

Kant's Phenomena: Extrinsic or Relational properties?

A Reply to Allais¹

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Kant's claim that we are ignorant of things in themselves is a claim that we cannot know 'the intrinsic nature of things', or so at least I argued in *Kantian Humility*.² I'm delighted to find that Lucy Allais is in broad agreement with this core idea, thinking it represents, at the very least, a part of Kant's view. She sees some of the advantages of this interpretation. It has significant textual support. It does justice to Kant's sense that we are missing out on something, in our failure to know things as they are in themselves. And it makes tellable, after all, Kant's at first sight untellable tale, about the knowable existence of unknowable things: for we can know that things exist, without knowing what their intrinsic properties are.

However, Allais is critical of the way I fill out this core idea, and she has an alternative to offer. She thinks Kant's distinction between things in themselves and phenomena is not a distinction between two kinds of properties, intrinsic and relational. She is critical of my interpretation of causal powers, which I take to be the relevant relational properties: my idea, first, that causal powers *are* in fact relational properties; second, that causal powers are only contingently associated with intrinsic properties, so that creating substances with intrinsic properties is insufficient for creating causal power; and, third, that intrinsic properties are causally inert. Her criticisms of these three ideas

¹Thanks to Lloyd Humberstone, Richard Holton and Steve Yablo for comments and helpful discussion about issues raised in this response.

² Rae Langton, *Kantian Humility* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

will be the topics of Sections 1-3 below. The last of these, the idea of inertness, will strike many as strange; but it provides an explanation for ignorance of things in themselves. If intrinsic properties are, for Kant, causally inert, then that explains why a receptive knower could have no knowledge of them: Kant's understanding of intrinsic properties and causal powers helps to explain his humility.

Allais claims that such 'radical' metaphysical theses are not forced upon us: that they depend on modal intuitions which can be resisted. She concludes: 'this means we have no reason to accept [Langton's] account of what it means to say we cannot know the intrinsic nature of things'. I readily agree that these theses are not forced upon us, and indeed spent some effort (in Chapter 8) exploring alternatives available to philosophers who resist the relevant intuitions. It will be no surprise that I find it harder to agree with the conclusion that Langton is wrong. Call me pigheaded, but it seems no objection to an interpretation of Kant that its philosophical premises are not absolutely forced upon us. Enough if it has firm textual support; and an advantage if it has some philosophical plausibility.

She also argues that one does not need metaphysical theses as radical as these in order to reach humility. Again, I readily agree, and indeed argued (in Chapter 8) that less radical contemporary views, which accept the contingency of causal power but take intrinsic properties to be causally active, nonetheless imply the conclusion that we are ignorant of things in themselves, i.e. ignorant of some fundamental intrinsic properties. So let me say at the outset that I ascribed these allegedly radical views to Kant, not because I thought they were necessary for reaching the conclusion of humility, but

because I thought they were sufficient; and, most importantly, because I thought Kant held them.

The alternative Allais proposes is interesting, both philosophically, and as an interpretation of Kant. As she presents it, instead of two classes of properties, intrinsic and relational, there are two ways of knowing something, a ‘transparent’ way and an ‘opaque’ way. Just as (in the example she borrows from John Foster) we know something about the shape in the envelope, when we are given the opaque specification that it is the shape discussed in the fourth chapter of only leather-bound volume in Smith’s library; so we know something about things in themselves when we know that they have certain powers to relate to other things. But knowing about the book in the library does not tell us that the shape is a triangle; knowing about the powers doesn’t tell us what the intrinsic properties are. The opaque specifications reveal nothing about the things *as* they are in themselves. This point about our ignorance has nothing to do with the supposed inertia of intrinsic properties; it has everything to do with the failure of certain specifications to give us full, transparent access to those properties.

Allais’s alternative interpretation deserves serious exploration, and this is the topic of Section 4. I shall be arguing that, contrary to her own advertisement, she in fact interprets Kant’s phenomena in terms of a certain distinction between properties; and that she understands phenomena in terms of certain relational properties. To say this is by no means to say that her proposal coincides with my own. It is quite distinct. One could capture the difference by saying that I take phenomena to be *extrinsic* properties, while Allais takes them to be *relational* properties. But to view this as a difference, we would need to distinguish relationality from extrinsicness, something that I shall indeed attempt

in a moment; in the meantime my statement of the difference will have to remain a bit mysterious. Many of Kant's writings are open to both our interpretations, as I think Allais would agree; that is why our debate is at least as philosophical as it is exegetical. Not all of them are so open, however, and I shall be noting, in due course, some occasions where Kant's thinking does seem at odds with Allais's account of him.

