

Exclusion Internalized: The Necessity of the Powers-Based Response in Russellian Monism

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Abstract

Russellian monism faces an internal analogue of Kim's exclusion problem: if the phenomenal quiddities that ground the dispositional profile of matter can vary or vanish without any difference to that profile, they appear causally idle, and consciousness collapses into epiphenomenalism. This paper does not add a further defence. It argues that the two most developed anti-exclusion strategies from the non-reductive physicalist debate — Bennett's appeal to modally dependent overdetermination, and List and Menzies' difference-making account — cannot be transferred to the internal problem, and that they fail for a single reason. Bennett's strategy requires a modal dependence between the two candidate causes that the monist's contingency-of-grounding thesis expressly denies; without it, the monist's predicament satisfies Bennett's own criterion for malign overdetermination. List and Menzies' test does not merely fail but reverses: it credits the dispositional profile and demotes the quiddity, yielding a proof of epiphenomenalism. Both failures trace to the contingency thesis, a form of quidditism that is the structural counterpart, inside Russellian monism, of the distinctness premise in Kim's argument. The whole family of compatibilist responses turns on a modal entanglement that the contingency thesis withdraws, so none transfers. The powers-based views — the powerful-qualities identity and the necessitarian phenomenal-powers view — are therefore not one option among several but the only coherent response, since they alone remove the contingency on which every version of the problem depends. The conclusion is robust across two readings of the excluding premise, which differ only over which powers-based view is thereby obligatory. The paper thus derives, rather than recommends, the powers-based treatment.

1. Introduction

The exclusion argument is usually presented as a problem for non-reductive physicalism, and the literature that answers it is addressed to that position. Russellian monism enters this literature as a way of relaxing one of Kim's background assumptions the assumption that the physical is exhaustively structural and non-experiential and so as a way of dissolving the problem rather than solving it within its original terms. If the intrinsic natures that ground the dispositions described by physics are themselves phenomenal, then a mental property that is identical with, or constituted by, such an intrinsic nature is not a rival to physical causation but a part of it, and the overdetermination worry never arises.

This dissolution is too quick, and the reason it is too quick has been understood for some time. Even granting that consciousness constitutes the intrinsic nature of the physical, we can still ask whether that intrinsic nature does any causal work, and the standard formulation of Russellian monism appears to answer no. On that formulation, physics captures the entire dispositional and relational profile of matter; the phenomenal quiddities merely ground those dispositions and are related to them only contingently. If so, the dispositions carry the causal load and the quiddities, however real, are causally idle. Howell (2015) has stated this objection with precision and has noted that it is modelled on Kim's argument. Alter and Coleman (2021) accept the challenge and reply to it; Mørch (2014, 2017, 2019) develops an

independent line of response. The objection, and the powers-based replies to it, are by now familiar fixtures of the debate.

The literature has established one half of what needs establishing. That rejecting the contingency thesis is sufficient to answer the internal epiphenomenalism worry is now widely accepted, whether the rejection takes the form of the powerful-qualities identity, of phenomenal-powers necessitation, or of the dual-aspect reformulation recently defended in this journal by Hashemi (2025). What no existing work asks is whether rejecting contingency is also necessary – whether some weaker manoeuvre, one that leaves contingency in place, might answer the worry just as well. This paper answers that question in the negative, and its method is eliminative rather than constructive: I do not defend a powers-based view directly but argue that every competing anti-exclusion strategy fails once transposed into Russellian monism, and fails for one common structural reason. The powers-based response thereby emerges not as one option among several but as the unique residual. The contribution is in this sense second-order – a structural reconstruction of the dialectic that isolates a hidden modal assumption shared by otherwise unrelated anti-exclusion theories – rather than a further first-order defence of Russellian monism.

My aim is not to add another reply. It is to establish a claim about the structure of the debate that, if correct, changes what the powers-based reply amounts to. The claim is this: the two most fully developed strategies for defusing exclusion in the non-reductive physicalist setting Bennett's (2003) and List and Menzies' (2009) cannot be transferred to Russellian monism's internal exclusion problem, and they fail for the same reason. That reason is the contingency of the quiddity–disposition grounding relation, which occupies, within the internal problem, exactly the position that the distinctness premise occupies in Kim's original argument. Once this is seen, two consequences follow. First, the internal exclusion problem is not merely analogous to Kim's; the analogy is deep enough that the responses to Kim inherit their fate from it, which is a stronger and more informative relation than mere structural similarity. Second, and more importantly, the powers-based response is not an optional preference. Bennett and List and Menzies are only the two most developed members of a larger family of compatibilist responses to Kim, and that family shares a single presupposition a modal entanglement between the two causal candidates that the contingency thesis withdraws. Once this is seen, the powers-based response emerges as the unique residual: it is the only response that dissolves the problem by removing the contingency thesis itself, rather than by exploiting an entanglement Russellian monism has renounced. In showing this I mean to derive the powers-based treatment from the failure of the alternatives, rather than to recommend it on the strength of its own attractions, which is how the existing literature presents it. The motivation for testing transferability is straightforward. If the internal problem is genuinely an instance of Kim's exclusion schema rather than merely analogous to it, then the most successful anti-exclusion responses ought to remain available unless Russellian monism itself blocks the assumption on which each depends. Whether they remain available is therefore a test both of the responses and of the depth of the analogy, and it is precisely this expectation that the following sections examine.

