name". For Kant, nominal definitions explain the meaning of words, and real definitions illustrate the essence of things. This distinction suggests that nominal definitions do not illustrate the essence of things. In what follows, I shall explain in what sense nominal definitions are "definitions of names", and why they are not a source of knowledge of the essence of things. To start, I will provide some information on Kant's conception of the relationship between words, concepts, and the essence of things.

Words express concepts and refer to things.<sup>41</sup> Words are not symbols, whose shape (in the case of written words) or sound (in the case of spoken words) reproduces features of things.<sup>42</sup> They are "signs which contain nothing at all belonging to the intuition of the object"<sup>43</sup>. This implies that the link between words and concepts is not natural, but arbitrary.

Words do not express the whole of our concepts. Words express the logical essence of concepts:

When I utter words and combine a certain concept with them, then that which I think of in connection with this word and expression is *the logical essence*. E.g., if I utter the word matter, then everything that is inseparable from the concept that I combine with the expression matter is the logical essence of matter. [...] Thus, e.g., with matter, I always think of an extension, an impenetrability, a certain constant inertia, and lifelessness, so that it is not capable of altering its position or of moving by itself but only through the assistance of another, foreign power.

<sup>41</sup> Kant's terminology is slightly different. Kant usually writes that words designate concepts, or stand for concepts. More precisely, written words stand for articulate sounds (see Anth, AA 07: 192.21–22), and articulate sounds stand for concepts (see Anth, AA 07: 155.22–25). Kant does not mean that words refer to concepts. For him, we normally use language to talk about things in the world, and not about concepts in our mind. E. J. Lowe made the same remark with reference to Locke's statement that words signify, or stand for, ideas in the mind of the speakers. See Lowe, E. J.: *Locke on Human Understanding*. London 1995, 148–153.

<sup>42</sup> See Anth, AA 07: 155, 191. Mathematical terms are exceptions, because they are symbols (see A 734/B 762).

<sup>43</sup> "[...] Zeichen, die gar nichts zu der Anschauung des Objects Gehöriges enthalten" (KU, AA 05: 352).

These all are the *essentialia* of the word [sic] *matter*, and consequently taken together they constitute the logical essence of it.<sup>44</sup>

For Kant, so to say, concepts are in the head: they are mental entities, and their content depends on people's thoughts. People sometimes associate the same word with concepts which have differing intensions. "Thus with the concept of *gold* one person might think, besides its weight, color, and ductility, or its property of not rusting, while another might know nothing about this".<sup>45</sup> The content of a concept can also change across time: "[o]ne makes use of certain marks only as long as they are sufficient for making distinctions; new observations, however, take some away and add some"<sup>46</sup>. People can refine their concepts through empirical research and introspection.

The concept that a particular person associates with a certain word is what we would call a speaker's meaning of that word. Let us call the concept that people usually associate with a certain word its literal meaning. What Kant calls the meaning of a term is not its speaker's meaning, but rather its literal meaning. In fact, Kant writes that "common usage [...] establishes the meaning of words"<sup>47</sup>. Therefore, the meaning of the word "truth" reflects people's ordinary conception of truth.

Everybody should use words according to their commonly accepted meaning: "[o]ne must not introduce new [literally: one's own] meanings for old words"<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> "Wenn ich Wörter ausspreche, und mit denselben einen gewissen Begriff verbinde so ist das, was ich bey diesem Worte, und Ausdruck hier dencke, *das Logische Wesen*. Z. E. wenn ich das Wort *Materie* ausspreche, so ist alles das, was unzertrennlich ist von dem Begriffe, welchen ich mit dem Ausdruck *Materie* verbinde, das *Logische Wesen* von der *Materie*. [...] Also z. E. bey der *Materie* dencke ich mir allemahl eine Ausdehnung, eine Undurchdringlichkeit, eine gewisse beständige Trägheit, und Leblösigkeit, so daß sie ihren Ort zu verändern, oder vor sich zu bewegen nicht im Stande ist, sondern nur durch das Zuthuen einer anderen fremden Kraft. / Dieses alles sind die *Essentialia* des Worts *Materie*, und machen folglich zusammengenommen das *Logische Wesen* derselben aus" (V-Lo/Blomberg, AA 24: 116; trans. modified). See Refl 3966 (1769), AA 17: 369; V-Lo/Philippi, AA 24: 456.19–20. These texts reflect Kant's thought of the 1760s and 1770s. I believe that these texts are in line with Kant's Critical thought. However, I did not find any text from 1780 onwards which exactly and clearly makes the same point as the cited passages.

