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ON SAME DATED USES OF THE WORD TRANSCENDENTAL AND
ON A STILL RELEVANT ONE

Abstract

This paper considers the different meanings which the term “transcendental” has assumed in the Western philosophical tradition. In particular, it considers these meanings as moments in a history whose guiding thread is a demand for universality, a demand which has, however, been continually adopted and interpreted in irreducibly different ways. Beginning with the late-medieval, proto-romantic idea of a meta-categorical dimension of being, and proceeding until the most recent theories of pre-categorical foundations of knowledge and action, the paper attempts to determine each of those conceptions’ presuppositions and to consider which of these might be still acceptable. The paper thus aims to determine which forms of transcendentalism might be considered to be still significance today – that is, which forms might be compatible with what we have since learnt regarding the nature of what in general is, and capable of offering us a better understanding of our own particular manner of being what we are.