

To appear in *The Journal of Philosophy*.

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

Kant's doctrine of transcendental idealism is the centre-piece of his Critical philosophy. In very broad terms, it consists of three claims. First, that there is a distinction between things as they appear to us and things as they are in themselves. Second, that the spatio-temporal objects of ordinary experience are mere appearances. And third, that we cannot cognize things as they are in themselves. There has been no consensus in Kant scholarship about how to understand any of these claims, nor on the question of whether the claims are compatible, nor on whether their conjunction is to be endorsed. Furthermore, Kant thinks that his transcendental idealism is compatible with empirical realism, perhaps even that it entails it or is entailed by it. Lucy Allais's new book aims to set out and defend an interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism which makes sense of these claims and the role they play in Kant's philosophy. The result is a forceful and articulate take on some of the fundamental topics in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: the nature of intuition; the problem posed by synthetic a priori judgements; the mind-dependence of appearances and their relation to things as they are in themselves; the role of idealism in explaining metaphysical knowledge. Allais's account of transcendental idealism and Kant's arguments for that view will rightly serve as a reference point in future discussions.

The tenor of Allais's discussion can be gleaned from her subtitle: she aims to provide an interpretation of transcendental idealism which does justice both to Kant's idealism and his realism. In practice what this means is that she defends a moderate metaphysical interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism, one which aims to avoid the pitfalls of both immoderate phenomenalist readings (too much idealism) and overly modest deflationary readings (too much realism). Part One of the book marshals a range of evidence against these two 'extreme' interpretations. Against a phenomenalist reading – those views that takes spatio-temporal objects to exist 'only in the mind... or as constructions out of mental

items' (p.37) – she notes that Kant took pains to distinguish his transcendental idealism from Berkeley's idealism; that he distinguishes primary from secondary qualities; and that he is a realist about entities postulated by science that we do not perceive. Against a deflationary reading, one which takes the distinction between appearances and things in themselves to be 'an epistemological or methodological distinction between two ways of considering things' (p.77), Allais notes the textual evidence in favour of Kant's thinking that spatio-temporal objects depend on our minds in some sense, and that these appearances are grounded in an aspect of reality which we cannot cognize.

The considerations that Allais brings together here are familiar, not least as a result of her previous work, but there is much to be gained from having them presented so clearly and so carefully all in one place. More importantly, the failure of each of these extremes sets the constraints for her 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' (p.16). Parts Two and Three of the book present an account of transcendental idealism which is intended to meet these constraints. In Part Two, Allais sets out an account of mind-dependence which aims to show how appearances can be mind-dependent without existing *in* the mind. And in Part Three, Allais examines the kinds of realism compatible with this form of idealism, and the role that such idealism plays in Kant's account of the possibility of metaphysics.

How can appearances – which is to say, spatio-temporal empirical objects – be dependent on the mind without existing *in* the mind? Allais's answer invokes the notion of *essentially manifest qualities*: properties whose 'existence is not independent of the possibility of their being presented to us in a conscious experience' (p.101). The model here is relational theories of colour, those on which colours are 'features of external objects which are directly presented to us in perception but which are not qualities objects have independently of the possibility of their perceptually appearing to us' (p.117). On this picture, colours are genuine features of objects. But they are not features that objects have independently of our

having conscious experiences of a certain sort. This secures a kind of mind-dependence for colour which is compatible with colour being a property of objects. Allais's interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism has it that all of the empirical properties of objects are essentially manifest qualities. Objects as they appear to us thus have a necessary connection to our experience of them. And since these essentially manifest qualities are grounded in qualities, we know not which, of objects as they are in themselves, we can explain the sense in which appearances depend on an aspect of reality which eludes us. On this reading, transcendental idealism is a claim about the necessary limitation of human cognition to those qualities which objects possess in virtue of our potentially being presented with them.

Allais's general approach is one of a family of views on which the distinction between appearances and things in themselves is a distinction between two sets of properties possessed by the very same object. Since essentially manifest properties are a kind of relational property, the view is similar in structure to Rae Langton's account of transcendental idealism (*Kantian Humility*, Oxford University Press, 1998). But Allais takes the fact that essentially manifest qualities have a necessary connection to perceptual experiences to secure a kind of mind-dependence which she thinks lacking in Langton's account. So the cogency of the account turns on whether the notion of essentially manifest qualities secures the blend of realism and idealism which Allais wants.

