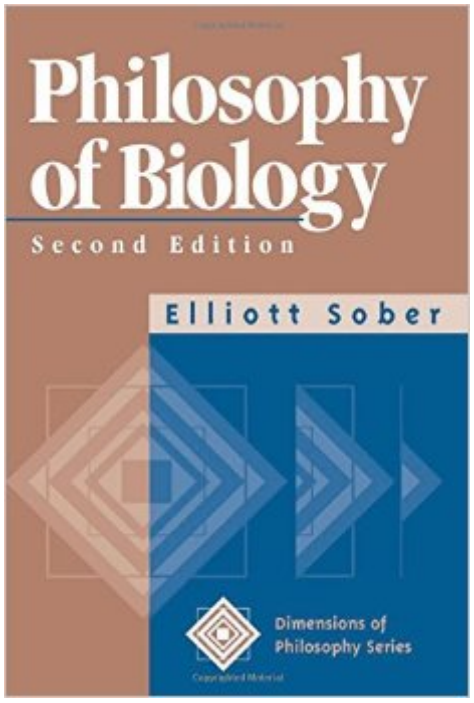
Philosophy Of Biology, 2nd Edition (Dimensions Of Philosophy)



Synopsis

Perhaps because of it implications for our understanding of human nature, recent philosophy of biology has seen what might be the most dramatic work in the philosophies of the â •specialâ • sciences. This drama has centered on evolutionary theory, and in the second edition of this textbook, Elliott Sober introduces the reader to the most important issues of these developments. With a rare combination of technical sophistication and clarity of expression, Sober engages both the higher level of theory and the direct implications for such controversial issues as creationism, teleology, nature versus nurture, and sociobiology. Above all, the reader will gain from this book a firm grasp of the structure of evolutionary theory, the evidence for it, and the scope of its explanatory significance.

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Customer Reviews

In brief this was one of the best books I read in 1995. While the book isa splendid introduction to an exciting topic, it has numerous specialinsights and clarifying presentations. It keeps close to biology demonstrating some fascinating respects in which biology and its theorists raise special issues in the philosophy of science. The book would go well with one of the main philosophy of natural sciences textbooks.

I am using this text in a Philosophy of Biology course on Darwinism together with writings from several other sources including Ridly and Dawkins. It works well in such a situation. While not purely a Phil/Bio book, it does contain information that is pertinent. Also, it is written by a well-established

and respected author who specializes in Philosophy of Biology. The book is easy to read and informative. It explores some off-hand topics such as the ability of science to prove adaptationism within evolution (maybe more Phil/Science?). Nevertheless, if used with other texts, I would recommend it.

I will not deny that Elliott Sober's work is illuminating and comprehensive. What concerns me is that his book is not one on the philosophy of biology. Rather, it is a work on the philosophy of evolutionary theory.Within it's own scope it's fine, although potential buyers should note that there are much better introductions to the subject (see Mayr 1988, 1999 or 2004, Rosenberg 1985, and Sober's anthology: 'Conceptual Issues in Evolutionary Biology'). In addition, Sober's philosophical background makes his writing style unnecessarily complicated, often attempting to impress the reader making irrelevant comparisons and references.What is most unfortunate is his choice of title. This book does not in any way represent or exemplify the current concerns of the practicing biologist. Sober ignores most areas of biology as if they didn't exist, focusing solely on evolution. Books like this one really harm the discipline of philosophy of biology, as they make the public think that this exciting new discipline can be effectively reduced to the study of evolutionary theory. As a biologist myself, I doubt that more than 5% of all practicing biologists are engaged in traditional evolutionary studies. Since the 1960s, the emphasis has been on the molecular aspect of life, and the philosophy of biology should similarly attempt to address issues arising from molecular concepts and research. A few books have been written that emphasise the molecular and experimental aspect that defines modern biology. See for example Weber's Philosophy of Experimental Biology (2005), or Sarkar's 'Molecular Models of Life'.For those looking for a general introduction to the philosophy of biology, I would recommend Sterelny and Griffiths' (1999) 'Sex and Death' since it successfully covers a very wide range of biological topics, not just evolution. Books like Sober's 'Philosophy of Biology' are misleading both in their content and in their approach to the subject.

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