<sup>45</sup> "So kann der eine im Begriffe vom *Golde* sich außer dem Gewichte, der Farbe, der Zähigkeit noch die Eigenschaft, daß es nicht rostet, denken, der andere davon vielleicht nichts wissen" (A 728/B 756, trans. modified).

<sup>46</sup> "Man bedient sich gewisser Merkmale nur so lange, als sie zum Unterscheiden hinreichend sind; neue Bemerkungen dagegen nehmen welche weg und setzen einige hinzu" (ibid.).

<sup>47</sup> "Der gewöhnliche Gebrauch bestimmt die Bedeutung der Worte" (Refl 3409 [1760–75?], AA 16: 818). A text of the early 1760s makes the same statement for philosophical terms: UDGTM, AA 02: 284. The distinction between literal meaning and speaker's meaning has been introduced by Paul Grice. See his papers "Utterer's Meaning and Intentions" and "Meaning". In Grice, Paul: *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, Mass. 1989, 86–116, 213–223. Grice distinguishes literal meaning and speaker's meaning of sentences. Here, I distinguish literal meaning and speaker's meaning of words.

<sup>48</sup> "Man muß keine eigne Bedeutungen alter Worte [...] aufbringen" (Refl 3409 [1760–75?], AA 16: 818–819). The Refl goes on: "*Verba valent sicut numi; a nomos: Gesetz*". The proverb means "words are valid like coins". Kant recalls the derivation of the Latin

One who associated a word with a concept fully different from the concept that people usually associate with that word would violate the tacit convention which fixes the meaning of that word.

Often, the content of our concepts does not reflect all basic properties of the things which fall within their extension. This is the case for empirical concepts and a priori concepts.

Kant, like Locke, holds that humans cannot know the essence of material objects.<sup>49</sup> We know only some of their features, which are sufficient to identify those objects and to distinguish them from other objects we have come across so far. Our concepts of material objects mention only those features. They do not describe the real essence of material objects.

There are other problems with regard to concepts given a priori, like SUBSTANCE, CAUSE, GOD, SOUL, and EQUITY. Let us consider the example of CAUSE. For Kant, objects of experience entertain causal relations insofar as we apply the concepts of cause and consequence to the data of sensibility. Causal relations depend, at least in part, on the application of the concepts of cause and consequence to the data of sensibility. Features of causal relations are instantiations of the marks of the concept of cause. However, we acquire and apply the concept of cause in ways which do not require an awareness of its content.<sup>50</sup> We might be only partially aware of the content of the concept of cause. Our concept of cause “can contain many obscure representations, which we pass by in our analysis though we always use them in application”<sup>51</sup>. The basic marks that we individuate in the concept of cause can differ from the basic marks that a complete analysis of the concept of cause would reveal, and, consequently, from the basic features of causal relations.<sup>52</sup>

“numus” (coin) from the ancient Greek “nomos” (law). The link between a word and the concept it expresses has the value of an inviolable law [*Gesetz*]. See Capozzi: *Kant e la logica*. Vol. 1, 164–166, 510.

<sup>49</sup> See Br to Reinhold, 12 May 1789, AA 11: 36.31–37.13; V-M/Mron, AA 29: 821.19–21; V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 728.27–29; V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 839.38–840.5; V-MP-L2/Pölitz, AA 28: 554; Log, AA 09: 61.15–17. For Kant, humans can know neither the essences of things in themselves, nor the essences of phenomenal objects in space and time. For Locke’s claim, see his *Essay*, e.g. III.ii.17–20.

<sup>50</sup> On Kant’s claim that concepts given a priori are not innate, but acquired, see ÜE, AA 08: 221.24–36; V-MP-K3/Arnoldt, AA 29: 951f.; and Oberhausen, Michael: *Das neue Apriori. Kants Lehre von einer ursprünglicher Erwerbung apriorischer Vorstellungen*. Stuttgart 1997. Kant calls the concept of cause a given concept because its acquisition does not require the exercise of our will. We do not arbitrarily compose by ourselves, like the concept of mermaid.

