

The Review of Metaphysics

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ON TAKING THE TRANSCENDENTAL TURN

KLAUS HARTMANN

I. *Introduction*

THIS PAPER is not a piece of “research”; it simply offers a series of reflections on the transcendental method. It is occasioned by the realization that, while this method is interesting and important in the opinion of some, it can count on little familiarity in the United States. And where philosophers and students of philosophy make the effort, they have great difficulty appreciating transcendental philosophy or understanding its proposals. This difficulty is, as I say, largely circumstantial and due to a lack of familiarity with the relevant works, but, viewed less superficially, it is motivated by a positive affiliation to another philosophical tradition. In fact, the positions of this other tradition are, if largely in a modern guise, the very ones against which transcendental philosophy reacted. This historical relationship has also systematic relevance. In many ways, pre-transcendental positions seem to have priority: we need only think of formal logic, certain basic stances in empiricist epistemology, common sense. Accordingly, the subjective difficulty of philosophers and students of such persuasions can be treated “objectively,” as the difficulty of ever establishing arguments for the transcendental turn or for what Kant calls the “Copernican revolution.” Transcendental philosophy must provide arguments, so it seems, on the pre-transcendental level to establish the transcendental position. Further, supposing this problem can be overcome, there is the genuine difficulty of understanding what the transcendental theory actually says and in what way it does its job. And lastly, supposing we find that it lives up to its program, there may still be difficulty with certain implications such that philosophers and students take refuge in non-transcendental positions rather than calling for improvements of transcendental philosophy. In this paper we cannot, of course, fully discuss to what extent the transcendental position can take