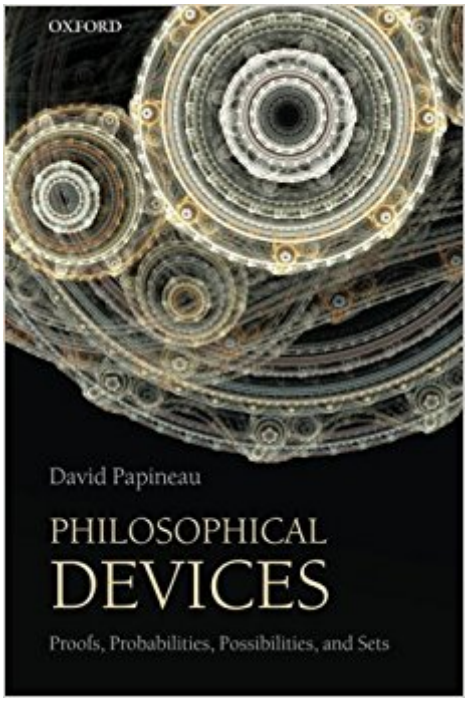
Philosophical Devices: Proofs, Probabilities, Possibilities, And Sets



Synopsis

This book is designed to explain the technical ideas that are taken for granted in much contemporary philosophical writing. Notions like "denumerability," "modal scope distinction," "Bayesian conditionalization," and "logical completeness" are usually only elucidated deep within difficult specialist texts. By offering simple explanations that by-pass much irrelevant and boring detail, Philosophical Devices is able to cover a wealth of material that is normally only available to specialists. The book contains four sections, each of three chapters. The first section is about sets and numbers, starting with the membership relation and ending with the generalized continuum hypothesis. The second is about analyticity, a prioricity, and necessity. The third is about probability, outlining the difference between objective and subjective probability and exploring aspects of conditionalization and correlation. The fourth deals with metalogic, focusing on the contrast between syntax and semantics, and finishing with a sketch of Godel’s theorem. Philosophical Devices will be useful for university students who have got past the foothills of philosophy and are starting to read more widely, but it does not assume any prior expertise. All the issues discussed are intrinsically interesting, and often downright fascinating. It can be read with pleasure and profit by anybody who is curious about the technical infrastructure of contemporary philosophy.

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Customer Reviews

"David Papineau’s Philosophical Devices is an excellent introduction to central tools, ideas, and pieces of vocabulary now current in Anglo-American (so-called "analytic") philosophy. Since he is himself an important contributor to their development and dissemination, one can hardly expect to

find fault with the content of his introductory effort. And one would be right; Devices delivers what it promises with speed and clarity. ... David Papineau's Philosophical Devices can hardly be bested as a rewarding auxiliary reading." --MAA Reviews

David Papineau was educated in Trinidad, England, and South Africa. He has a BSc in mathematics from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and a BA and PhD in philosophy from Cambridge. He has lectured at Reading University, Macquarie University, Birkbeck College London, and Cambridge University. Since 1990 he has been Professor of Philosophy at King's College London.He was President of the British Society for the Philosophy of Science from 1993 to 1995. In 1999-2000 he was a Leverhulme Research Fellow and in 2007 a Mind Fellow. He was President of the Mind Association for 2009-10. In 2010 he gave the Rudolf Carnap Lectures in Bochum, Germany and in 2011 the Gottlob Frege Lectures in Tartu, Estonia.

I have to agree with the majority of the reviewers who've already commented on Papineau's book. It's concise, generally clearly written, covers a number of areas that those interested in getting deeper into philosophy, logic, mathematics, or computer science should be readily familiar or comfortable with, and serves as a very good intermediate step between the overly general pop philosophy books readily available and more serious, but also denser, more academic treatises. The four main areas covered, i.e., set theory, types of truth and possible world theories, the nature of probability, and logic and theoretical structures, are vitally important in dealing with, and thinking through, many areas of both practical and theoretical life. My only quibble, based upon the Kindle version, is that Papineau peppers his text with 25 explanatory boxes giving more detail about various topics mentioned in the main text. Some of the boxes should, I believe, be slightly rewritten and inserted into the main text since they make clearer the point or points that particular part of the text is attempting to make. If the nature of the information in the box is such that it's nice, but essentially superfluous to the main text's argument, then at least place the box somewhere close to the area where it's referred. Quite often one is referred to a box, and it's located quite a few pages further on; does one stop at the reference point and page ahead quite a way in order to read the box, or does one wait until the box comes up naturally a number of pages later when it's not connected with what the text is then discussing. The above is a minor point I grant, but it became somewhat irritating each time it would happen. It does not, however, take away from the numerous positive points about the content of the text itself. In sum, a worthwhile read.