<sup>51</sup> “[...] viel dunkle Vorstellungen enthalten kann, die wir in der Zergliederung übergehen, ob wir sie zwar in der Anwendung jederzeit brauchen” (A 728/B 756).

<sup>52</sup> Kant’s argument (A 728–729/B 756–757) rests on a tacit distinction between the concept of cause in itself (i.e., in the totality of its constitutive marks), and the concept of cause as analysed by us (i.e., those marks of the concepts of cause of which we are aware). As Nenon notes, “[t]he term ‘concept’ is equivocal in this respect. On the one hand, it designates that which one more or less immediately understands with one’s words: the immediate representation that one has. On the other hand, and in a stronger sense, it designates that which one should correctly think” (*Objektivität und endliche Erkenntnis*, 30).

Now we have all the elements to help us understand Kant's characterization of nominal definitions as definitions of names:

- Nominal definitions “signify [...] the logical essence of their objects”<sup>53</sup>. They illustrate the essence of our concepts, as opposed to concepts fully adequate to the essence of things.<sup>54</sup> More precisely, nominal definitions indicate the essence of those concepts which people usually associate with words, as opposed to the concepts which each single person may connect with words.
- As logical essences are the meanings of words, and the link between words and logical essences is arbitrary, nominal definitions “contain the meaning that one wanted arbitrarily to give to a certain name”<sup>55</sup> or word.
- Kant's sharp separation of logical essences from real essences, together with the impossibility of knowing real essences, implies that nominal definitions do not enable one to “have better insight into the thing itself”<sup>56</sup>. They do not reveal the essence of things, which cannot be known, and they do not reveal those marks of a priori concepts that we overlooked in our analysis. They do not yield any information about objects which is not contained in our concepts. In effect, unless they stipulate the meaning of a new term, nominal definitions are analytic judgements,<sup>57</sup> whereas only synthetic judgements enlarge knowledge.<sup>58</sup>

If Kant's view is correct, then we find ourselves in the following position. Nominal definitions illustrate the content of the concepts associated with certain words. The extension of a concept is determined by its content. It is the set of the objects which have the features designated by the marks of the concept. As a consequence, nominal definitions indicate features which the objects that fall within the extension of the defined concepts actually possess. As Kant's nominal definition of truth is “truth is the agreement of a cognition with its object”, true judgements do agree with their objects.

On the other hand, in many cases, the features that nominal definitions indicate are not essential features of the objects which fall under the defined concepts. Something other than conceptual analysis is required to disclose the essential features of water, space, causal relationships, and maybe even the essence of truth.

<sup>53</sup> “[...] das logische Wesen ihres Gegenstandes bezeichnen” (Log, AA 09: 143).

<sup>54</sup> See V-Lo/Blomberg, AA 24: 268.12–18.

<sup>55</sup> “[...] die Bedeutung enthalten, die man willkürlich einem gewissen Namen hat geben wollen” (Log, AA 09: 143, based on Refl 3003 [1770s], AA 16: 610). See also an addition, probably from 1776–78 or 1790–1804, to Refl 3006, AA 16: 611.8; Refl 2919 (1764–71?), AA 16: 576.16; Refl 2936 (1770s), AA 16: 581.15–18; Refl 2941 (1776–78), AA 16: 582; Refl 2995 (1769–77?), AA 16: 607.10–11; V-Lo/Blomberg, AA 24: 271.15–26; V-Lo/Philippi, AA 24: 457.09–10.

<sup>56</sup> “die Sache selbst [...] besser einzusehen” (V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 919).

<sup>57</sup> Arbitrary stipulations of the meaning of new terms are expressed by synthetic judgements: see Refl 3007 (1776–1804), AA 16: 611. Real definitions are synthetic judgements, as noted by Mellin, Georg Samuel Albert: *Encyklopädisches Wörterbuch der kritischen Philosophie*, Jena 1797–1804, *sub voce* “Sacherklärung”, and by White Beck, Lewis: “Kant's Theory of Definition”, in his *Selected Essays on Kant*. Ed. Hoke Robinson, Rochester, NY 2002, 182.

<sup>58</sup> See Prol, AA 04: 266–267.