I shall begin with Allais's chief criticism, which concerns causal power. She raises philosophical objections to three claims I make about causal power on Kant's behalf, which I sketched just now under the headings of the *relationality* and *contingency* of causal power, and the causal *inertness* of intrinsic properties. In attributing these three claims, she presents them on my behalf as a package, sometimes going so far as to say I equate them, attributing to me the idea that 'substances must have an intrinsic nature... amounts to having causally inert intrinsic properties'. I sometimes, admittedly, grouped the last two together under the heading of the 'irreducibility' of causal power; but I do take them all to be distinct theses, as I hope will become plain. One could assert the relationality (in some sense) of causal power, while denying the contingency; and assert the contingency while denying the inertness of intrinsic properties.

I shall take the three claims in turn.

1. Causal power as relational/extrinsic

Beginning with the first of the three claims, we can ask whether a causal power—say the power to attract another body—is a relational property, or an intrinsic property. Allais objects to my suggesting, on Kant's behalf, that causal power is relational rather than intrinsic. But various responses are possible (as I said in Chapter 5). If we suppose that

an intrinsic property is (keeping it simple) a property that can be possessed by a ‘lonely’ or unaccompanied object, then a causal power looks to be an intrinsic property.³ After all, something can have a power to attract, whether or not something else is actually there to be attracted. On the other hand, the power to attract can be described only in terms of certain (actual or counterfactual) relations to other things, so there is an apparently competing temptation to say a power is relational.

Are these intuitions at odds with each other? Not really. We could regiment our terminology more carefully. We could say that whether a property is *extrinsic* or *intrinsic* is primarily a metaphysical matter: it is intrinsic just in case it is compatible with loneliness. We could say that whether a property is *relational* or *non-relational* is primarily a conceptual matter: it is relational just in case it can be represented only by a relational concept, i.e. a concept definable only in relational terms. It then becomes natural to say that a causal power is at once an intrinsic property, and a relational property: intrinsic because it is compatible with loneliness, and relational, because we need to talk about other things when describing it. It is part of the concept of a causal

³The isolation or ‘loneliness’ test is too simple, because (as David Lewis pointed out) loneliness is compatible with itself, but not intrinsic (Lewis, *Philosophical Studies* 44 (1983), 197-200. Lewis and I develop an improved version, defining basic intrinsicness terms of *independence* of loneliness or accompaniment, in Langton and Lewis, ‘Defining “Intrinsic”’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58 (1998), 333-45. In chapters 2 and 5 I raise various accounts of intrinsicness as possibilities for Kant. For a systematic discussion of different notions of intrinsicness and their uses, see I. L. Humberstone, ‘Intrinsic/Extrinsic’, *Synthese* (1996) 108: 205-67; Brian Weatherson, ‘Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Properties’ (2002), in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu>); see Weatherson’s bibliography for some relevant literature up to 2001.

power that it enables its bearer to act on other things; but that ability is something it can have in the absence of those other things.⁴

This very view is in fact attributed to Kant by Harold Langsam, who takes up some of Kant's remarks about the relationality of phenomena. Kant says:

In an object of the pure understanding that only is inward which has no relations whatsoever (so far as its existence is concerned) with anything different from itself. It is quite otherwise with a *substantia phaenomenon* in space; its inner determinations are nothing but relations, and it itself is entirely made up of mere relations. (A265/B321)

Langsam argues that according to Kant, 'the intrinsic properties ("inner determinations") of the objects of our experience...are relational, in the sense that they can be represented only by relational concepts'. He says that the only candidates for these intrinsic properties are causal powers; that causal powers are thus intrinsic properties determined by relational concepts; and that 'there is nothing contradictory or paradoxical' in saying they are both.⁵ Phenomenal substance contains properties that are at once intrinsic and relational.

⁴The distinction between intrinsic/extrinsic and non-relational/relational is made by Humberstone, 'Intrinsic/Extrinsic' (1996), especially p. 253. I am drawing on his suggestion, without being certain he would approve this interpretation. He aligns the former distinction with properties robustly understood (in terms of necessary co-extensiveness); the latter with property-concepts. He traces a genealogy of the distinction among properties to (*inter alia*) George Bealer, *Quality and Concept* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). Note that it is an over-simplification to say that powers involve relations to *other* things (bombs have a power to explode, seeds have a power to germinate).

⁵ Harold Langsam, 'Kant, Hume, and our Ordinary Concept of Causation', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54 (1994), 625-47, 640-1. His interest is in Kant's views about causality and natural kinds, rather than a contrast between phenomena and things in themselves. He goes on: 'There is nothing contradictory or paradoxical in saying that an intrinsic property can also be relational... It is concepts that are relational in the primary sense, not properties (whereas it is properties, not concepts, that are intrinsic or extrinsic). [...] [A property is] relational only in a derivative sense...if it can be represented only by relational concepts.' Humberstone draws a similar conclusion

Langsam here offers a different interpretation of Kant's understanding of the relationality of phenomena.⁶ I shall be suggesting later on that Allais ought to find Langsam's picture congenial, even though she doesn't put her point in quite these terms; I'll return in Section 4 to the connection between the interpretations of Allais and Langsam.