The contribution can be stated in one place: this paper makes three claims that the existing literature does not. First, and centrally, it converts a sufficiency result into a necessity result. The literature shows that rejecting the contingency thesis suffices to answer the internal epiphenomenalism worry (Alter & Coleman 2021; Mørch 2017, 2019; Hashemi 2025); by showing that every compatibilist anti-exclusion strategy, transposed to the internal problem, either lapses or inverts — and that each does so because the contingency thesis withdraws the modal entanglement they all exploit — it shows that nothing weaker will do. Rejecting contingency is not one good option but the only one. Second, a metametaphysical consequence follows: Russellian monism cannot be neutral on the metaphysics of causation, since its treatment of mental causation stands or falls with anti-quidditism, a thesis that belongs to the theory of causation rather than to the theory of consciousness. Third, disambiguating the excluding premise into a distinctness-only and a modal-independence reading fixes not merely that a powers-based view is obligatory but which one is.

The argument is entirely conceptual. Section 2 fixes the contingency thesis—a form of quidditism—and sets out the internal exclusion problem it generates. Section 3 reconstructs Kim's argument to isolate the excluding premise, distinguishes two readings of it, and establishes the mapping between that premise and the internal problem. Sections 4 and 5 argue that Bennett's and List and Menzies' strategies fail, the first by becoming inapplicable and the second by inverting. Section 6 shows that these are not isolated failures but instances of a single fact about the whole compatibilist family, so that no such strategy can transfer. Section 7 shows that removing the contingency thesis the one remaining intervention is what the powers-based views do, and that the conclusion holds whichever reading of the excluding premise is correct. Section 8 addresses the cost of the resulting position.

2. The contingency thesis and the internal exclusion problem

Russellian monism begins from a division of labour in our knowledge of matter. Physics, on this view, tells us how matter is disposed to behave how it interacts, what it does under intervention, how it can be mathematically modelled but it does not tell us the intrinsic categorical nature of whatever it is that is so disposed. The dispositional and relational profile is one thing; the quiddities that possess or ground that profile are another. This is the Russellian thought, running from Russell (1927) and Eddington (1928) through Maxwell (1978) and Lockwood (1989) to its recent revival in Stoljar (2001), Chalmers (1996), and Goff (2017). The consciousness-friendly versions of the view — Russellian panpsychism and panprotopsyism — hold that the quiddities are, or ground, phenomenal properties, and it is on these versions that the identification of consciousness with the intrinsic nature of the physical is made. This paper does not add to the arguments for such a view catalogued by Jarocki (2024); its target lies one level up, at the structure of the defences against epiphenomenalism that become available once such a view is in place.

Two features of the position matter for what follows, and it is worth being explicit that the first grounds the second rather than being an incidental addition to it.

The first is the structural characterization of physics. What physics captures is the network of dispositions and relations, and this network is closed in the sense that Kim's closure principle requires: physical effects are fixed by the dispositional profile of their physical antecedents. Nothing in the Russellian picture disturbs this. The whole point of the view is to leave physics intact and to add a claim about what physics leaves out.

The second is the contingency of grounding. On the formulation that generates the problem, the relation between a quiddity and the disposition it grounds is contingent: the same disposition could have been grounded by a numerically distinct quiddity, and, on stronger versions, a given quiddity could have grounded a different disposition in a different nomological setting. This is a form of what the metaphysics of properties calls quidditism the thesis that the identity of a quiddity is independent of the causal-dispositional role it happens to occupy, so that quiddities could be permuted or replaced beneath a fixed structural profile (Black 2000; Lewis 2009). Quidditism is not an eccentric add-on. It is what underwrites the epistemic motivation for Russellian monism in the first place: what makes it true that physics leaves the quiddities undetermined is precisely that structure does not fix quiddity, and if the grounding were necessary in both directions, the structural description would settle the intrinsic nature after all, closing the epistemic gap on which the position trades. This is why the contingency of grounding is the default setting of the view rather than a detachable extra.

It is, however, only the default, not a definitional commitment, and this qualification matters for what follows. Some Russellian monists reject the contingency thesis outright Alter and Coleman (2021) are the clearest case and it will emerge that rejecting it is not one option among several but the single manoeuvre that answers the problem this paper poses. For now the point is only that the standard, problem-generating version of the view is committed to contingency, and that the burden of the following sections is to show that this commitment cannot be reconciled with the causal relevance of consciousness by any of the means the exclusion literature has developed.

The internal exclusion problem falls out of these two features together. Take a physical effect E—a neuron firing, a limb moving. By the structural characterization, E is fixed by the dispositional profile of its physical antecedents. By the contingency thesis, that dispositional profile could have been grounded by a quiddity other than the one that in fact grounds it, or by a "bare" quiddity with no phenomenal character at all, without any change to the profile and hence without any change to E. The phenomenal quiddity is therefore a free wheel: it turns, but nothing turns with it. Whatever E depends on, it does not depend on which quiddity underlies the operative disposition. Since consciousness, on this view, just is (or is constituted by) the phenomenal quiddities, consciousness makes no difference to any physical effect. That is epiphenomenalism, and it is the position's own commitments, not an external assumption, that produce it.

It is important to see that the problem does not require the falsity of the identification of consciousness with intrinsic natures. One might expect that identifying the mental with the physical's categorical ground would immunize it against exclusion, on the model of the reductive reply to Kim: identical items do not

compete. But the identity here is between consciousness and the quiddity, whereas the causal work is done by the disposition, and the contingency thesis holds these apart. Identifying consciousness with the ground does not identify it with what does the causal work; it identifies it with what the causal work is contingently anchored to. The gap that generates the problem is not between the mental and the physical but between the categorical and the dispositional, and it opens inside the physical rather than between the physical and something else. This is why the problem is genuinely internal, and why it cannot be answered simply by insisting on the monist's core identity.

