

The Probabilistic Revolution: Ideas in History (MIT Press) (Volume 1)

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Probability ideas are the success story common to the growth of the modern natural and social sciences. Chance, indeterminism, and statistical inference have radically and globally transformed the sciences in a "probabilistic revolution." This monumental work traces the rise, the transformation, and the diffusion of probabilistic and statistical thinking in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is less concerned with specific technical discoveries than with locating the probability revolution historically within a larger framework of ideas. There is no comparable study that treats the rise of probability and statistics in such scope and depth. The contributors - scientists, historians and philosophers from eight countries - make it possible for readers trained in many disciplines to see why the probabilistic revolution has been so complete and so successful, and how the rejection of uniform causality by quantum physics, the stochastic nature of evolutionary biology, the indeterminisms of human psychology, and the random processes of many economic activities are all manifestations of an underlying unifying concept. Volume 1 opens with provocative essays on scientific revolutions in general and the probabilistic revolution in particular by Thomas S. Kuhn, I. Bernard Cohen, and Ian Hacking. Other authors discuss the evolution of philosophical ideas about probability and their articulation and elaboration in the mathematics of the nineteenth century and describe the first applications of techniques of statistical inference during that century: Topics include the uses and abuses of official statistics by the bureaucrats of France, England, and Prussia; the use - or neglect - of statistics by nascent sociologists, demographers, and insurance actuaries; and the emergence of statistical methodologies in fields ranging from social reform to agricultural production. The emphasis in volume 2 is on the more recent scientific advances of the probabilistic approach in various natural and social sciences, from "random walks" in the stock market to random drift in natural selection, and from indeterminate events at the atomic level to unpredictable actions at the human level. Lorenz Krüger and Michael Heidelberger are philosophers of science at Göttingen University, Lorraine J. Daston is a historian at Brandeis University, Gerd Gigerenzer is a psychologist at the University of Constance, and Mary S. Morgan is an economist at York University. A Bradford Book.

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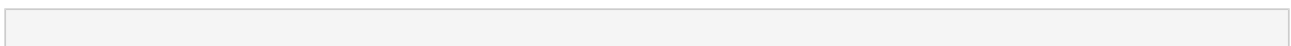
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Editorial Review

Review

"I can think of no other comparable work that comes even close to covering the same important material in the history of science and philosophy." Patrick Suppes, Lucie Stern Professor of Philosophy, Stanford University

These two volumes come close to the best that can be achieved on the topics and the period covered. They contain a mine of historical and philosophical material. You can dip in almost anywhere and be interested.

(Nature)

About the Author

Lorraine Daston is Director at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, Germany. She is the coauthor of *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* and the editor of *Things That Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science* (both Zone Books).

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