

Lucy Allais: *Manifest Reality: Kant's Idealism and his Realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. xi + 329. £40.00 (hb). ISBN: 9780198747130.

This eagerly awaited book is an important addition to the literature on Kant's transcendental idealism and is sure to generate a lot of discussion. Drawing together her influential previous work alongside substantial new material, Allais presents a comprehensive and novel account of Kant's signature doctrine, its structure, nature, and purpose, as well as Kant's master argument for the view. Allais' interpretation is textually well supported and philosophically sophisticated. The overarching aim, as the subtitle of the book suggests, is an account of transcendental idealism that fully respects both Kant's idealism and his realism. And one of the best things about the book is how it takes various extant interpretations to task for failing in this regard. In Part One (Chapters 1-4) Allais compiles arguments against a range of 'extreme' views, from strong, phenomenalist interpretations to weak, deflationary ones. Many of these arguments will be familiar, but they are clearly and compellingly presented and it will be extremely useful to have them all in one place. Allais concedes that there are deep textual and philosophical motivations that have led commentators to these extremes and then does a masterful job of using this very fact to play them off against one another. In the process, she lays down her desiderata for a fully adequate interpretation of transcendental idealism: 'To make sense of Kant's position we need an account of mind-dependence that does not involve existence in the mind, and which is compatible with thinking that mind-dependent appearances are grounded in the way things are in themselves' (16). In Parts Two and Three, Allais attempts to meet her own challenge. As we shall see, I am not sure that the result is itself entirely satisfactory when it comes to walking Kant's notoriously unstable 'tightrope' (17), though nor am I sure the problem is Allais' and not Kant's. In either case, the clarity of purpose and ingenuity in execution make the book well worth engaging with in a serious way.

The heart of Allais' proposal is her account (in Chapter 5) of what she calls 'essentially manifest qualities'. These are 'qualities of things which can be present in perceptual experience, and which do not present us with qualities things have as they are in themselves, independent of their perceptually appearing to us' (124). The model here is a relationalist theory of colour on which colours are 'features of the way objects appear to us and nothing but such features' (117). This kind of theory is supposed to respect the objective character of colours – they are features of the way *objects* appear – while at the same time respecting their subjective character – they are features of the

way objects *appear* – and indeed their essence as such – they are *nothing but* such features. Allais’ innovation is to generalize this kind of view to cover all those features of reality that we could possibly cognize and thus mobilize it as a model for Kant’s transcendental idealism, for it seems to provide just the kind of balancing act we need. According to Allais, the possible properties of Kantian appearances are one and all essentially manifest qualities. Essentially manifest qualities are relational properties, and the view is in many ways similar to Rae Langton’s interpretation of transcendental idealism (*Kantian Humility*, Oxford University Press, 1998). But Allais wants to do a better job of acknowledging Kant’s idealism, and these properties are also supposed to qualify as suitably mind-dependent. This is because, although they do not exist in the mind and are grounded in the way things are in themselves, the possibility of their being ‘present in perceptual experience’ – the possibility of their being perceptually ‘manifest’ or ‘given’ – is no accident, but rather an essential feature of their nature (122-3).

With this basic idea in hand, the rest of the book is concerned to support and elaborate on it. Allais looks at specific textual evidence, deriving in particular from Kant’s ‘secondary quality analogy’ (Chapter 6); the different roles of concepts and intuitions, in particular in the argument for transcendental idealism and in cognition and the Transcendental Deduction (Chapters 7-8 and 11); the accounts of both empirical reality and transcendent reality to which the view leads (Chapters 9-10), the former of particular interest because it has the spatiotemporal realm as essentially ‘incomplete’ and in this way makes room for the robust conception of freedom that will be so central to Kant’s moral philosophy; and finally what the view means for the possibility of metaphysics generally (Chapter 12). No short review like this can do justice to the host of fascinating ideas and insights contained in a book of this scope and quality. I can only hope to encourage readers to look for themselves by offering them a snapshot of the issues that arise.

