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CAUSAL POWERS IN NATURE AND IN MIND A KANTIAN APPROACH

In this paper, I shall argue that there are causal powers exerting effects on objects, and on ourselves—both as physical objects (bodies) among other objects, and as acting (thinking, moving, etc.) subjects.

Over the last years there has been a revival of the thought that there are so-called powers in nature and, more specifically, causes as powers. The main assumptions within this paradigm of thinking about causes is that causality is not an event-event relation; that causes and effects co-exist; and that we gain insight into these powers only by observing their manifest effects. One of the questions that remains unclear within the contemporary debate about causes as powers is whether, and how, we get to know about these powers. Some make the assumption that causes may be experienced within our bodies: “Bodily sensations might be what give us direct experience of causation in action.” (Mumford & Anjum, 2011: 201) More specifically, proprioception, or the sense of one’s own body, may be the unifying sense for our minds and nature. Proprioception gives us the sense of a required effort, the power needed in order to, for instance, lift a glass of water. (Mumford & Anjum, 2011: 207-8)

In my paper, I shall argue that the conception of causes as powers, in contrast to event-event causation, can be traced back to the philosopher Immanuel Kant’s metaphysics and philosophy of nature. Kant defends a conception of causes as powers throughout his philosophical career, that is, from the publication of his work *Thoughts on the true estimation of living forces* in 1747 up to his last major work *Opus postumum*. Despite some shifts in his conception of causes as powers, Kant all the way maintains that causal powers themselves are not empirical. Instead, they are noumenal, which means that they are a result of the way our minds are affected by empirical, spatial, objects. Affection implies that there is a causal relation between object and subject, the effect of which is representations. A power is, then, a “causality of a cause”: All causal relations are grounded in their causal powers. Causal powers are grounds that cannot be represented as such. Yet, they are identified through their effects.

I shall argue that, on Kant’s view, causes as powers work both as a way of manifesting the relation between object and subject through affection, and as powers that cause changes in (external) spatial relations as an exchange between moving powers – attraction and repulsion (empirically). Affection concerns the way the mental is caused by the real in objects. Affection exhibits, then, a causal relation between object and subject, the effect of which is representations. On the other hand, outer objects are considered as matter in space. Matter has no other powers than moving powers where the moving powers cause changes in (external) spatial relations. Changes in spatial relations are caused, then, by two fundamental powers, namely the active power to move -- attraction, and repulsion, or repulsive power – the passive power to resist a motion within a certain space.