3. Kim's argument and the role of distinctness

To see that the internal problem is not merely reminiscent of Kim's exclusion argument but structurally continuous with it, we need the original argument in a form that isolates the premise that does the excluding. Kim's argument rests on four commitments (Kim 2000, 2005). (K1) Closure: every physical effect has a sufficient physical cause. (K2) Efficacy: mental properties are causally efficacious with respect to physical effects. (K3) Non-overdetermination: physical effects are not systematically overdetermined by distinct sufficient causes. (K4) Distinctness: mental properties are not identical to the physical properties on which they supervene. Given a physical effect E with sufficient physical cause P, (K2) supplies a mental cause M; (K4) makes M distinct from P; (K1) and (K3) then leave no causal work for M, which is excluded unless it is identical to P (reduction) or unless the world is pervasively overdetermined (rejected).

The premise on which the exclusion turns is (K4), and it is worth being precise about how it turns on it, because a distinction that the literature does not always mark will do substantial work below. What (K4) supplies is the distinctness of M from P, and it is distinctness that makes the overdetermination worry bite: if M and P were the same item there would be no question of two sufficient causes competing for one effect. But there are two readings of what distinctness has to amount to for the exclusion to go through, and they diverge on a point that turns out to be decisive.

On the first, distinctness-only reading, numerical non-identity is by itself sufficient. This is Kim's own view: he argues expressly that the supervenience of M on P a modal dependence of the mental on the physical does not defuse the exclusion, so that even a mental property tightly tied to its base is excluded as long as it is not identical to it (Kim 2005, ch. 2). On this reading the excluding premise is just $M \neq P$. It is worth conceding that on the distinctness-only reading the internal problem inherits a familiar feature of Kim's original: bare non-identity excludes any non-identical dependent property, so the reading indicts non-reductive physicalism quite generally and Russellian monism holds no special interest under it. This is one more reason the sophisticated literature has abandoned the reading in practice, and it is why the modal-independence reading — under which contingency does distinctive work — is the one on which the paper's diagnosis is most illuminating.

On the second, modal-independence reading, numerical non-identity is necessary but not sufficient: the overdetermination becomes malign the kind the argument needs only when the two candidate causes

are also modally independent, each able to obtain without the other. This is the reading presupposed by the most developed replies to Kim. Bennett (2003) and List and Menzies (2009) both grant distinctness and block the argument by denying modal independence; their strategies are intelligible only if it is modal independence, not bare non-identity, that the malign overdetermination requires. The sophisticated anti-exclusion literature, in other words, has already rejected the distinctness-only reading in practice, whatever Kim himself holds.

I flag both readings now because the paper's conclusion is robust across them, but which powers-based view is forced depends on which is correct—a point I return to in Section 7. What matters here is only that the excluding premise, on either reading, has a determinate counterpart inside Russellian monism.

This is where the mapping to Russellian monism's internal problem becomes exact. Rewrite the four commitments with the dispositional profile in the role of the sufficient physical cause and the phenomenal quiddity in the role of the mental cause. (R1) Closure becomes the structural characterization: physical effects are fixed by the dispositional profile. (R2) Efficacy becomes the Russellian monist's aspiration: the quiddity, and so consciousness, is causally relevant to physical effects. (R3) Non-overdetermination carries over unchanged. And (R4), the analogue of Distinctness the premise that makes the quiddity a cause over and above the disposition, and so a candidate for exclusion is supplied by the relation between quiddity and disposition. The correspondence $K1 \leftrightarrow R1$, $K2 \leftrightarrow R2$, $K3 \leftrightarrow R3$ is straightforward. The substantive claim is $K4 \leftrightarrow R4$, and here the two readings of the previous paragraph must be tracked separately, because they place different demands on R4.

On the distinctness-only reading, R4 requires merely that the quiddity be numerically distinct from the disposition. That much holds on every version of Russellian monism that keeps the two apart at all—including the necessitarian version, on which quiddity and disposition are distinct but modally locked. On the modal-independence reading, R4 requires more: that the quiddity be modally independent of the disposition, able to vary or vanish while the disposition and its effects remain fixed. And that is exactly the contingency thesis of Section 2. So the excluding premise of the internal problem is numerical distinctness of quiddity from disposition on the first reading and the contingency thesis on the second. The mapping is exact in the sense that whatever plays the excluding role in Kim's argument has a determinate filler in Russellian monism; it is not exact in the sense of collapsing the two readings, and keeping them apart is what lets us see, in Section 7, why the two powers-based views are not interchangeable.

One clarification forestalls a natural objection. Grounding is not a causal relation, so quiddity and disposition are not two causes competing for one effect in the way two assassins are; strictly, the internal problem is a relevance (or screening-off) problem — the disposition screens the quiddity off from the effect — rather than an overdetermination problem in the literal sense. This is not a defect of the mapping but its point. The exclusion schema is indifferent to whether the excluded item is screened off by a rival cause or by the dispositional profile that its own ground underwrites; what the schema needs is only that the effect be fixed without reference to the excluded item, and screening-off delivers exactly

that. This is also why the internal problem is exposed to both families of response at once: to Bennett's, which addresses the overdetermination gloss, and to List and Menzies', which addresses the difference-making gloss. That a single predicament answers to both descriptions is further evidence that what is at work is the topic-neutral exclusion schema and not a merely verbal analogy.

Two things follow immediately. First, the internal problem is a genuine instance of the exclusion schema, not a metaphor for it; the schema's excluding premise has a determinate referent inside Russellian monism, and that referent is a thesis the position is committed to for independent reasons. Second, we now have a criterion for whether any anti-exclusion strategy can be transferred to the internal problem. A strategy defuses exclusion only by doing something to the excluding premise (R4) by denying it, by showing the two items are not distinct in the way the argument needs, or by showing that their distinctness does not have the consequence the argument claims. Whether such a strategy transfers therefore depends on whether the corresponding operation can be performed given what fills the R4 role in Russellian monism. This is the test the next two sections apply to Bennett and to List and Menzies, and Section 6 generalizes.