In the terminology just outlined, the view I attribute to Kant is not that causal powers are at once intrinsic and relational properties: it is (as Allais recognizes) that they are *extrinsic* properties. I take passages of the kind just cited to express the *absence* of intrinsic properties in phenomenal substance. Phenomena are constituted by extrinsic properties. Admittedly, I usually called such properties 'relational' in *Kantian Humility*, to keep the labels closer to Kant; but I contrasted them with 'conceptually relational' properties: in the present terminology they are extrinsic. The issue concerns primarily the metaphysics of a power, not primarily the concept of a power. A universe consisting of

about dispositions, 'Intrinsic/Extrinsic' p. 257; see too Stephen Mumford, *Dispositions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

⁶I briefly considered this idea as an interpretation of Kant in *Kantian Humility*, 116-7. Langsam thanks Mark Johnston for help in understanding how a property may be both relational and intrinsic. Johnston develops these ideas in various papers on response dependence, such as 'How to Speak of the Colors', *Philosophical Studies* 68 (1992), 221-63; 'Objectivity Refigured: Pragmatism without Verificationism', in J. Haldane and C. Wright, eds., *Reality, Representation and Projection* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993). While for present purposes I follow Langsam, Johnston and Humberstone in making relationality primarily a conceptual matter, I want to note a competing conception of relationality (not extrinsicness), which would make it more metaphysical. There is, on the one hand, the conceptual issue: the concept of a power is defined in terms of relations (possible or actual) to other things. But there might also be this metaphysical issue: the *essence* of a power involves relations (possible or actual) to other things. This might be motivated by some ideas from e.g. Kit Fine on real definition (Fine, 'Essence and Modality', *Philosophical Perspectives* 8 (1994), 1-16); Ralph Wedgwood on response-dependence, 'The Essence of Response-Dependence', *European Review of Philosophy* 3 (1998), 31-54. Thanks to Steve Yablo for discussion about this; I'm afraid there isn't scope to go into this further here, though it does seem highly relevant.

strictly nothing but an object with its intrinsic properties would be a universe entirely *lacking* in causal power.

Allais complains that I bring to the table an unorthodox conception of intrinsicness to reach this conclusion on Kant's behalf. Intrinsic properties are those compatible not just with 'loneliness', but also with 'lawlessness': in asking whether a property is intrinsic, we ask whether the property can be had by an object in a world where it is unaccompanied by other objects, and unaccompanied by laws of nature. And it is on this conception that causal powers look to be (not just relational but) extrinsic.⁷ This way of thinking about intrinsicness isn't forced upon us, I readily allow; but it can be useful for certain philosophical and interpretive purposes. Allais suggests that my motivation for it rests on a contentious 'modal intuition': but the thing to emphasize is that my motivation was primarily *interpretive*.

In the passage I was investigating, Kant claims to have 'proven' that 'a substance never has the power through its own intrinsic properties to determine others different from itself'.⁸ I was addressing the interpretive question: is there a conception of intrinsic properties which allows this conclusion some credibility? Clearly it could not be a conception of intrinsicness according to which a causal power is *itself* an intrinsic property; for then a substance could readily, 'through its own intrinsic properties', have the power to determine others different from itself.

⁷ *Kantian Humility*, 119. The 'loneliness and lawlessness' version was adapted from a suggestion by Langton and Lewis, 'Defining "Intrinsic"', n12, which was in turn adapted from a suggestion by Peter Vallentyne, 'Intrinsic Properties Defined', *Philosophical Studies* 88 (1997), 209-19.

⁸ *A New Exposition of the First Principles of Metaphysical Knowledge* (1755), Vol. 1. of the Academy edition of Kant's works, 412-5; also in L. W. Beck et al., eds., *Kant's Latin Writings* (NY: Lang 1986), 100-4.

This brings me to the second of Allais's objections, about the contingency of causal power, and the allegedly contentious 'modal intuition' shared, I suggested, by Kant and a fair few philosophers of our own time.

