



Subjects of the World: Darwin's Rhetoric and the Study of Agency in Nature

Paul Sheldon Davies

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Being human while trying to scientifically study human nature confronts us with our most vexing problem. Efforts to explicate the human mind are thwarted by our cultural biases and entrenched infirmities; our first-person experiences as practical agents convince us that we have capacities beyond the reach of scientific explanation. What we need to move forward in our understanding of human agency, Paul Sheldon Davies argues, is a reform in the way we study ourselves and a long overdue break with traditional humanist thinking.

Davies locates a model for change in the rhetorical strategies employed by Charles Darwin in *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin worked hard to anticipate and diminish the anxieties and biases that his radically historical view of life was bound to provoke. Likewise, Davies draws from the history of science and contemporary psychology and neuroscience to build a framework for the study of human agency that identifies and diminishes outdated and limiting biases. The result is a heady, philosophically wide-ranging argument in favor of recognizing that humans are, like everything else, subjects of the natural world—an acknowledgement that may free us to see the world the way it actually is.

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