I should add a note on the attribution to Kim, since the internal problem is being read out of his argument. Kim does not stipulate that physical properties are non-experiential, and nowhere does he address the categorical grounds of dispositions; the mapping offered here is a claim about the form of his argument, not an exegesis of his intentions. The point is that the exclusion schema is topic-neutral with respect to what plays the roles of sufficient cause and excluded competitor, and that Russellian monism supplies fillers for those roles from within its own resources. The argument that follows does not depend on Kim having anticipated this application.

4. Why Bennett's strategy is unavailable

Bennett (2003) offers the most influential attempt to show that the overdetermination generated by the exclusion argument is benign. Her strategy is to distinguish the problematic kind of overdetermination the kind exhibited by two assassins independently firing fatal shots from the kind allegedly exhibited by a mental cause and its physical realizer, and to argue that only the former is objectionable. The distinguishing mark is modal. Genuine, troublesome overdetermination has a characteristic counterfactual signature: had the first cause not occurred, the effect would still have occurred, because the second cause was independently sufficient; and symmetrically for the second. The two causes are counterfactually independent, and it is this independence that makes their joint sufficiency an embarrassment.

Bennett's claim is that the mental–physical case fails to exhibit this signature. Because of the dependence of the mental on the physical, we cannot hold the physical cause fixed while removing the mental one: had the mental property been absent, the physical realizer would have been different too, and it is not the case that the effect would have come about anyway via an untouched physical route. The relevant counterfactual had M not occurred, P would still have occurred comes out false.

Overdetermination whose two "causes" are counterfactually locked together in this way is not the assassin case; it is benign, and the exclusion argument, which treats it as malign, misfires.

Everything in this strategy depends on the falsity of the counterfactual had the first item not occurred, the second would still have occurred. That is the load-bearing element: it is what marks the overdetermination as benign rather than assassin-style. And here the internal problem and the physicalist problem come apart decisively. Transpose Bennett's test to the internal case, with the quiddity Q in the role of M and the disposition D in the role of P. Bennett needs had Q not obtained, D would still have obtained to come out false. But the contingency thesis is, more or less verbatim, the claim that this counterfactual is true. To say that the grounding of D by Q is contingent that D could have been grounded by a distinct quiddity or by none just is to say that D could have obtained without Q. The Russellian monist's foundational commitment fixes the very counterfactual that Bennett's strategy needs to falsify at the value that, on Bennett's own analysis, marks the overdetermination as genuine and troublesome.

The result is not simply that Bennett's strategy is unavailable. It is that Bennett's own criterion, applied to the internal problem, classifies the Russellian monist's situation as the bad case. The quiddity and the disposition are related exactly as the two assassins are: each could have been absent while the other, and the effect, remained. By the standard Bennett herself supplies, the phenomenal quiddity is an idle over-and-above cause of the assassin kind except that, unlike an assassin, it contributes nothing even jointly, since the disposition alone suffices. Bennett does not merely fail to rescue Russellian monism; she diagnoses it.

One reply is available, and tracing why it does not help is instructive. The monist might insist that the quiddity and the disposition are, after all, modally tied that removing Q would remove D so that Bennett's counterfactual comes out false in the internal case as well. But to say this is to deny the contingency thesis. It is to hold that the disposition could not have obtained without this very quiddity, which is to make the grounding necessary rather than contingent. That is a coherent position, but it is no longer the problem-generating version of Russellian monism; it is the powers-based revision of Section 7. So Bennett's strategy does not provide the contingentist Russellian monist with an independent escape. Either contingency holds, and Bennett's test convicts the position; or contingency is abandoned, in which case the escape is effected not by Bennett's strategy but by the very move that strategy was supposed to spare us. Bennett's route, in the internal setting, collapses into the powers route or fails outright.

5. Why List and Menzies' strategy backfires

List and Menzies (2009) pursue a different and in some ways more ambitious strategy. Rather than reclassifying the overdetermination as benign, they deny that the exclusion principle is universally valid, and they do so with a difference-making account of causation. On an interventionist treatment, a property C is causally relevant to an effect E just in case an intervention that changes whether C obtains changes whether E obtains roughly, had C not obtained, E would not have obtained, and had C obtained,

E would have. Applied to a multiply realizable mental property M and one of its physical realizers P, this account can privilege the higher level. Suppose E is insensitive to which realizer of M obtains: it would have come about under any of a range of realizers. Then intervening on the specific realizer P swapping it for another realizer while M is retained leaves E unchanged, so P is not a difference-maker for E. But intervening on M removing M, and with it all its realizers relevant to E does change E. So M is a difference-maker and P is not. Far from M being excluded by P, it is P that is excluded by M. Exclusion runs downward, from the proportionate higher-level property to the over-specific realizer, and the Kimian direction is reversed.

The mechanism is proportionality: the cause that difference-making picks out is the one pitched at the right grain relative to the effect, neither too specific nor too general. When the effect is realization-insensitive, the multiply realizable higher-level property is the proportionate cause and its particular realizer is too specific to count.