2. The contingency of causal power

Many philosophers share an intuition that causal powers are only contingently associated with intrinsic properties. As I put the idea (and as I was quoted by Allais):

In a world where the laws of nature were very different, things might not have an attractive power, despite having the very same intrinsic properties that attractive things actually have.⁹

We can call this the 'Humean' intuition, more in deference to the contemporary literature than to Hume himself. Allais argues that the plausibility of this intuition rests on an ambiguity of my wording. She thinks it is open to (at least) two readings. According to reading (1), we could have two universes, containing the same objects, but the objects have different intrinsic properties, and hence different powers. According to reading (2), there could be two universes containing the same objects, with the same intrinsic properties; but the laws of nature are different, so they have different powers. Allais is right to say I need the second reading. She is wrong to say I am exploiting the relative plausibility of the first—wrong, because (1) is surely not a possible reading. No reader, surely, could interpret 'having the very same intrinsic properties' as 'having different intrinsic properties'. So her objection must really rest on what she takes to be the basic implausibility of (2).

⁹ *Kantian Humility*, 118. One complication I am not going into here is whether we should really be talking about *categorical* properties, rather than intrinsic, in this context. (Note that Allais in the end thinks the quoted passage is ambiguous in, not just two, but *three* ways; again I disagree, but won't go into that further.)

She finds this Humean intuition implausible. Fair enough. One could certainly deny it, by saying (as Shoemaker does) that properties are to be *identified* with their causal or nomic role, so there is no room for supposing there could be the same (intrinsic) properties, but different powers.¹⁰ But in thinking about the philosophical plausibility of the contingency thesis, it is surely relevant that many philosophers (including James van Cleve, whom Allais discusses) do share it. I don't intend to arbitrate this metaphysical debate here, or engage in dubious philosophical vote-counting, but my impression is that the Humean view is, at present, still closer to being orthodoxy than its alternatives.

Whether it is plausible is one thing; whether Kant believes it is another. And in thinking about whether to attribute the contingency thesis to Kant, it is relevant that Kant endorses it, in the early work I was investigating. He says that a substance 'never has the power through its own intrinsic properties to determine others different from itself'; that establishing this power takes a special creative act on God's part; that God must 'add' something to the existence of substances with their intrinsic properties; and that this creative act is 'plainly arbitrary on God's part and can therefore be omitted or not omitted at His own pleasure'.¹¹ Allais complains about my talk of 'superaddition', but I didn't just make it up. It is hard to deny that Kant endorses at least the contingency thesis that Allais rejects ('at least', because he is endorsing this and *more*, as I'll say in a moment).

¹⁰Sydney Shoemaker, 'Causality and Properties', in Peter van Inwagen (ed.), *Time and Cause* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980). For a sample of some related views see Chris Swoyer, 'The Nature of Natural Laws', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1982), 203-23; Brian Ellis and Caroline Lierse, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1994), 27-45; Alexander Bird, 'Necessarily, Salt Dissolves in Water' *Analysis* 61 (2001), 267-274. Note that one could then combine the relationality of properties with a rejection of contingency. Some of Allais's remarks sound sympathetic to this combination of views.

¹¹Kant, *New Exposition*, Ak. Vol. I, 414-5; Beck (ed.), *Kant's Latin Writings*, 104, 102.

There is, of course, scope for a sceptic to dismiss textual evidence from the *New Exposition*, as Allais does, writing it off as a relic of Kant's early dogmatic metaphysics. But contrary to her suggestion that the evidence resides entirely in this early work, its conclusions survive in various parts of Kant's later work (some samples are enumerated in my Chapter 6). For example, he restates that early conclusion in the first *Critique*, in complaining of Leibniz that 'when everything is merely intrinsic...the state of one substance cannot stand in any active connection whatsoever with the state of another' (A274/B330). This affirms (at least) the contingency of any association between causal powers and intrinsic properties.

It strikes me that Allais's first two objections address philosophical opinions that are not really so radical. It is not so odd to suppose that causal powers are extrinsic properties; or that they fail to strongly supervene on intrinsic properties. But the third of Allais's objections addresses an idea that is admittedly far from orthodox.

3. The inertia of intrinsic properties

Allais objects to the idea that intrinsic properties are *causally inert*: she objects to it both as a philosophical thesis, and as an interpretation of Kant. I have no stake in it as a philosophical thesis, though I do think it can be made more credible than one would antecedently expect.¹² But whatever its merits as philosophy, I think Kant believes it.

¹²It can be motivated by the following combination of views: bearers of powers need to have some intrinsic properties or other; but the intrinsic properties don't need to be the contingent basis of those powers. It isn't unusual to find philosophers who accept one or the other of these views; it's unusual to find one who accepts both. For discussion of the two different 'grounding' roles that intrinsic properties can play, see my Chapter 5 and Chapter 8.