This could be empirical research, or an inquiry into the a priori conditions of human knowledge. If we want to get as close as possible to knowing the essence of water, we do not have to analyse our concept of water, but engage in empirical research. If we want to know the features of space, we have to inquire into the conditions of possibility of experience and geometry. Only this inquiry can enable us to know that space is a form of intuition,<sup>59</sup> and this is a fundamental feature of space according to Kant. Similarly, an analysis of the a priori conditions of empirical knowledge might disclose important features of true judgements about empirical objects, which are not contained in our concept of truth.

### 3.2 Nominal Definitions, Real Definitions, and Criteria of Application

In Kant's view, real definitions provide criteria for distinguishing items which fall under the defined concept from items which do not. Nominal definitions do not provide such criteria.

According to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, a real definition “contains in itself a clear *mark* by means of which the *object (definitum)* can always be securely cognized, and that makes the defined concept usable in application”<sup>60</sup>. Kant holds that real definitions mention all the essential features of the items which fall under the *definiendum*. For instance, the real definition of gold (provided it is possible to formulate it<sup>61</sup>) lists all the essential features of gold. An item is made of gold if and only if it has all the features which are listed in the real definition of gold. Therefore, the real definition of concept A provides a sort of checklist that we can employ to establish whether any given item is an item of kind *a*. The real definition of gold enables one to distinguish real gold from fool's gold, and from any other item which is not gold. The real definition of water enables one to distinguish terrestrial water from Twin Earth water, and from any other substance which is not really water.

Nominal definitions do not provide any criterion for the application of the defined concepts. “Nominal definitions can be only comparatively sufficient. By means of them one cannot distinguish the thing from all possible things, but one [can] certainly [do this] through the marks which, taken together, make up the whole essence”.<sup>62</sup> “Only those marks which, taken together, constitute the whole essence of the thing can suffice absolutely [to distinguish the thing from all possible other things], for the whole essence of the thing cannot be – common to two things.

<sup>59</sup> See, e.g., Prolegomena, AA 04: 322.02.

<sup>60</sup> “[...] ein klares *Merkmal*, daran der *Gegenstand (definitum)* jederzeit sicher erkannt werden kann, und den erklärten Begriff zur Anwendung brauchbar macht, in sich enthält” (A 241 n.; transl. modified).

<sup>61</sup> In fact, according to Kant, it is not possible to formulate real definitions outside mathematics. See A 729–730/B 757–758.

<sup>62</sup> “Die nominal Definitionen können doch nur bloß comparativ zureichend seyn. Mann kann durch sie die Sache nicht von allen möglichen unterscheiden, aber wol durch die Merkmale die zusammen genommen das ganze Wesen ausmachen” (V-Lo/Pöhlitz, AA 24: 573; see Refl 3006 [1776–89], AA 16: 611).

And this is a real definition”.<sup>63</sup> “Should a definition contain the difference from all possible concepts [...]. Then it should be nominal and also real definition”.<sup>64</sup>

From these quotations, it follows that the nominal definition of gold might not suffice to tell real gold from fool’s gold. The nominal definition of water might not suffice to tell terrestrial water from Twin Earth water. Only real definitions indicate marks which suffice to distinguish the objects falling under the defined concept from any other possible object.<sup>65</sup>

What are the limits of the discriminatory capacity of nominal definitions? They could discriminate objects which fall under the defined concepts from all other objects we got to know so far, or from the objects we usually encounter in our experience. A marginal annotation to the *Logic Bauch* supports the first hypothesis.<sup>66</sup> The main text of the *Logic Bauch* is in line with the second hypothesis.<sup>67</sup> Kant does not seem to be concerned with explaining the precise limits of the discriminatory capacity of nominal definitions, but rather, with emphasizing the existence of those limits.

#### 4. *What Does It Mean To Say that the Agreement Formula is the Nominal Definition of Truth?*

The analysis of the features of definitions, nominal definitions, and real definitions allows us to determine the meaning and implications of Kant’s claim that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth.

*The agreement formula illustrates the meaning of the predicate “is true”.* Nominal definitions explain the meaning of words. When competent speakers say that a judgement is true, they mean that it agrees with the object it is about. For Kant, meanings are arbitrary. Common linguistic usage arbitrarily established the meaning of “is true”. If one gave a different meaning to “is true” (say, belonging to a maximally coherent set of beliefs, or being consistent with the laws of transcendental logic and being supported by the deliverances of the senses), one would

<sup>63</sup> “Nur diejenigen Merkmale können absolut hinreichen, die zusammen genommen das ganze Wesen der Sache ausmachen, denn das ganze Wesen der Sache kann nicht – zwey Dingen gemein seyn. Und dieses ist denn die real definition” (V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 919).

