



Did Darwin Write the Origin Backwards?: Philosophical Essays on Darwin's Theory by Elliott Sober
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HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, AND ETHICS OF BIOLOGY

DID DARWIN WRITE THE *ORIGIN* BACKWARDS?: PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAYS ON DARWIN'S THEORY.

By Elliott Sober. Amherst (New York): Prometheus Books. \$21.00 (paper). 230 p.; ill.; index. ISBN: 978-1-61614-230-8 (pb); 978-1-61614-278-0 (eb). 2011.

This book is a collection of four more-or-less freestanding essays, as well as a lengthy postscript that explores some themes of the essays in greater technical detail. In each essay, Sober engages with Darwin's work, highlighting some of Darwin's underappreciated insights, noting the occasional misstep, and addressing some interpretive puzzles. Sober's own philosophical commitments—especially his likelihoodist views about confirmation—influence his reading of Darwin. For this reason, the volume also serves as an accessible introduction to Sober's thoughts.

The four independent essays address: the relationship between Darwin's arguments for natural selection and his arguments concerning common ancestry; Darwin's views on group selection; his less than entirely successful attempt to tackle the problem of explaining sex ratios; and methodological naturalism.

The title of this publication is derived from the opening essay. Sober notes that in *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin frontloads the arguments concerning natural selection. The arguments for common ancestry get developed most fully in the later chapters of the book. Why did Darwin opt for this order of exposition? Sober argues that the common ancestry thesis is *evidentially prior* to natural selection. Darwin's arguments for common ancestry do not depend on his account of natural selection. But natural selection is

causally prior to common ancestry, because selection helps explain how existing species have descended, with modification, from a single common ancestor in the remote past. In the author's telling, Darwin made a decision to structure *Origin* in a way that best reflects the causal rather than the evidential relations.

Another highlight of the current volume is Sober's treatment of methodological naturalism. He dismisses some in-principle arguments for methodological naturalism and takes a more modest, pragmatic line: we should stick with methodological naturalism just because naturalistic science has been so successful. This move enables him to respond to the charge that it is inconsistent for scientists to prohibit appeals to some supernatural entities (e.g., God), while routinely presupposing the existence of others (e.g., numbers, which some Platonists take to be supernatural). In the past, successful science has appealed to the latter, but not the former.

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THE DARWIN ARCHIPELAGO: THE NATURALIST'S CAREER BEYOND *ORIGIN OF SPECIES*.

By Steve Jones. New Haven (Connecticut): Yale University Press. \$27.50. xvii + 228 p.; index. ISBN: 978-0-300-15540-2. [Originally published as *Darwin's Island: The Galapagos in the Garden of England*, 2009.] 2011.

Charles Darwin published his great work, *On the Origin of Species*, in 1859 when he was 50 years old. He died some 20-plus years later in 1882.

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