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SWARTZ, Norman. *Beyond Experience: Metaphysical Theories and Philosophical Constraints*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. xiii + 449 pp. Cloth, \$50.00; paper, \$19.95

Swartz attempts the commendable task of motivating nonprofessional philosophers to engage in the activity of identifying and criticizing their own metaphysical theories. He does this first by explaining what a metaphysical theory is and how to evaluate it, and second by examining the plausibility of various theories concerning space, time, properties, synchronic identity, diachronic identity, and personal identity. A professional philosopher will find it easy to read. An upper-level undergraduate or beginning graduate student would, I imagine, find it challenging at times but readable. There is a glossary of technical terms, further readings suggested, bibliographical references, a name index, and a subject index at the end of the book.

Swartz lays out the currently-popular approach to metaphysics used by analytically-trained philosophers, that is, the testing of our intuitions in counterfactual situations. He claims that if we are to learn which metaphysical theories are better than others, we must go beyond what scientific theories are limited by, namely, experience. He shows convincingly that scientific theories are imbedded with metaphysical theories which cannot themselves be adjudicated using experience (or observation) alone. Moreover, there is no mechanical way to decide between metaphysical theories. One simply has to test these theories using conceptual analysis on a case by case basis. Swartz's understanding of conceptual analysis, then, involves analyzing a concept in counterfactual situations. That is, one has to ask whether a logically consistent story could be told such that the story would make sense of a particularly odd use of a term. If so, then one has found out that a commonly-accepted use for a term is not necessarily, that is, metaphysically, the correct use for that term, but is only contingently the correct use.

Swartz then examines briefly (which is surprising in a 449-page book) various metaphysical theories concerning what space is, what time is, what a property is, what synchronic identity is, what diachronic identity is, and what being a person is. He suggests, but does not argue, that a negative theory of space, for example, is more plausible than a positive theory. That is, he suggests that a metaphysical

theory which reduces talk of "space" to talk of physical objects without remainder is more plausible than a theory which posits the existence of space in addition to physical objects. He suggests, but again does not argue, that realism as opposed to conceptualism, nominalism, and a theory of tropes, is most plausible, although reluctantly so. This reluctance stems from, I think, his preference for negative theories in general. He then suggests that positive theories concerning synchronic identity just push the problem back one step, and do not solve the problem. On the other hand, negative theories do solve the problem. The same suggestion is made with respect to positive theories concerning diachronic identity and personal identity. In other words, the problems of individuation, identity through time, and personal identity are not solved by positing the existence of some additional kind of thing, called "substance." These problems are just postponed.

I found this book interesting to read. Swartz introduces and motivates nicely some metaphysical problems and some of the main metaphysical theories which have been proposed to solve them. However, his philosophical methodology will look more like a "language game" than a hard-nosed search after truth. This, I believe, makes his goal of motivating the nonprofessional philosopher difficult to achieve. Such a reader, in turn, may be left with the feeling that metaphysics is all "ivory tower" stuff, which, as Swartz agrees, it is not.

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NOTE: Norman Swartz's *BEYOND EXPERIENCE* is available online, **at no cost**, at http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/beyond_experience/

Transfer/return to Norman Swartz's [homepage](#).
Transfer/return to [online materials](#) written by Norman Swartz.