<sup>64</sup> “Soll eine Definizion den Unterschied von allen möglichen Begriffen enthalten, [...]. Sie muß also nominal und auch real Definizion seyn” (V-Lo/Busolt, AA 24: 658). See also LBauch, 167f.; Refl 2997 (1769–78?), AA 16: 608.

<sup>65</sup> As Kant’s lecture notes put it, the sufficiency of nominal definitions is only a “limited external sufficiency”. Their validity is “only comparative”. “E.g., when I say that man is an animal that has the faculty of speech. Here I can differentiate him from all animals (but not from the starling). Nonetheless, the concept is sufficient in comparison with other animals” (“Z. B. wenn ich sage: der Mensch ist ein Thier, das Vermögen zu sprechen hat. Hier kann ich ihn von allen Thieren (doch aber noch nicht vom Staar) unterscheiden. Indessen ist der Begriff in Vergleichung mit andern Thieren schon zureichend”: V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 919). See V-Lo/Pölitiz, AA 24: 573.38–574.2; Refl 3006 (1776–89), AA 16: 611; and Log, AA 09: 143.31; cf. MS, AA 06: 248.

<sup>66</sup> See LBauch, RT 126, 260.105–107.

<sup>67</sup> See LBauch, 168.565–568.

diverge from common linguistic usage. Kant does not allow such a deviation: this would be tantamount to using “is true” in a wrong way.<sup>68</sup>

The fact that Kant calls the agreement formula the nominal definition of truth does not mean or imply that he rejects the agreement formula.<sup>69</sup> As “judgement *p* is true” means “judgement *p* corresponds with the object(s) it is about”, *true judgements correspond with the objects they are about*.<sup>70</sup> More precisely, all true judgements and only true judgements correspond with the objects they are about. “Truth is agreement of a cognition with the object it is about” is a true identity claim, unless further reflection proves the agreement formula to be inconsistent. Even if this were the case, the fact that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth would not mean or imply that it is false.

The only sense in which it is correct to say that Kant rejects the agreement formula is that he rejects it as a proper definition. For Kant, the agreement formula is only a nominal definition, as opposed to a real definition, and only real definitions are definitions in proper sense.<sup>71</sup>

*The concept of truth is analysable.* The agreement formula is a nominal definition. Nominal definitions, like definitions in general, have the feature of distinctness: they make explicit which concepts jointly make up the content of the defined concept.<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, the nominal definition of truth indicates marks of the concept of truth. If the concept of truth has marks, it will not be primitive, simple, and unanalysable, as Kant’s contemporary Johann Heinrich Lambert and, more recently, Donald Davidson claimed.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> See Capozzi: *Kant e la logica*. Vol. 1, 503.

<sup>69</sup> *Contra* the scholars cited at n. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Kant generally uses the verb “to agree” (*übereinstimmen*), rather than “to correspond”. I used “to correspond” because Kant’s *Übereinstimmung* is a truth-making relation between objects and judgements, and such a relation is normally called correspondence in the literature on truth. It is not a relation of coherence, because coherence holds between semantically evaluable items, yet objects are not semantically evaluable for Kant. On his use of “*Übereinstimmung*” and related terms, see Nenon, Thomas: “Limitations of a Coherence Theory of Truth in Kant’s Critical Philosophy”. In: *International Studies in Philosophy* 26/2, 1994, 33–50.

<sup>71</sup> See 11.

<sup>72</sup> On distinctness, see Section 2. Kant ascribes distinctness to nominal definitions in V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 919.4. Three texts previous to 1781 deny that nominal definitions are distinct: Refl 2941 (about 1776–78), AA 16: 582; Refl 2980 (1764–70?), AA 16: 599.15–18; V-Lo/Philippi, AA 24: 459.34–37. Accordingly, a passage in the *Enzyklopädie Vorlesung* claims that the nominal definition of truth is tautological (AA 29: 20.25–27). In my view, this is not the official position of the Critical Kant. His conception of truth of the 1770s differs from his conception of truth of the 1780s in other respects as well, as Thomas Nenon argued (*Objektivität und endliche Erkenntnis*, 166–171).