If I understand her correctly, Allais takes me to hold that the contingency thesis implies the inertia thesis. But I do not. I think the former can help motivate the latter; and that Kant might well have taken the former to imply the latter. But the inertia thesis is not, of course, implied by the orthodox Humean view about the contingency of causal power. The Humean can agree with what Allais calls the ‘anti-Humean’, that the intrinsic nature is causally active: that, as a matter of fact, the intrinsic nature does the nourishing or poisoning. The Humean view adds that the intrinsic nature *needn’t* have done so. It is only because the laws are thus and so that the intrinsic nature does it what it does: for the laws can be thought of as instructions that things with such-and-such intrinsic natures are to behave thus-and-so.

I took care to distinguish this view, which allows intrinsic properties to be causally active, from the view I ascribed to Kant, that they are causally inert. And it’s worth emphasizing again that, in ascribing the latter view to Kant, my aim was interpretive. Kant was thinking not just about contingency, but inertia, when he said that a substance never has the power, through its own intrinsic properties, to determine others different from itself. I take the ‘never’ to really mean ‘never’, and not, ‘sometimes, when God makes the laws telling the intrinsic properties what to do’. Kant was thinking about inertia, not just contingency, in the passage about Leibniz I quoted above (A274/B330); and the same goes for a passage in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, where Kant argues that candidate intrinsic properties, such as solidity, cannot be causally active.¹³ The conclusion about inertia is not the only philosophical option available (to

¹³Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, in Vol. IV of the Academy edition, 497-8; in the J. Ellington translation (Indianapolis: Library of Liberal Arts, 1970) p. 42. This and other such texts are discussed in *Kantian Humility*, Chapters 6 and 8.

understate the point), but there are good grounds for attributing it to Kant; and the alternatives do have their philosophical costs (I described some of them in Chapter 8).

If one supposes that there are intrinsic properties and causal powers; if one understands the irreducibility of causal power as I think Kant does, taking it to indicate that intrinsic properties are causally inert; and if one supposes that human knowledge is receptive, so that we must be affected by something if we are to have knowledge of it; then one concludes that we must be ignorant of the intrinsic properties. That is the path to humility I traced in Kant, and whatever its faults, I doubt that it depends on a conflation of intrinsicness with inertness, or an equivocation about modal intuitions.

Now, as already noted, we don't require the premise about inertness to reach the conclusion about humility. That is something I conceded—nay, argued for—in Chapter 8. One alternative path to humility starts from the Humean view, which accepts the contingency of causal power, but denies the inertness of intrinsic properties. This Humean view implies that there are intrinsic features of the world with which we can never become acquainted. For if the fundamental intrinsic ground of a causal power is only contingently associated with the power, then there is a sense in which it is a different property, since the intrinsic ground and the power are not necessarily co-extensive. What then can we know about the fundamental, intrinsic ground, other than it supports the causal power? Nothing. It becomes a something-I-know-not-what, as unknowable as any thing in itself. David Lewis agreed with this thought, and in 'Ramseyan Humility' took up the argument, showing why even the Humean should accept that we are, in a certain sense, ignorant of things in themselves. As Lewis put it:

To be the ground of a [power] is to occupy a role, but it is one thing to know that a role is occupied, another to know what occupies it.... Quite

generally, to the extent that we know of the properties of things only as role occupants, we have not yet identified those properties. No amount of knowledge about what roles are occupied will tell us which properties occupy which roles.¹⁴

So I accept that there may be other routes to humility than the one I ascribed to Kant.

Allais's own proposed path to humility has something in common with the one just considered, namely that it involves no contentious metaphysical claims about the inertia of intrinsic properties. This I take to be a real virtue; and it is time now to give our full attention to her interesting proposal.

4. Allais's interpretation: phenomena as relational and opaque

Allais's proposal aims to be metaphysically neutral: besides steering clear of the inertness of intrinsic properties, she also steers clear of some other metaphysical commitments.

Unlike the Humean route I sketched (and that Lewis develops), her proposal doesn't seem to depend on any thesis about the contingency of causal power. (It does, though, bear certain resemblances to Lewis's argument, which would be interesting to explore.)

As I understand her, Allais aims to be neutral about the contingency issue; she comes over as sympathetic, though not committed, to something like Shoemaker's account of properties. According to Allais, when Kant denies knowledge of things in themselves, he

¹⁴David Lewis, 'Ramseyan Humility', forthcoming in *Naturalism and Conceptual Analysis*, ed. David Braddon-Mitchell and Robert Nola, MIT Press, 2006, section 1. I have substituted 'power' for Lewis's 'disposition'. Lewis goes on to argue that humility, or something like it, follows from facts about Ramsification. For a comparison of Kantian and Ramseyan humility, and a potential Lewisian escape-route from Ramseyan humility, see Langton, 'Elusive Knowledge of Things in Themselves', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 82 (2004), 129-36. For some earlier versions of this kind of argument for humility, see Simon Blackburn, 'Filling in Space', reprinted in *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993); and John Foster, *The Case for Idealism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 51-72.

denies knowledge of intrinsic properties: but that denial has nothing to do with the metaphysics of causal powers—nothing to do with the contingency of causal power, and nothing to do with the inertness of intrinsic properties.

