



Interpreting Probability: Controversies and Developments in the Early Twentieth Century (Cambridge Studies in Probability, Induction and Decision Theory)

By David Howie

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This book is a study of the concept of probability as it has been used and applied across a number of scientific disciplines from genetics to geophysics. Probability has a dual aspect: sometimes it is a numerical ratio; sometimes, in the Bayesian interpretation, a degree of belief. David Howie examines probabilistic theories of scientific knowledge, and asks how, despite being adopted by many scientists and statisticians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Bayesianism was discredited as a theory of scientific inference during the 1920s and 1930s. Through a close examination of a dispute between two British scientists, the author argues that a choice between the two interpretations of probability is not forced by pure logic, or the mathematics of the situation, but depends on the experiences and aims of the individuals involved, and their views of the correct form of scientific inquiry.

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Review

"...this is a timely and valuable contribution to our knowledge of the period and its great figures. There is a wealth of incidental, but always relevant and often fascinating, historical detail. Another distinctive feature of his book is that, though it concerns a highly technical subject matter, his own discussion is anything but technical in any overtly formal sense: in fact, there are hardly any formulas in the book. Yet he succeeds in conveying, in words, the technical ideas both precisely and clearly. Its thoroughness, combined with an assured informality and lightness of touch, make the book an enlightening and entertaining read." -Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews 02/02/2003

"A very valuable reference for researchers and general readers in probability, statistics, and the history and philosophy of science. Recommended." Choice

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