<sup>73</sup> See Lambert, Johann Heinrich: *Anlage zur Architektonic, oder Theorie des Einfachen und des Ersten in der philosophischen und mathematischen Erkenntniß*. Riga 1771 (repr. 1965), § 305; Davidson, Donald: “The Folly of Trying to Define Truth”. In: *Journal of Philosophy* 93, 1996, 263–278. Some scholars claim that Kant takes the concept of truth to be primitive. They might mean either that Kant takes the notion of truth to be simple and unanalysable, or that he does not aim to offer any explicitly philosophical analysis, or elucidation, of the notion of truth. See Svendsen, Lars Fr. H.: “Kant’s Theory of Empirical Truth”. In: *Kant und die Berliner Aufklärung. Akten des IX. Internationalen Kant-Kon-*



Given Kant's view, a correct analysis of the concept of truth will break it down into four other concepts: AGREEMENT, COGNITION, OBJECT, and ABOUTNESS, because the nominal definition of truth is: truth is the *agreement* of a *cognition* with the *object* it is *about*.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, if the nominal definition of bachelor is "a bachelor is an adult, unmarried male", a correct analysis of the concept of bachelor will break it down into three concepts: ADULT, UNMARRIED, and MALE. However, the way the concepts of agreement, cognition, object, and aboutness are combined into the concept of truth is remarkably different from the way the concepts of adult, unmarried, and male are combined into the concept of bachelor. The concept of bachelor derives from a sort of conjunction of the concepts of adult, unmarried, and male. To say that  $x$  is a bachelor is just to say that  $x$  is male, adult, and unmarried. By contrast, to say that  $x$  is true is not to say that  $x$  is an agreement, a cognition, an object, and that there is something  $x$  is about. The concept of truth involves a relation among the notions of agreement, cognition, object, and aboutness, which is more complex than a conjunction: to say that a cognition  $x$  is true is to say that there is an object  $o$ , such that  $x$  is about  $o$ , and that a relation of agreement holds between  $x$  and  $o$ . Gottlob Frege and Rainer Stuhlmann-Laeisz suggested that Kant's doctrine of complex concepts as combinations of marks is only tailored for concepts like BACHELOR, which derive from the conjunction of other concepts. They held that Kant's doctrine of complex concepts does not allow for a persuasive treatment of relational concepts, like those of agreement, aboutness, and possibly of truth.<sup>75</sup> I will not attempt to answer this question here, nor will I illustrate the notions of agreement, cognition, object, and aboutness which are related to truth. A lengthy discussion of many Kantian texts would be necessary to explain those notions.

*The agreement formula is informative*, at least in the following sense. The agreement formula is not a tautology of the form " $a$  is  $b$ ", where  $b$  is a lexical variant of  $a$ , or exactly the same term as  $a$ . "Corresponds to its object" is not just a lexical variant of "is true", a sort of fused idiom, whose difference from "is true" would only be a stylistic one.<sup>76</sup> The agreement formula provides information on the content of the concept of truth.<sup>77</sup> "Truth is the agreement of a

*gresses*. Ed. Volker Gerhardt, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, and Ralph Schumacher. Berlin. 2001. Vol. 2, 847; Abela, Paul: *Kant's Empirical Realism*. Oxford 2002, 66–73; Bird, Graham: *The Revolutionary Kant. A Commentary on the Critique of Pure Reason*. Chicago 2006, 258.

<sup>74</sup> I substituted the expression "its object" of the agreement formula ("truth is the agreement of a cognition with its object") with the expression "the object it is about" to make the meaning of "its" explicit.

<sup>75</sup> See Frege, Gottlob: *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik. Eine logisch mathematische Untersuchung über den Begriff der Zahl*. Ed. Christian Thiel. Hamburg 1988, § 88; Stuhlmann-Laeisz, Rainer: *Kants Logik. Eine Interpretation auf der Grundlage von Vorlesungen, veröffentlichten Werken und Nachlass*. Berlin 1976, 96f.

