Beyond the Conflict of Standpoints


The *Possibility of Transcendental Philosophy* is the second volume of J. N. Mohanty's essays issued by Martinus Nijhoff in the Phaenomenologica series.¹ These sixteen essays, four appearing for the first time, are select fruits of Mohanty's labor from 1970 through 1983. Each essay in its own way addresses problems appertaining to transcendental philosophy. But given the inherent weaknesses of the collection genre, the reader may find a special effort is required to discern all but the broad strokes of internal connection among the assortment of topics and range of arguments through which Mohanty makes his case for transcendental philosophy.

The virtue of this volume is that readers from diverse philosophical points of view are likely to find essays speaking to their concerns, and initial access to Mohanty's position can be had through those essays as well as any other. All assuredly will be stimulated and challenged to dig deeper. After a brief introductory observation we shall survey the contents of the book, concluding with general remarks about what one might find by such digging.

Mohanty strikes a note which rings throughout the volume in a methodological remark offered in order to open up dialogue among Quine, Piaget, and Husserl on the problem of the genesis of reference, He writes,

> Since it is not infrequently the case that philosophical theories, professing radically different, and even opposed points of view (such

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¹. The earlier volume is *Phenomenology and Ontology* (Phaenomenologica 37), The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970.
as realism, idealism, mentalism, behaviorism), are found to share in
commom philosophical problems and theses that are "beyond the
conflict of standpoints," it is often necessary to separate a philoso-
pher's "standpoint" from his fundamental, and more enduring
insights.\(^2\)

To move philosophical dialogue beyond the strictures of hardened per-
spectives and assumptions is at the very heart of Mohanty's scholarly
efforts, and more importantly, constitutes an indispensable moment of
transcendental philosophy itself. Consequently, a respectful, mediating
tone pervades these essays, constantly seeking to resonate with common
interests, promising insights, and traces of accord too often drowned out
by differences in language and conceptual orientation. This is not to say
that Mohanty has no standpoint. But rather that the possibility of
transcendental philosophy depends largely on the ability to call any given
standpoint into question, including its own.

While the volume as a whole is something less than the systematic
treatment for which the title would seem to beckon, the tightly structured
and tersely argued individual pieces are gathered into three broad groups.

The first group defends the possibility of transcendental philosophy
from without, relating it to certain trends and issues in analytic philos-
ophy. In particular, there is a new essay on Husserl and Frege regarding
the overcoming of psychologism, which, Mohanty argues, Husserl was
able to do and Frege was not. Overcoming here does not mean refutation
but coming to recognize that psychologism presupposes an ontologically
naive interpretation of mind (the mental as the private) and showing how
such an interpretation is possible. Without so doing even anti-psychol-
ogistic positions remain tied to a naturalistic framework. Hence, Frege's
move was to sever mental life from logic and science while Husserl sought
a critique and understanding of the mental through a transcendental
discourse which exposes the errors of naturalism and opens up an eidetic,
descriptive, intentional theory of mind.

Two other essays in the first group, "Intentionality and Noema" and
"Intentionality, Causality, and Wholism" pick up on problems concern-
ing the conflict and compatibility between naturalistic and intentional
interpretations of consciousness. The former goes on to outline the inten-

\(^2\) Pp. 167-68. Mohanty attributes the phrase "beyond the conflict of standpoints" to
Nicolai Hartmann's "Diesseits vom Idealismus und Realismus," *Kant Studien* 29 (1924).