Instead, our ignorance arises from certain conditions of our knowledge: the way we know the properties of things in themselves is through an ‘opaque’ specification of them. A ‘transparent’ specification of those properties would reveal their nature to us, but such a specification is not available. We are in the position of someone holding an envelope, knowing that the shape inside is the one discussed in the fourth chapter of the only leather-bound book in Smith’s library; but not knowing that the shape is a *triangle*. The descriptions we have don’t reveal to us the shape ‘as it is in itself’.

Her suggestion is that that in reaching humility, we don’t need to do metaphysics: we don’t need to affirm the relationality or extrinsicness of causal power; we don’t need to affirm the contingency of causal power; and we don’t need to affirm the inertness of intrinsic properties. Allais casts her interpretation as a distinction between two ways of *knowing*, opaque vs. transparent; and *not* as distinction between two classes of *properties*, extrinsic vs. intrinsic. She casts her solution as epistemological, rather than metaphysical. She says that it is a ‘problem’ with my interpretation that it views Kant’s distinction as a distinction ‘between two kinds of property’.

Now I want to suggest that Allais is in fact doing some metaphysics: and that her own proposal does in fact rest on a distinction ‘between two kinds of property’, fittingly described as intrinsic and relational. Naturally, I don’t take this to be an objection to her positive interpretation, though it is a kind of *ad hominem* response to her criticism. (If the

problem was supposed to be a distinction between two kinds of property, it's odd to find the solution also a distinction between two kinds of property.)

Think about Foster's example again, which Allais reads in terms of *two ways of knowing* something. It seems clear that, whether or not the example says something about knowledge, it certainly says something about properties. For the predicate 'is a triangle', and the predicate 'is the shape discussed in the fourth chapter of the only leather-bound book in Smith's library', surely determine *two different properties*. The first predicate determines an intrinsic property, the property of being a triangle. The second predicate determines an extrinsic property, since the shape in the envelope would presumably lack the property in the absence of the book or the library; *and* it determines a relational property, since the concept of being the shape discussed in the fourth chapter, is a relational concept.

What then of Foster's idea, which Allais quotes approvingly, that the two predicates in some sense pick out the *same* thing: that both are 'in a sense about the intrinsic nature of the figure'? Well, we can allow there is some point to this, since the properties in question are contingently co-extensive. But while the first predicate, 'is a triangle' is *only* about the intrinsic nature of the figure, the second, 'is the shape discussed in the only leather-bound volume...', is about the figure and some other things—books and libraries for a start. The main thing to note is that the Foster example can hardly be read as *avoiding* the topic of properties, since it deals in properties from the outset: it contrasts an intrinsic property with a property that is both extrinsic and relational.

Why then does Allais put her proposal in terms of ‘ways of *knowing*’? If we move from the example of the shape to that of causal power, we find her saying this:

The idea is that powers are specified in terms of effects on other things, and this means that in knowing a thing’s powers we do not know the thing in terms of the intrinsic nature in virtue of which it has the powers, the way it is in itself. Powers are properties understood in terms of other things; they are not relations, or extrinsic properties, but a relational way of knowing things.

We can agree with Allais that causal powers are not relations or extrinsic properties, agree that they are ‘specified in terms of effects on other things’; but we can still suppose they are *properties*, rather than a ‘way of knowing’. What kind of property is causal power, then? We saw (in Section 1) that on a traditional test for intrinsicness, causal power turns out to be at once intrinsic, and relational: intrinsic because it is compatible with loneliness, relational because it can only be described in terms of its effects on other things. Recall Langsam’s thought that, for Kant, causal power is an intrinsic property (an ‘inner determination’) and also a relational property. This seems quite harmony with Allais’s thinking about causal power; and it is the relationality of causal power that interests her, as the above quotation illustrates.

Note incidentally that the shape example from Foster does not quite fit the model of causal power: the property of being the shape discussed in the only leather-bound book seems not only relational and *extrinsic*, by the same test. For Allais, the important common factor in the two cases is that they exhibit a relational property closely associated with an intrinsic property: but the association strikes me as different in the two cases. For causal power, the relational property *is* the intrinsic property; for the triangle, the relational property is *contingently co-extensive* with the intrinsic property.

No damage is done to Allais's proposal by pointing out that it rests on a distinction between properties, it seems to me. On this interpretation, Allais's proposal, and Langsam's proposal, at this stage pretty much coincide.