Here are two issues. Take the property of existing unperceived. This cannot be an essentially manifest property, since it is not a property which can be presented to us in perceptual experience. So appearances, which is to say empirical objects, cannot possess the property of existing unperceived. Is this compatible with empirical realism? Or take her discussion of scientific unobservables. Kant is very clear that empirical objects have the properties which are ascribed to them by scientific theories even though we cannot perceive those properties. Allais takes these properties to nevertheless be essentially manifest since they *could* be presented in perceptual experience were we to have different sense organs (p.142ff). But what fixes the boundary of what could be presented in perceptual experience? Allais's answer invokes the notion of 'actual

possibility' (p.142), a kind of possibility which is meant to be narrower than logical or real possibility. But one might worry that an account of what is actually possible presupposes an account of what is actual such that those properties which are essentially manifest are constrained by those properties which are actual. In which case, what happens to Allais's idealism?

With this picture of transcendental idealism in place, Allais goes on to address a range of questions about Kant's argument for transcendental idealism and its role in his explanation of the possibility of metaphysics. A guiding theme of this material is that we need to take seriously Kant's distinction between intuitions and concepts or, more generally, between sensibility and the understanding. Attention to this distinction sheds light on the argumentative structure of the *Critique* as a whole. Allais emphasises, quite rightly, that a priori intuitions and a priori concepts do not play parallel roles for Kant. A priori intuitions do not present any feature of things as they are in themselves whereas a priori concepts can only be cognized of things that can be given in intuition, but can be used to think of things in themselves. Correspondingly, the explanation of our synthetic a priori cognition in mathematics, which turns on the availability of a priori intuition, differs from the explanation of our synthetic a priori cognition in metaphysics, an explanation which turns on the existence of the a priori concepts. Allais's discussion clearly brings out the way in which Kant's project can be misunderstood if these two different forms of explanation are run together. This material is a highlight of the book.

The part of this material which is likely to provoke the most discussion is Allais's claim that intuitions are, for Kant, 'representations that give us acquaintance with the objects of thought' (p.17) and that they 'do not depend on concepts to play their role of presenting us with particulars' (p.148). This conception of intuition plays a central role in her account of Kant's argument for transcendental idealism. One important question about this material is whether Allais intends her account of intuition to have a phenomenal gloss. She describes intuitions as 'involv[ing] the presence to consciousness of their objects' (p.153), and says that her acquaintance reading puts the object of intuition 'in the subject's consciousness; it is directly and immediately available in consciousness for

the subject to attend to' (p.159). This suggests that intuitions are phenomenal states of consciousness which acquaint subjects with features of the environment.

One reason for asking this question is that it is relevant for determining whether this account of intuition is compatible with the account of essentially manifest qualities. Allais suggests not only that they are compatible but that the latter 'requires' the former (p.121). This seems mistaken if intuition are to be given a phenomenal gloss. Consider the account of essentially manifest qualities. Although Allais sometimes formulates the thesis as a conditional (pp.123-4), we need something stronger to capture the requisite dependence: an essentially manifest property is one that an object possesses in virtue of the object appearing to a subject to have that property. (Actually, in virtue of the object *possibly* appearing to a subject to have that property, but we can ignore for the moment the additional complexities introduced by this modal status.) Given this characterisation of an essentially manifest property, we cannot give an account of what it is for an object to appear to a subject to have a property in terms of the subject being acquainted with that property since we have just explained the presence of the property in terms of it appearing some way to a subject. The two views look incompatible.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Allais does not intend her account of intuitions to be understood as making claims about phenomenal character. One worry about divorcing the acquaintance reading of intuitions from claims about phenomenal character is that some of the motivations for endorsing an acquaintance reading seem to trade on phenomenal notions. Allais thinks intuitions are a necessary ingredient of cognition for Kant because they are required for referential thought about objects (p.269). And she think that a mere causal link between object and subject isn't enough to secure referential thought: we need a constitutive acquaintance relation specifically. Why do we need a constitutive relation of acquaintance? One answer would be that intuitions are phenomenal states, and objects need to enter into a subject's consciousness if she is to think about them. But if intuitions are not to be

<sup>1</sup> See Andrew Stephenson 'Relationalism about Perception vs. Relationalism about Perceptuals', *Kantian Review* (forthcoming) for discussion of this point.

understood as phenomenal states, why would referential thought require a relation of acquaintance rather than a mere causal relation?

There are many ways in which Allais might respond to these questions and the difficulties raised here are the difficulties involved in doing justice to Kant's idealism and Kant's realism. Allais's book faces down those difficulties with aplomb. Her book makes the case, in the strongest possible terms, that a moderate metaphysical interpretation of transcendental idealism is required to make sense of Kant's texts. And her exposition of a moderate metaphysical interpretation will serve as a model against which future interpretations will be judged. Kant scholars will be engaging with this excellent book for many years to come.<sup>2</sup>

Anil Gomes  
Trinity College, Oxford

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Andrew Stephenson for comments and discussion.