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BOOK REVIEW OF *SUBJECTS OF THE WORLD: DARWIN'S RHETORIC AND THE STUDY OF AGENCY IN NATURE*

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BOOK REVIEW OF PAUL SHELDON DAVIES *SUBJECTS OF THE WORLD: DARWIN'S RHETORIC AND THE STUDY OF AGENCY IN NATURE*. BY PAUL SHELDON DAVIES. CHICAGO (ILLINOIS): UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS. \$40.00. VII + 259 P.; ILL.; INDEX. ISBN: 978-0-226-13762-9. 2009.

Naturalism argues that the best way to make sense of reality is to ground one's assumptions in our best current scientific understanding. In philosophy, this translates into providing ways for explaining away many traditional issues in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. In P.S. Davies' bracing book, we get a resounding manifesto for naturalism, in particular as it pertains to our perceived free will (Davies argues that this concept is otiose). His is not the first naturalistic manifesto, but it is arguably one of the most trenchant. He focuses on cognitive psychology and how it explains many of our epistemic biases. There is very little evolutionary theory in this book; the Darwinian rhetoric advertised in the book's subtitle refers simply to the fact that Darwin often hints at our lack of imagination in how we trace the origin and nature of our core beliefs. Davies' goal is to take up this insight anew using what he calls 'directives' which are heuristic principles that should guide philosophical inquiry. The most contentious directive is the "Dubious by descent" directive (DD) that assumes that any and all concepts that do not have purely naturalistic foundations will be explained away and should therefore be bracketed from discussion. However, the DD directive is ultimately too uncompromising and this weakens the broader appeal and plausibility of some of the arguments presented in the book. History of science is riddled with successful theories that were motivated by questionable cosmological beliefs (e.g. Newton's alchemy). Should we have used the DD directive to jettison

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positive scientific contributions grounded in error? Davies' eliminativist knife will be too sharp for the unconverted. For this reason, this book will not agree with many readers (but after all, few philosophy books do). Most non-philosophers will wonder what the fuss is about. Non-naturalistic philosophers will not entertain any of Davies' directives since naturalism is adopted mostly by fiat. The right audience is probably the growing naturalistic philosophers' community (the discussion on teleology and functions in particular is very helpful). Whether 'naturalists' will accept Davies' challenge (i.e. most of you are not 'good' naturalists) as constructive remains to be seen, but the gauntlet has been cast and it deserves being picked up. Davies reminds us that being a coherent naturalist is a serious and difficult philosophical project; as such this stimulating book should be read by all philosophers interested in the implications of naturalism.