Epistemology arrives for Allais in what I take to be a second stage, which involves not just relationality, but opacity: epistemology arrives in the thought that some relational properties are *opaque*. The idea goes something like this. Some relational properties have an especially close association with some intrinsic properties: but the relational properties in question don't reveal the nature of the intrinsic properties with which they are associated. This talk of 'association' is a bit too hand-waving, but it needs to cover the cases where the relational property is the intrinsic property (causal power) and cases where it is just contingently co-extensive with it (the triangle, and the shape in the leather-bound book).

Observe that on the face of things there seems to be nothing about relational properties *as such* that would make them opaque. Some relational properties might not be opaque. Suppose that instead of being given the useless clue that the shape in the envelope is the one discussed in the fourth chapter of the book you haven't got, you were given the more useful clue that it's the sort of shape that, if a person were correctly count its sides, they would come up with the number '3'.¹⁵ Call that a clue? That's a dead giveaway! There again we would have a property that at once intrinsic and relational: intrinsic because something could have it all on its own, relational because its

¹⁵ This kind of example is used by Hugh Mellor, who aims to show that primary qualities are dispositional, because of the *a priori* equivalence of triangularity and the property in question (D. H. Mellor, 'In Defense of Dispositions', *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974), 157-81). I find Mellor's argument unconvincing, but the *a priori* equivalence perhaps enables the property to be 'transparent', in Foster's sense (whatever that sense is, exactly).

corresponding concept must be defined relationally. But in this case the relational property is transparent: this relational property *does* reveal the nature of the intrinsic nature of the shape in the envelope. Allais could allow that some relational properties might be transparent in this way: she only needs the claim that other relational properties are opaque, and that causal powers are among them.

In short, I am tempted to re-interpret Allais's proposal as having two parts: one part is about properties, the other is about knowledge. According to Kant, we are only acquainted with powers. What are powers? Powers are not extrinsic properties, but intrinsic properties; they are not non-relational properties, but relational properties. When Kant talks of 'things in themselves', he is talking about powers as intrinsic properties.

A natural question arises: if we are acquainted with powers as relational properties, and the powers are at the same time intrinsic properties, aren't we thereby acquainted with things in themselves? Not exactly, Allais replies, and here the epistemological part of the proposal comes in. Since powers are among those relational properties that are *opaque*, in knowing them as powers, we don't know—what exactly? We don't know those powers 'as they are in themselves'; or we don't know the intrinsic natures of the powers; or we don't know the powers as intrinsic properties. We are as helpless as someone trying to guess a shape, given the clue that it is the shape discussed in the fourth chapter of a book in someone else's library.

On this interpretation of her proposal, Allais does not avoid the metaphysics of properties, any more than I do. The important contrast for her is (in the present terminology) between intrinsic and relational properties; the important contrast for me was between intrinsic and extrinsic properties. Allais has in addition an epistemological

component, just as I do. She says causal powers are opaque; I said only causal powers could be known by a receptive knower. Allais and I are both doing some metaphysics of properties, and both doing some epistemology, on Kant's behalf. She says causal powers are intrinsic and relational, but that somehow, in knowing their relational aspect, we don't know their intrinsic aspect. I said (using a different conception of intrinsicness) that causal powers are extrinsic and relational; that things in themselves have intrinsic properties besides their extrinsic causal powers; and that in knowing the extrinsic causal powers we do not know the intrinsic properties. It must be conceded that Allais's proposal is more metaphysically hands-off than my own, avoiding some controversial premises about the contingency and inertness of intrinsic properties. That is an advantage: it is charitable to ascribe to Kant a view that is less contentious, more philosophically acceptable, than the alternatives.

Two questions remain, however: the first is whether Allais's proposal encounters its own philosophical difficulties; the second is whether it does justice to Kant. I can't adequately address these in the space remaining, but can offer a brief comment on both.

One philosophical puzzle about Allais's interpretation concerns her version of humility. What do we fail to know—what are we missing out on? My hesitation in trying to express this was evident just now. I suspect that in looking harder at this, the contingency issue will need to be confronted, rather than avoided. If one were to take the Humean view that causal powers are relational role properties only contingently realized by certain intrinsic properties, then one could perhaps see how acquaintance with the relational properties failed to yield acquaintance with the intrinsic properties (in keeping with the argument I sketched, and Lewis developed in 'Ramseyan Humility'). But Allais

explicitly rejects this Humean view, and while she is generally hands-off about metaphysics, she expresses sympathy for an opposing account (offered by Shoemaker, among others), which regards properties as identical with their causal or nomic role, and leaves no room for a modal gap between intrinsic properties and causal powers.