Now transpose this to the internal problem, and attend carefully to which item occupies which role, because the roles are not assigned by our choice of labels but by the contingency thesis. The effect E is, by contingency, insensitive to which quiddity grounds the operative disposition: swap Q for a distinct quiddity Q while holding the disposition D fixed an intervention the contingency thesis guarantees is available and E is unchanged. So relative to E, it is the disposition that is the realization-insensitive difference-maker: intervene on D and E changes; the quiddity is the over-specific factor whose variation makes no difference to E. List and Menzies' test therefore delivers its verdict, and the verdict is that D is causally relevant to E and Q is not. The strategy that in the physicalist case elevates the mental over its realizer, in the internal case elevates the dispositional structure over the quiddity, and it does so by the very same reasoning.

This is why I say the strategy does not merely fail but backfires. Bennett's strategy is inapplicable; List and Menzies' strategy is applicable and yields a proof of exactly what the Russellian monist was trying to avoid. Their difference-making test, run honestly, is a demonstration that the phenomenal quiddity is epiphenomenal for it shows that no intervention on the quiddity, holding the operative disposition fixed, makes any difference to the physical world. The tool built to secure higher-level mental causation becomes, in the Russellian monist's hands, an instrument for establishing quiddity-epiphenomenalism.

It might be objected that this transposition begs the question. List and Menzies frame their account in terms of realization, and paradigmatically the realized property is a determinate of which the realizer is a determinate; the quiddity-disposition relation is grounding, not determination, so perhaps the difference-making test simply does not apply to it. But the test does not require the determinate-determinable structure specifically. What it requires is two things: that the effect be insensitive to variation in the lower item, and that interventions on that item be available. The contingency thesis delivers both directly E is insensitive to which quiddity grounds D, and swapping quiddities beneath a fixed D is precisely the intervention contingency licenses. Wherever those two conditions hold, the difference-making verdict follows, whatever the underlying relation is called. The Russellian monist

might instead deny that interventionist difference-making reaches categorical grounds at all. But that reply is self-defeating in this context: if difference-making cannot be applied to the quiddity, then it cannot be used to establish the quiddity's efficacy either, and the monist has simply given up the resource that List and Menzies were supposed to provide. Either the test applies, and it convicts the quiddity, or it does not apply, and it offers the monist nothing. There is no reading on which it helps.

The reason for the reversal is worth stating, because it confirms the diagnosis of Section 3. In the physicalist case, the mental property is the realization-insensitive item and its realizer the insensitive-to item, so difference-making favours the mental. In the internal case the alignment flips: it is the disposition that is realization-insensitive insensitive, that is, to which quiddity realizes it and the quiddity that occupies the losing position of the over-specific realizer whose variation the effect ignores. The flip is not optional. It is fixed by the contingency thesis, which stipulates that E depends on D and not on Q. One cannot reassign the roles to put the quiddity in the winning position without denying that physics tracks the disposition or denying that the effect is quiddity-insensitive, and denying either is, once again, to abandon the position whose internal problem we are trying to solve. As with Bennett, the only way to make the imported strategy help is to remove the contingency thesis; and once that is removed, the intervention on which the backfire depends swapping Q while holding D fixed is no longer possible, because a necessitated Q cannot be varied independently of D. The strategy stops backfiring precisely when contingency goes, which is to say precisely when we have adopted the powers view.

6. The failure generalizes

Bennett and List and Menzies are two strategies, and defeating two strategies does not by itself show that none can succeed. The stronger claim I want — that the powers-based response is the only one left — requires seeing that the two failures are instances of a single structural fact about the whole family of anti-exclusion responses. Before the general diagnosis, it helps to see the pattern in one view. Each compatibilist strategy secures benign, non-excluding status for the higher item by leaning on some modal tie between it and the lower item; the contingency thesis severs exactly that tie. The table records, for each strategy, what it demands of the two candidates and why contingency denies it.

Strategy	What it requires of the two candidates	Why contingency defeats it
Bennett (benign overdetermination)	modal dependence: "had Q not obtained, D would still have" is <i>false</i>	contingency makes that counterfactual <i>true</i> — the malign, assassin profile
List & Menzies (proportionality)	the effect is insensitive to the lower item, so the higher item is proportionate	insensitivity attaches to D, not Q; the test elevates D and demotes Q
Yablo (determinable–determinate)	the determinable is not independent of its determinate	Q is no determinable of D; Q varies beneath a fixed D
Subset view (Wilson; Shoemaker 2007)	the higher item's powers $\subseteq$ the lower item's powers	a contingent Q contributes no powers to be a subset of
Constitution (Pereboom)	the higher item is constituted by its base	a merely contingent ground does not constitute what it grounds
Grounding compatibilism (Kroedel & Schulz 2016)	factive, robust grounding transmits causal relations downward	a merely contingent ground transmits nothing
Counterfactual compatibilism (Kroedel 2020; Moore 2017)	the higher item is counterfactually necessary for the effect	contingency falsifies "had Q not obtained, E would not have"

That fact can be stated generally. Every response to an exclusion argument must intervene on one of its premises, and there are only four available points of intervention: reject closure (K1/R1), reject non-overdetermination (K3/R3), reject the excluding premise (K4/R4), or accept the reductive/identity horn. The Russellian monist has committed to leaving physics intact, which forecloses rejecting R1; and pervasive overdetermination, which forecloses rejecting R3. So the monist's only options are to do something to R4 or to accept the identity horn.

The compatibilist responses to Kim — the ones that try to preserve non-identical mental causation — are, without exception, ways of doing something to the excluding premise short of denying numerical distinctness. The table above lists the family's principal members, from Bennett and List and Menzies through Yablo's (1992) determinable–determinate treatment, the powers-based subset view (Wilson 2011; Shoemaker 2007) and constitution accounts (Pereboom 2011), to the more recent grounding-based (Kroedel & Schulz 2016) and counterfactual (Kroedel 2020; Moore 2017) variants. They differ in machinery, but they share a single presupposition: that the two items, though distinct, are modally entangled — that one cannot be varied while the other is held fixed. It is this entanglement that each of them exploits to deny malign competition, and each newer member fails at the same point and for the same reason as the older ones.