<sup>76</sup> Austin calls the expression "corresponds to the facts" "as it were a 'fused' idiom" in his "Unfair to Facts". In: Austin, John: *Philosophical Papers*. Ed. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock. Oxford. 3rd edn. 1979, 155.

<sup>77</sup> *Contra* Walker: "Empirical Realism and Transcendental Anti-Realism. II", 160.

cognition with the object it is about” spells out the content of the concept of truth by means of the concepts of agreement, cognition, object, and aboutness. Thus, for Kant, the expression “corresponds to its object” is more richly articulated than “is true”. By contrast, A tautology like “*a* is *b*”, where *b* is identical to *a* or it is a lexical variant of *a*, does not give any perspicuous description of the content of the concept expressed by *a*. It is uninformative.<sup>78</sup>

*The agreement formula illustrates people’s ordinary conception of truth.* Nominal definitions illustrate the meaning of words. The meaning of a word is the logical essence of the concept that people usually associate with that word. Hence, for Kant, people usually think that truth is the agreement of a cognition with its object.<sup>79</sup> Transcendental philosophy could prove that this conception is superficial or unsatisfactory, and it could yield a better characterization of truth. Even if this were the case, Kant’s nominal definition of truth would still be the agreement formula.

*The property of truth could consist in something more than what the agreement formula states.* If the real essence of water is H<sub>2</sub>O, and nobody knows it, the content of the concept of water could be something like “colorless, tasteless, and odorless liquid”. However, one will better characterize the property of being water by saying that water is H<sub>2</sub>O. Thomas Scanlon offered an account of the property of moral wrongness which implies a divergence between this property and the concept of moral wrongness.<sup>80</sup> William P. Alston suggested that there could be a similar divergence between the concept of truth and the property of truth. The concept of truth “is embodied in the T-schema: The proposition that *p*

<sup>78</sup> Incidentally, for several contemporary philosophers, sentences like “truth is correspondence to the facts” are uninformative and tautological. See, e.g., Strawson, Peter F.: “Truth”, in his *Logico-Linguistic Papers*. London 1971, 195; Wright, Crispin: *Truth and Objectivity*. Cambridge, Mass. 1992, 25–27; Engel, Pascal: *Truth*. Chesham 2002, 66. Kant would classify the nominal definition of truth as an analytic judgement, and not as a tautology. On the distinction between analytic judgements and tautologies, see FM, AA 20: 322.18–29; LBusolt, AA 24: 667.21–29; and De Jong, Willem R.: “Kant’s Analytic Judgments and the Traditional Theory of Concepts”. In: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33, 1995, 628–630. I do not claim that the agreement formula provides any information which goes beyond the content of the concept of truth. I only claim that it is informative in the modest sense that it illustrates the content of the concept of truth.

<sup>79</sup> In effect, the agreement formula and its variants were the most common definitions of truth in Kant’s environment. See, e.g., Crusius, Christian August: *Dissertatio philosophica de usu et limitibus principii rationis determinantis vulgo sufficientis*. In his *Opuscula philosophico-theologica*. 2nd enlarged edn. Leipzig 1750 (repr. in Crusius, Christian August: *Die philosophischen Hauptwerke*. Vol. 4.1. Ed. Silvia Carboncini and Reinhard Finster. Hildesheim 1987), § xviii: “[t]ruth is the agreement [*conuenientia*] of thoughts with things”; Knutzen, Martin: *Elementa philosophiae rationalis seu logicae*. Königsberg 1747 (repr. 1991), § 232: “Logical Truth is agreement [*conuenientia*] of our cognition with the known thing, or of our thoughts with their objects”; Reimarus, Hermann Samuel: *Vernunftlehre*, 3rd enlarged edn. Hamburg 1766 (repr. 1979), § 17: “truth in thought (*Veritas Logica*) consists in the agreement [*Uebereinstimmung*] of our thoughts with the things we think of”.

<sup>80</sup> See Scanlon, T.: *What We Owe to Each Other*. Harvard 1998, 9–13, and his retraction in “Replies”. In: *Ratio*, n.s., 16, 2003, 438.

is true *if and only if p*<sup>81</sup>. The property of truth might be best captured by a relation of correspondence.<sup>82</sup> Kant's identification of the agreement formula with the nominal definition of truth leaves space for a similar divergence between the concept and the property of truth. The agreement formula captures people's ordinary conception of truth. Transcendental inquiry could prove that another definition of the property of truth should be preferred: for instance, because it employs more basic concepts, or because "object" should be defined by means of the concept of truth, and hence it cannot be used in the definition of truth. In this case, true judgements would still agree with their objects. Yet truth would be better described in other terms (e.g., as coherence with the deliverances of the senses and the laws of transcendental logic). In this case, the property of truth could consist in something more than what the agreement formula says.