Whatever the merits of this account in its own terms, it poses a puzzle for humility. If *all there is* to a property is its causal role, then what could we be missing out on, in knowing ‘only’ the causal role? Causal power, on this account, presents us with nothing like the gap between the triangle, and the shape discussed in the leather-bound library book. If *all there was* to the shape was its having been discussed in the library book, then the case would be analogous to causal power, understood the Shoemaker way: but then surely opacity would disappear. What could be we missing out on? A natural answer is *nothing*, and that, it is worth reminding ourselves, was exactly Shoemaker’s answer: he offers his account of properties precisely to *forestall* a conclusion something like humility. How then could his account of properties be married to Allais’s argument *for* humility? I shall leave that on the table as an interesting and potentially problematic question.

Now for the interpretive question. We have seen that the metaphysical part of Allais’s proposal (on my reading) was ascribed to Kant by Langsam. I too raised it as a possible interpretation of Kant—but then rejected it.¹⁶ Why? Not because I found it philosophically implausible, but because I thought it did not do justice to what Kant in fact says.

¹⁶ *Kantian Humility*, 116-7.

When Kant speaks of relations and relational properties, I think he means what we are here calling *extrinsic* properties, and not (in the present terminology) relational properties. The reasons I gave in Section 2 for thinking that, according to Kant, causal power is an extrinsic property (and the reasons for introducing an unorthodox conception of intrinsicness which permits that), are at the same time reasons against Allais's interpretation of Kant. It is clear in his early argument of the *New Exposition* that Kant has extrinsic, not just relational, properties in mind. Why? Because God has to perform a special act of creation in order to bring these properties into being. Would special acts of creation be required to bring merely relational properties into being? Not at all. Bringing merely relational properties into being would just be a matter of conceptualizing the existing intrinsic properties somewhat differently. The need for a special creative act shows that, in this early work, Kant has extrinsic, and not just relational properties in mind. Likewise in Kant's later work: in complaining of Leibniz that 'when everything is merely intrinsic, the state of one substance cannot stand in any active connection with the state of another' (A274/B330), Kant is not complaining about an absence of causal power, understood on Allais's model as an intrinsic and relational property. If everything was 'merely intrinsic', and causal power was intrinsic (as Allais takes it to be), then substances could 'stand in active connection' with each other. But they can't. Kant mourns the absence of causal power in Leibniz's philosophy: causal power construed as an extrinsic property, absent in a world where 'everything is merely intrinsic'. So when Kant thinks of causal power, it is an extrinsic property he has in mind, even in his later work.

5. Closing remarks

I have addressed Allais's chief objections, which concern the nature of causal power; and I have considered in some detail her alternative proposal. I cannot close, though, without some brief mention of two further objections, independent of her main line of argument; though I don't pretend to do them justice.

First, Allais says that humility is not idealism, and that therefore it cannot be whole story about Kant's transcendental idealism. True: it is a story not about idealism, but about ignorance of things in themselves. My Chapter 10 was devoted to exploring, all too briefly, the implications of Kant's idealism about space for humility. Since I agree with P.F. Strawson that, according to Kant, ignorance of things in themselves is supposed to follow from the receptivity of our knowledge, I take humility to be independent of claims about the ideality of space. But I can't go further into that, admittedly controversial, argument here.¹⁷

The second brief point is a textual one. Kant says, 'the things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be, nor are their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us' (A42/B59). This is a good objection: for it looks as though Kant is *contrasting* certain relations, those among things in themselves, with phenomena, contrary to my reading of his distinction. In thinking further about this, it would be worth considering how it fits with Kant's apparently opposing statement that 'the understanding...calls an object in a relation mere *phenomenon*' (B306). And it could be worth exploring the following possibility: that there are, after all, certain relations among things in themselves; but that they are reducible relations, i.e. the sorts of relations

¹⁷*Kantian Humility* 43-7, 210-218; P.F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (London: Methuen, 1966) 250.

that even Leibniz would have allowed (such as similarity), that supervene on the intrinsic properties of the things in themselves. The domain of things as they are in themselves could perhaps contain such relations, and still be one where there is a sense in which 'everything is merely intrinsic'; and the basic picture of Kant's distinction would remain intact.

There are vexed questions about interpretation here, as everyone will recognize. It is a sad (or perhaps not so sad) truth that what seems obvious to one reader will seem considerably less obvious to another. We can acknowledge these differences, and acknowledge uncertainty about how our disagreements will pan out in the end. We can at the same time be grateful to Allais for underscoring once again the importance of Kant's belief that 'we have no insight into the intrinsic nature of things' (A277/B333), and for drawing our attention to a fresh and interesting way of understanding just what that might mean.