This is exactly the presupposition that the contingency thesis withdraws. Under contingency the quiddity and the disposition are modally disentangled: the whole point of quidditism is that the quiddity can be

varied or removed beneath a fixed disposition. Every compatibilist strategy therefore loses the resource it needs at the same point and for the same reason. Bennett's benign-overdetermination verdict requires entanglement and gets disentanglement; the subset strategy requires the quiddity's powers to be included in the disposition's, but contingency gives the quiddity no powers to be included, since its variation makes no dispositional difference; constitution requires the quiddity to constitute the disposition, but a merely contingent ground does not constitute what it grounds in the relevant sense; and proportionality, as Section 5 showed, does not merely fail but inverts. The generalization is thus not an enumeration of cases but a single diagnosis: the compatibilist family is defined by its reliance on modal entanglement between the two causal candidates, and contingency is precisely the denial of that entanglement. No member of the family can survive the transposition, because the feature they all draw on is the feature Russellian monism has renounced.

Two points of housekeeping follow. First, Shoemaker's causal theory of properties (Shoemaker 1980), on which properties just are clusters of causal powers, is sometimes listed as an anti-exclusion resource; but it belongs on the other side of the ledger. To identify a property with its powers is to reject quidditism, and a view that rejects quidditism is not an alternative to the powers-based response — it is a version of it. The same holds for any strictly anti-quidditist treatment. Second, this leaves exactly one intervention point that the compatibilist family does not occupy: denying numerical distinctness itself, by identifying the quiddity with the disposition. That is the identity horn, and in the present setting it is not a reductive capitulation but the powerful-qualities view. The eliminative survey therefore ends where the next section begins.

7. The powers-based response as the unique residual

The preceding sections have a common shape. In each case the imported strategy either cannot be applied or, applied, produces the wrong result; in each case the obstacle is the modal disentanglement of quiddity from disposition that the contingency thesis imposes; and in each case the only way to make the strategy help is to give up contingency, which is to leave the problem-generating version of Russellian monism behind. This convergence is the paper's central result. Every compatibilist anti-exclusion strategy operates on the excluding premise by exploiting an entanglement between the two causal candidates, and contingency withdraws that entanglement, so the whole toolkit is inapplicable at once. The problem is therefore not to be solved by better deployment of the existing strategies. It is to be solved, if at all, only by removing the contingency thesis itself.

That is exactly and only what the powers-based views do, which is why they succeed where the imported strategies fail, and why their success is not the fortunate feature of a favoured theory but the forced consequence of the elimination just carried out.

Consider first the powerful-qualities view of Martin (2008) and Heil (2003). On this view the categorical and the dispositional are not two properties standing in a grounding relation but one property considered under two aspects: every property is at once qualitative and powerful. If this identity holds, there is no

grounding relation between quiddity and disposition to be contingent or necessary, because there are not two relata. The phenomenal quality does not lie behind a power as an idle substratum; it is that power, qualitatively characterized. The contingency thesis is not merely denied but has no application: one cannot ask whether the same disposition could have been grounded by a different quality when the quality is not a ground of the disposition but an aspect of it. With the contingency thesis gone, the distinctness premise of the internal problem is gone, and the exclusion schema has nothing to run on just as, in the original argument, an identity between M and P leaves nothing for exclusion to exclude. The difference from the reductive reply to Kim is that the qualitative is not thereby eliminated or left unexplained; it is retained as one face of the single property, so the view secures causal relevance without paying the phenomenological price that reductive physicalism pays.

Two worries about this route should be met head-on, since they are what a critic will press. The first is that the identity view simply is Kim's reductive horn under a new name: if the categorical is identical to the dispositional, has consciousness not been reduced to causal role after all? It has not, and the direction of the identity is what marks the difference. Kim's functional reduction runs one way the mental is analysed into, and exhausted by, a causal role, with the qualitative either identified with a role-occupier or quietly dropped. The powerful-qualities identity is symmetrical: neither aspect is analysed into the other, and the qualitative is as basic as the dispositional, not a derivative of it. What is denied is only that the two are two; what is retained is that the property is irreducibly qualitative. The second worry is the demand for an explanation of why this power should feel like this. The powerful-qualities theorist does not answer it, and does not need to: on this view the felt character is not produced by the power and so owes no productive explanation, any more than a shape owes an explanation of why it occupies the region it occupies. The feel is one aspect of a property whose other aspect is the power; the identity is where explanation stops. This is the same fundamentality that Russellian monism claims for quiddities generally, so the identity view inherits no explanatory debt that the wider position was not already carrying. Strawson (2008) gestures at a nearby identity when he insists that the qualitative and the dispositional character of a concrete phenomenon cannot be prised apart even in thought, though his 'real materialism' is not straightforwardly the powerful-qualities view; the most developed statement of that view is now Heil (2003, 2021) and Martin (2008).

Consider next Mørch's phenomenal-powers view (Mørch 2014, 2017, 2019). Here the quiddity and the disposition may remain distinct, but the grounding relation between them is held to be necessary rather than contingent: certain phenomenal qualities necessitate the causal powers they ground, so that the felt character of an experience is not an idle accompaniment of its causal role but that in virtue of which it has the role it does. If the grounding is necessary, the contingency thesis is false, and both of the failures diagnosed above are undone at their source. Bennett's counterfactual had Q not obtained, D would still have obtained now comes out false, because a disposition necessitated by Q cannot obtain without it; the overdetermination is benign after all, by Bennett's own criterion. And List and Menzies' backfiring intervention swap Q while holding D fixed is no longer available, because Q cannot be varied while D is held fixed if Q necessitates D; the quiddity is a difference-maker for E after all. The same

removal of contingency that closes the powerful-qualities route closes the necessitarian route, and it closes both of the failures that afflicted the imported strategies.

