

NORMAN SWARTZ

BEYOND
EXPERIENCE

Metaphysical Theories and
Philosophical Constraints
Second Edition

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You can contact the author at: swartz@sfu.ca He welcomes your comments and suggestions. Other of his writings can be found at <http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/swartz/contents.htm>

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Foreword

Grappling with issues that are both inherently interesting and unavoidably controversial is the lifeblood of philosophy. A good introduction to the subject must convey the sense of excitement that characterizes lively controversies. Doing this well – avoiding the mock combat of straw men and artificial opponents – is far from easy, which is why relatively few good introductions are the work of one single writer. The present book is an exception to this rule. For Norman Swartz has managed to combine a good sense of the complexities that always lurk behind the surface of philosophical issues with an easy, nontechnical mode of exposition accessible to the interested nonspecialist. His book is at once readable, informative, and stimulating.

One can learn *about* philosophy by reading, but one can learn to *philosophize* only by thinking about the issues. But philosophical thinking requires recourse to problems, concepts, and methods, and these are obtained most efficiently and effectively via the printed page. What a book can do is to extend a congenial invitation to learning. The difficulty is finding books with the right combination of accessibility-with-profundity and of breadth-with-depth. In this regard, the interests of the beginner – student or interested reader alike – are well served by *Beyond Experience* which, I have found, provides constantly stimulating discussion of a wide range of challenging questions.

The very nature of philosophy is such that it is easier to pose problems than to enforce conclusions. Even the plausible data of the field – the deliverances of ‘plain logic’, of ordinary common sense, and of science – are not of so fixed a character that they always resist the corrosive impact of critical scrutiny. Moreover the ‘data’ of philosophy (whatever they are) underdetermine the conclusions: there are always alternatives that must be weighed by standards that we bring to our philosophizing rather than extract from it. To present philosophy in a dogmatic way is accordingly to betray the enterprise

by impoverishing it – by putting out of sight concepts, issues, and problems that deserve and need to have their place in philosophy's complex terrain. In this connection, what is particularly appealing about this book is its undogmatic approach. Its author is more concerned that readers should appreciate the many-sidedness and complexity of the issues than that they take away a predilection for one particular answer. This insistence on readers thinking for themselves rather than pressing for the endorsement of one particular view is certainly one of the book's most attractive features.

Those who give *Beyond Experience* an attentive reading are in for a treat. They will come away not only with a better sense of what philosophy is all about, but will also experience the enjoyable stimulus of thinking philosophically.

Nicholas Rescher
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University of Pittsburgh

Acknowledgments

Four colleagues, three of whom I have never met, have played essential roles in making it possible for me to bring this book into being.

William Saywell, the president of Simon Fraser University, took it upon himself to recommend to the board of governors a sabbatical leave for me under special terms for the academic year 1988-89. Without his confidence in the project, his enthusiasm, and his arranging supplementary financial support, I would not have been able to undertake writing this book.

If William Saywell provided the opportunity, Nicholas Rescher provided the sustenance. In the fall of 1988, when I had written about the first third of the manuscript, I read Rescher's editorial in the *American Philosophical Quarterly*:

A substantial divide apparently separates the issues that intrigue philosophers themselves from those which non-philosophers think that philosophers ought to discuss. For, like other professionals, we philosophers favor shoptalk over popularization and prefer addressing our colleagues and 'the public' at large. We incline to salve our consciences with the comforting reassurance that our field has become too technical for that sort of thing.

But has it? Perhaps we have simply become too impatient to deal with the complexities of simple exposition and self-indulgently prefer technicalities laden with presuppositions and laborsaving complexities to the clear and patient discussion of fundamentals.

A considerable host of philosophers from Hume to Russell and beyond show that it is possible to do both technical philosophy and popular communication – occasionally even in one and the same book. ... If philosophy loses out on its educative

mission towards the reading public at large, the fault lies not in our stars – or in the very subject – but in ourselves. ([172], 347)¹

Once you have read chapter 1 in this book, you will understand why I was startled and delighted to find Rescher writing this. On opposite sides of the continent, we were simultaneously writing identical thoughts about the practice of philosophy. I sent him immediately what I had already written, and he wrote back, encouraging me in my effort and graciously accepting my invitation to write the Foreword to this volume. But his kindness did not end there. Throughout the year that followed, when I often became exhausted and discouraged, Rescher kept pushing me on with reassurances and suggestions. There is no way I can repay him. But neither – I am sure – does he expect repayment. All I can hope is that someday I might, in turn, be privileged to pass such generosity on to some other writer.