Allais’ identification of the possible properties of Kantian appearances with properties that could be manifest in perception seems relatively straightforward for properties like colour and shape. But what about properties that do not fit so easily into this picture? Such properties fall into different categories. For example: (i) properties that, as a matter of fact, we have no ability to perceive, like those of magnetic matter and attractive force; (ii) properties that do not seem especially perceptual, like being born in the U. S. A., being made in Italy, or being the book I am thinking about right now; and finally (iii) properties that seem in some essential way precisely non-perceptual, like that of existing unperceived or that of

remaining forever unperceived. These and many others look like counterexamples to Allais' account – properties that could be had by appearances but which could not be perceptually manifest. They throw up different challenges and would require different treatments. Allais deals explicitly with (i) by allowing for variance in the contingent aspects of our senses. We *could*, in the relevant sense, perceive magnetic matter and attractive force, for we *could*, in the relevant sense, have 'finer' senses (47-8, 142ff.). I have worries about the complexity that starts to creep into Allais' modal notions at this point, which I turn to below. But in outline this approach seems exactly right to me and is certainly supported by the texts. (ii) and in particular (iii), however, are much harder, and Allais does not deal with them. Some reductive analysis in terms of perceptual properties might be available but is by no means obvious.

The property of remaining forever unperceived is especially difficult. On the face of it, this is a property that Allais wants to be able to attribute to appearances. She appeals to Kant's apparent avowal of such a possibility at A496/B524 in the course of her criticisms of phenomenalist readings (47), and it is required for the realism in her own reading. Notably, it seems unproblematic for Langton, whose account is crucially more permissive in the kind of relational property it allows. But how would Allais' more demanding, specifically perceptual analysis run? According to Allais, 'an object is coloured only if there is a way it would appear to subjects who are suitably situated and suitably receptive' (123-4). This is meant to be an account of *what it is to be* coloured, where the specific way an object would appear is meant to play a role in explaining or accounting for which specific colour it has. Now substitute in the case at hand: 'An object remains forever unperceived only if there is a way it would appear to subjects who are suitably situated and suitably receptive'. What could this mean? To be clear, there may well be ways such an object would appear. After all, the object might be coloured. And Allais' framework can account for this. The problem is not properties that remain forever unperceived though they could be perceived. The problem is the property of remaining forever unperceived itself. What specific way in which an object would appear could play a role in explaining or accounting for its remaining forever unperceived? Surely none. But then no such property can be attributed to appearances on Allais' account, and it starts to look far more idealist than she wants.

I suspect this problem is solvable. One general response to examples like those in (ii) and (iii) might run along the following lines. In modern parlance we tend to call these 'properties', but they are not accidents that

inhere in substances, they are not *magnitudes*, like colour and shape, and so they simply do not come under the scope of the proposed account. Again there would seem to be various resources in Kant for such a solution, starting with his distinction between logical and real predicates, so my point is just that it would be interesting to see how exactly Allais would fill in the details, and also that the details do need filling in.

However, there is another, more intractable problem in the vicinity. If the possible properties of appearances are the properties possibly manifest in perception, what then are the *actual* properties of appearances? What, on Allais' account, is the criterion of the empirically *real*? The answer cannot be that the actual properties of appearances are the properties actually manifest in perception. That would be to lapse into the kind of 'extreme' idealism that Allais is at such pains to eschew. Instead, Allais introduces a notion she calls 'actual possibility' (142ff.). This, Allais claims, is the notion of possibility at work in the connections Kant draws between actuality or empirical reality and 'possible experience' (e.g. at A225-6/B272-3 and A493-4/B521-2). Thus, according to Allais, the actual properties of appearances are those properties actually possibly manifest in a perception like ours. But how are we to make sense of this notion of actual possibility? The matter is far more complex than Allais appreciates, for in order to determine the extent of the actually possible, it seems like we would already need to have fixed the extent of the actual. Therefore the notion cannot be used, as Allais claims Kant uses it, to explain what it means to be actual.

A salient way to put the problem is in terms of Allais' guiding theme. If determining what properties are actually possibly manifest in a perception like ours would require already having determined what properties are actual, then it is far from clear what remains of the idealism at this stage. Things seem just as they are for Langton. In connecting empirical reality to possible experience, Kant's point is not that things are thus and so because we would experience them as thus and so but rather that we would experience things as thus and so because they are thus and so. Allais thinks this direction of fit too realist (139). But unless she tips back towards the other, too idealist extreme of having empirical reality fully determined by what is actually perceived, it is just what her own view reduces to. In which case, one wonders whether the brand of idealism Allais attributes to Kant is really so 'robust' and 'radical' (17, 133, 135). Perhaps not, and perhaps that's ok. Either way, it looks like we have realism or idealism but still not both.

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