I wish I had known about David Papineau's Philosophical Devices when I first started studying philosophy at an academic level. So much of what makes philosophy difficult to study is bound up in concepts and principles everyone seems to have as part of their background knowledge. Many times I have gone to office hours needing tutoring on the finer points of conditionals, probability theory, set theory, the analytic/synthetic distinction, and the difference between de re and de dicto necessity. Often I left with only a little better understanding of the issues, and a vague sense of what NOT to write in a paper fearing I would say something ignorant about them. This book goes a long way in alleviating that problem, because Papineau does a wonderful job breaking these rather abstruse topics down into plain language. I was especially impressed with the clarity of exposition with respect to Kripke's modal semantics and causal theory of reference, Russell's paradox, Cantor's continuum hypothesis, and Godel's incompleteness theorem. I will revisit this volume again and again to brush up on these subjects to better my understanding and that of my students if I get the chance to teach.

The main thrust of this book is sorely needed in philosophy - detailed explanations of commonly-used philosophical tools (concepts, models, analogies, etc.) geared towards an advanced beginner to intermediate-level philosopher (meaning, anyone who studies philosophy, not just students or graduates of an academic program, but certainly including those). As the book says, it's easy to find superficial treatment of things such as the "Possible Worlds" framework for talking about all sorts of things like counterfactuals, modality, meaning, semantics, truth, etc. The other immediately available resources (though not always easy to track down) are the original works and/or subsequent expert-level critiques, defenses, extensions, etc. Stuff that is much too technical for the person just learning how to use the tool. Yet, many of these "devices" (to start using the word the book uses!) are ones used quite frequently in philosophical conversation and written work, and written with the assumption that the reader already understands everything there is to know about the device. There was, until this book, nothing I could find that filled the gap between the super-easy, high-level explanation and the highly technical expert treatment. This book does that job admirably. I didn't always agree with the reasoning and choices made in the creation of the devices, but that's philosophy for you :-). I couldn't have had the knowledge to agree or disagree until I understood the device in the first place (notwithstanding, of course, the common practice of holding strong political opinions without understanding the issues in the first place :-)).The book's success could be based on the single point discussed above, but it's also a well-written book. Engaging, erudite, witty, and just generally well-done. Highly recommended for anyone who

reads/enjoys/studies philosophy more than casually, but who is not yet or has no desire to become an expert.Cheers,ScottTallahassee, Florida, USA

Excellent book for building an understanding of the basics in each topic. Authors who do good work establishing foundations for further understanding often don’t get the credit they deserve... it’s very difficult work to write clearly about complex topics! Papineau does not use confusing jargon or excessive examples, he provides clean and clear explanations and helps ease you into the theories so you can know *why* things work the way that they do, not merely *that* they work a certain way. This book is perfect for self-study, and quite compact to make it a cinch to throw in your backpack for reading between lectures or on lunch breaks.I would recommend this book to any Philosophy, Math, or Computer Science undergraduate who wants to foster a holistic understanding of the topics Papineau’s book covers. As these "Philosophical Devices" are germane to countless disciplines, many graduate students as well could benefit from the book’s concise representation of its topics.

Proofs and Fundamentals: A First Course in Abstract Mathematics (Undergraduate Texts in Mathematics) Introduction to Mathematical Structures and Proofs (Undergraduate Texts in Mathematics) How to Read and Do Proofs: An Introduction to Mathematical Thought Processes Mathematical Thinking: Problem-Solving and Proofs (2nd Edition)