If Saywell was the impetus and Rescher the sustainer, then Ron Schoeffel, senior house editor, and Bill Harnum, marketing manager, at the University of Toronto Press, were the patrons. I had earlier discussed this project with some other editors, but they had warned that the general public would not read philosophy. Schoeffel and Harnum reacted differently. They were not willing to ‘write off’ the general public, believing that not just university students and their teachers, but nonacademics as well, have both an appetite and an ability to read serious philosophy.

But it must be clear that a book of this size cannot have called upon the assistance of just four other persons. Many others, as well, contributed substantially to this volume.

The British Columbia provincial government, under its Work/Study Program, and Robert Brown, the dean of arts at Simon Fraser University, provided funding for my two stalwart research assistants, Hye-Ju Cho and Armin Meyerholz.

Moira Gutteridge, a friend and colleague (Fraser Valley College and Capilano College), drew the splendid illustrations for chapters 8 and 11. Lorraine Ourom, executive editor at the Press, was in charge

1. Abbreviated citations are used throughout this book. Bracketed numbers in parentheses are cross-references to the References section, pp. 415-26. Numbers following the brackets are page citations. Thus “([172], 347)” refers to page 347 in the item cited as no. 172 in the References section.

of the production editing. Throughout the months of preparing the manuscript for publication, she good-naturedly accommodated an inordinate number of fussy requests from this author. John St James copy-edited this book. Unfortunately, a good copy-editor's contribution to a book, unlike a good illustrator's, is by its very nature invisible. But those who have seen my original manuscript and have seen John's expert, extensive, and indispensable repair of it know what a considerable improvement he has wrought. Probably unwisely, I have sometimes refused his advice. What stylistic idiosyncrasies occur, I assure you are my own.

Two readers who were engaged by the University of Toronto Press, and who remain anonymous, painstakingly read the penultimate draft of the manuscript. They provided a number of astute suggestions which I have been pleased to adopt, and they caught some errors which I have corrected. But I am sure that they have not spotted every error or challenged me on every unclarity. In due course, readers may tell me what these are. But whatever these errors may turn out to be, I, who wrote them, am alone responsible for them.

Dennis Bevington and Professors John Len Berggren, Raymond D. Bradley, Roger C. Buck, Warren Goldfarb, Raymond E. Jennings, Hugh Johnston, E.L. Pattullo, Mark Skinner, Kenneth B. Storey, Don Todd, and Robert Todd provided invaluable assistance in tracking down some of the bibliographical materials I needed.

Professors Harvey Gerber, Leigh Palmer, and Lawrence Dill obligingly lent a hand with certain details in mathematics, astronomy, and ichthyology, respectively.

And the editors of *Analysis*, *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, and *Ratio* kindly gave permission for me to reprint, as sections of chapters in this book, revised versions of certain of my earlier papers. The particulars of original publication are to be found herein as footnotes at the outset of each of the relevant sections. The curator of the Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, gave me permission to quote from the unpublished papers of Clarence Darrow.

Last to be mentioned, but foremost in importance, is Sylvia, my wife and helpmate. Throughout the thousands of hours I spent working on this book, by her quiet encouragement and unfailing love, she provided the needed perspective and balance. For she is the secure reminder that I am first a husband and a father, a son and a brother, and then – but only then – a philosopher.

February, 1991

Preface to the second edition

All known typographical errors in the first edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1991, have been corrected. There are, in addition, numerous small changes throughout.

A postscript (pp. 144ff), further exploring the matter of out-of-body sensations, has been added to chapter seven.

I would like to thank the many university and college instructors who have adopted the first edition for use in their metaphysics courses. Thanks, too, to all those – instructors and students alike – who have written to me with comments, questions, and suggestions.

By making this book available, both as a single file and as multiple files (chapter-by-chapter), I hope instructors who wish to use selected chapters as parts of their course materials will now find it easy to do so.

Additional materials of mine can be found at

<http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/swartz/contents.htm>

Please do feel welcome to send me your comments. I can be reached by email at: swartz@sfu.ca