The two views differ in a way that is worth marking. The powerful-qualities view is an identity claim and so recognizes no residual relation between quality and power to be characterized; Mørch's view keeps quality and power distinct and characterizes their relation as necessary. How that necessitation is to be understood is developed further by Mørch (2019, 2020), who ties it to the productive character disclosed in our experience of causation; Goff (2020) presses the question how far such necessitation is compatible with our supposed revelation of phenomenal character, a question the necessitarian owes an answer to but which does not bear on the present eliminative point. They therefore disagree about whether any gap between quality and power remains to be closed. I do not adjudicate between them on their independent merits. But they are not, as one might think, freely interchangeable for present purposes, and seeing why returns us to the two readings of the excluding premise distinguished in Section 3.

Recall that on the distinctness-only reading the excluding premise R4 requires merely that quiddity and disposition be numerically distinct, whereas on the modal-independence reading it requires that they be modally independent. This difference sorts the two powers-based views. Mørch's necessitarian view keeps quiddity and disposition numerically distinct while making their connection necessary; it therefore removes modal independence but not numerical distinctness. The powerful-qualities identity removes both, since it denies that there are two items at all. Consequently: on the modal-independence reading, both views defeat the exclusion, because both remove the modal independence that reading requires; on the distinctness-only reading, only the identity view defeats it, since Mørch's distinct-but-necessitated quiddity still satisfies the bare non-identity that reading treats as sufficient for exclusion. The situation can be set out compactly:

Contingentist RM (Q distinct, contingent)	Distinctness-only reading (R4 = Q ≠ D)	Modal-independence reading (R4 = contingency)
	excluded	excluded
Mørch (Q distinct, necessitated)	excluded	saved
Powerful qualities (Q = D)	saved	saved

The table makes the paper's central claim visible in one place. Whichever reading of the excluding premise is correct, at least one powers-based view escapes, and no non-powers view appears in either "saved" column the contingentist Russellian monist, who occupies the top row, is excluded on both readings, and Section 6 has shown that no imported strategy can move her out of it. This is what it means to say the powers-based response is the unique residual: the conclusion does not depend on settling the reading, because the disjunction of powers-based views spans both columns while everything else spans neither. What the reading settles is only the narrower question of which powers-

based view is obligatory the identity view alone, if distinctness-only is correct, or either view, if modal-independence is correct. Since the sophisticated exclusion literature has in practice adopted the modal-independence reading (Section 3), the more permissive result is the more likely one; but the argument does not need it.

This is the point at which the contribution must be distinguished from what is already in the literature, since a natural objection is that Alter and Coleman (2021) have established the conclusion already. They have not, and the gap between what they show and what is shown here is precisely the eliminative result of Sections 4 through 6. Alter and Coleman argue that the Russellian monist can reject the contingency thesis and thereby secure the physical efficacy of phenomenal quiddities; they defend this option against the charge that it is unmotivated, and they are right to. But their claim is a claim of sufficiency: rejecting contingency is enough to answer the epiphenomenalist. They do not argue for necessity they do not show that rejecting contingency is the only thing that would answer it, because they do not take up, and defeat, the compatibilist strategies that promise to answer it without rejecting contingency. Bennett and List and Menzies are exactly those strategies, and they are absent from the Russellian-monist discussion. So the standing situation is that the powers-based reply is known to work while its rivals have gone unexamined, which leaves it looking like one good option among possible others. The argument of this paper closes that gap from the other side: by showing that every compatibilist rival fails, and fails for the single reason that it relies on the modal entanglement contingency withdraws, it converts Alter and Coleman's sufficiency claim into a necessity claim. Rejecting contingency is not a defensible option; it is the only option. That is the sense in which the powers-based treatment is here derived rather than recommended, and its success explained rather than asserted.

The same point situates the present argument with respect to the most directly relevant recent contribution. Hashemi (2025) defends a solution to precisely this exclusion problem by reformulating Russellian panpsychism as a dual-aspect monism on which the phenomenal and the physical are two aspects of a single property. On the taxonomy of Section 7, that dual-aspect identity is a species of the powerful-qualities route: it dissolves the excluding premise by denying that quiddity and disposition are two items at all. Hashemi's argument is, once again, a sufficiency argument — it shows that a dual-aspect reading can answer Howell's (2015) objection. It does not show that the dual-aspect (or any powers-based) route is forced, because it does not take up and defeat the compatibilist strategies that promise to answer the objection while leaving the contingency thesis in place. The elimination of Sections 4–6 is what closes that gap: it is what shows that Hashemi's dual-aspect route is not merely available but obligatory, on the distinctness-only reading uniquely so.

It also becomes clear why the appeal to powers is not ad hoc, a charge to which it is otherwise exposed. A powers-based metaphysics is not introduced solely to rescue Russellian monism; it is independently motivated by a difficulty that afflicts the structuralist alternative quite apart from consciousness. If a disposition is nothing over and above a pattern of actual and counterfactual behaviour, it is obscure what makes counterfactuals about unmanifested dispositions true—the familiar truthmaker objection to pure dispositionalism and to Humean structuralism (Molnar 2003; Mumford 1998). Powers theorists answer

that dispositional truths are grounded in something categorical and actual, a power that exists whether or not it is ever manifested. The commitment that removes the contingency thesis is thus one that powers theorists have reason to hold on general metaphysical grounds; Russellian monism is one domain, consciousness, in which its payoff becomes visible. The position defended here inherits its central commitment rather than inventing it to meet a local difficulty.