*The fact that Kant considers the agreement formula the nominal definition of truth does not imply that he adheres to a correspondence theory of truth.*<sup>83</sup> He might prefer another theory, such as a coherence theory. In order to have a correspondence theory of truth, Kant should provide an account of the truth-bearers, of the truth-makers, and of the correspondence relation. His texts should provide answers to questions like the following: are the truth-bearers propositions, sentences, or utterances? Do true judgements correspond to phenomenal objects, noumenal objects, or facts? Is correspondence a relation between items in the world and the truth-bearers as a whole, or single parts of the truth-bearers (say, their subject and predicate)? If all Kant had to say about truth and correspondence were that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth, this would be far from enough to have a full-blooded account of truth in terms of correspondence. It would hardly deserve the name of a correspondence *theory* of truth.

To conceive of truth as depending on a genuine correspondence relation, Kant should choose items which are not truth-bearers as truth-makers. According to the current linguistic practice, a truth-making relation between a truth-bearer and other truth-bearers is called identity, coherence, or verification, but not correspondence. Any attempt of calling a relation between truth-bearers "correspondence" amounts to endorsing an identity theory, a coherence theory, or a verificationist theory, and just changing its name.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Alston, William P.: "Truth: Concept and Property". In: *What is Truth?* Ed. Richard Schantz. Berlin 2000, 24.

<sup>82</sup> Other studies on the possibility of a divergence between the concept and the property of truth are: Lynch, Michael P.: "A Functionalist Theory of Truth". In: *The Nature of Truth. Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Michael P. Lynch. Cambridge, Mass. 2001, 723–749, and Wright, Crispin: "Minimalism, Deflationism, Pragmatism, Pluralism". *Ibid.*, 751–787.

<sup>83</sup> Several interpreters have claimed that Kant accepts the agreement formula, while rejecting a correspondence theory of truth in favour of another theory of truth. See, e.g., the scholars quoted at n. 5.

<sup>84</sup> See Vision, Gerald: *Veritas. The Correspondence Theory and Its Critics*. Cambridge, Mass. 2004, 12, 58.

Moreover, Kant shall have a correspondence theory of truth only if his definition or most perspicuous explanation of what the truth-makers are does not employ or presuppose the concept of truth. For instance, if Kant takes objects as truth-makers, he should not define an object as that whose existence is entailed by a true judgement. Otherwise, the agreement formula could provide at most an explication of the notion of object on the basis of the notion of truth, but not an explication of the notion of truth on the basis of the notion of object, on pain of circularity.

Finally, to be a correspondence theorist, Kant should choose as correspondence the same relation for every true judgement. Otherwise, truth would consist in something different for different sorts of judgements. In this case, it would be more appropriate to say that one has two different theories of truth, that which is sometimes called a pluralist theory of truth, rather than a single, unified correspondence theory.<sup>85</sup>

One more feature of nominal definitions is relevant for Kant's claim that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth: nominal definitions, differing from real definitions, do not yield any criterion for the application of the defined concept. Accordingly, the nominal definition of truth does not provide any criterion for discriminating true judgements from false judgements. Kant explains at some length why the agreement formula does not provide any criterion of truth in the Introduction to Transcendental Logic in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, so I will not dwell on this point.<sup>86</sup>

Summing up, Kant's claim that the agreement formula is the nominal definition of truth is not sufficient to prove that he had a correspondence theory of truth, or that he rejected it. It does not imply that Kant considered the agreement formula irrelevant or platitudinous either. The agreement formula is a genuine explanation of the meaning of the predicate "is true" and of people's ordinary conception of truth. True judgements agree with the objects they are about. However, claiming this is not sufficient to have a correspondence theory of truth.

<sup>85</sup> See Patterson, Douglas: "What is a Correspondence Theory of Truth?" In: *Synthese* 137, 2003, 433.

<sup>86</sup> See A 58–59/B 83–84.