8. The cost of the position

None of this is free, and it would misrepresent the argument to present it as a decisive vindication of Russellian monism. What has been shown is conditional: if the causal relevance of consciousness is to be secured within a broadly monist and physicalist ontology, then the contingency thesis must go, and the powers-based views are the only ones that remove it. Whether one should want to secure that relevance at this price is a further question, and the price is substantial. Nor is the residual position unopposed. Baysan (2025) argues that the mental-causation advantage claimed for Russellian panpsychism is illusory: on one reading the powers-based story explains the wrong explanandum, and on another the explanation has cheaper analogues available to rival views. Robinson (2018) and Chan (2020) press related versions of the epiphenomenalist worry against the powers route itself. The present argument does not refute these objections and does not need to: its conclusion is conditional throughout. Whether the resulting position ultimately delivers mental causation of the right kind – Baysan's challenge – is a further question that the exclusion schema alone cannot settle, and the second of the two scope-limitations stated at the end of this section is meant to concede exactly this.

The position requires realism about causal powers, together with either the identity of categorical and dispositional properties or a necessitation relation between them. Both commitments are contested. A Humean or purely categorical metaphysics of causation rejects the necessitation of dispositions by their categorical bases, holds that dispositions are metaphysically independent of what grounds them, and so treats quidditism as the default; on such a view the contingency thesis is not a local feature of Russellian monism but a consequence of the correct account of properties in general, and the anti-quidditism this paper's conclusion requires carries the full burden of that general debate (Black 2000; Lewis 2009). I have not argued against the Humean view, and the present argument does not refute it. What the argument shows is narrower and, I think, more useful: that the Russellian monist cannot remain neutral on the metaphysics of causation. The widespread assumption that Russellian monism is a thesis about the intrinsic natures of physical properties that can be combined with any account of how those properties are causally related is false. The position is hostage to the metaphysics of causation, because its treatment of mental causation stands or falls with the rejection of contingency, and contingency is a thesis about causation, not about consciousness.

Dispositional essentialism (Bird 2007) deserves a word, since it too rejects Humeanism and might seem to offer a cheaper route. On that view properties are individuated wholly by their causal roles, with no categorical remainder. This secures the reality and necessity of causal powers but at the cost of the qualitative character the present argument needs: a purely dispositional property no more explains why a

power feels like something than a categorical property explains why it does anything. The powerful-qualities view is meant to occupy the ground between dispositional essentialism and categoricism, holding that powers are also, irreducibly, qualities. That is a demanding position, and the standard objection to it—that identifying the qualitative with the dispositional threatens to make every property maximally specific, so that it is unclear how one property can ground several causal roles or how qualitatively similar properties can differ dispositionally across worlds—must be met by its proponents (Heil 2003; Martin 2008). Their reply, that this multiplicity is what taking properties to be fully determinate amounts to rather than a cost, is not obviously adequate, and I do not defend it here.

Two limitations of scope should be stated plainly. First, the argument secures the causal relevance of phenomenal quiddities; it says nothing about how such quiddities combine into the unified consciousness of a macro-subject. The combination problem is untouched, and the two problems are independent: an account of combination would still face the causal-relevance objection unless paired with the rejection of contingency, and the present argument secures causal relevance whether or not the quiddities combine as constitutive panpsychism requires. Second, the argument is addressed to the causal relevance of the categorical, not to the further question whether that relevance is of the right kind to underwrite agency, rational explanation, or the phenomenology of efficacy. Those are real questions, and they lie beyond what an argument about the exclusion schema can settle.

What the argument does settle is a point about the shape of the debate. The internal exclusion problem for Russellian monism is not one difficulty among the many that face the view; it is Kim's problem, relocated, with the contingency thesis in the role of distinctness. The strategies developed to answer Kim in the physicalist setting do not transfer, and they fail to transfer for that single reason. The powers-based response succeeds because, and only because, it removes the premise that all the other strategies leave in place. Its adoption is therefore not a preference but a result, and its cost a realist, non-Humean metaphysics of causal powers is the price of the only door that the elimination of the alternatives leaves open. The significance of the result is therefore not that powers metaphysics offers one more defence of Russellian monism. It is that the dialectical landscape changes shape. Once the contingency thesis is recognised as the structural analogue of Kim's distinctness premise, the space of available replies collapses: the choice is no longer among competing solutions to the internal exclusion problem but between a powers-based metaphysics and epiphenomenalism.

Declarations

Ethics Approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Informed Consent

This article does not involve human participants, and therefore informed consent is not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest with any institution, person, or organization.

Author Contribution

A.G. wrote the main manuscript text

Data Availability

No data were generated or analyzed in this study; therefore, data sharing is not applicable.

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Footnotes

1. The argument is stated for the panpsychist version, on which the quiddities are phenomenal. It transfers to panprotopsychism *mutatis mutandis*: there the powerful-qualities identity is between the proto-phenomenal quality and the power, and the necessitarian route has the proto-phenomenal quiddity necessitate the disposition. Nothing in Sections 4–6 turns on the quality being phenomenal rather than proto-phenomenal; what does the work throughout is contingency, which both versions share by default.
2. This mirrors the distinction Jarocki (2024) draws among versions of Russellian monism motivated by different arguments: the epistemic ("agnostic") motivation for the view is precisely what makes contingency its default setting, since it is structure's failure to fix quiddity that leaves the intrinsic natures epistemically open.