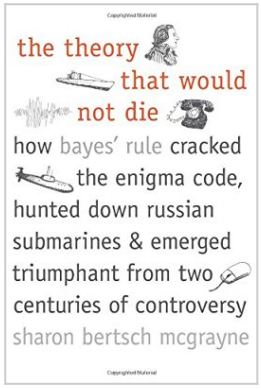

The Theory That Would Not Die: How Bayes' Rule Cracked the Enigma Code, Hunted Down Russian Submarines, and Emerged Triumphant from Two Centuries of Controversy

By Sharon Bertsch McGrayne

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Bayes' rule appears to be a straightforward, one-line theorem: by updating our initial beliefs with objective new information, we get a new and improved belief. To its adherents, it is an elegant statement about learning from experience. To its opponents, it is subjectivity run amok.

In the first-ever account of Bayes' rule for general readers, Sharon Bertsch McGrayne explores this controversial theorem and the human obsessions surrounding it. She traces its discovery by an amateur mathematician in the 1740s through its development into roughly its modern form by French scientist Pierre Simon Laplace. She reveals why respected statisticians rendered it professionally taboo for 150 years—at the same time that practitioners relied on it to solve crises involving great uncertainty and scanty information (Alan Turing's role in breaking Germany's Enigma code during World War II), and explains how the advent of off-the-shelf computer technology in the 1980s proved to be a game-changer. Today, Bayes' rule is used everywhere from DNA de-coding to Homeland Security.

Drawing on primary source material and interviews with statisticians and other scientists, *The Theory That Would Not Die* is the riveting account of how a seemingly simple theorem ignited one of the greatest controversies of all time.

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Editorial Review

Review
"A masterfully researched tale of human struggle and accomplishment . . . . Renders perplexing mathematical debates digestible and vivid for even the most lay of audiences."--Michael Washburn, "Boston Globe"--Michael Washburn "Boston Globe "

"If you're not thinking like a Bayesian, perhaps you should be."--John Allen Paulos, "New York Times Book Review"--John Allen Paulos "New York Times Book Review "

"[An] engrossing study....Her book is a compelling and entertaining fusion of history, theory and biography."--Ian Critchley, "Sunday Times"--Ian Critchley"Sunday Times" (06/19/2011)

"Well known in statistical circles, Bayes's Theorem was first given in a posthumous paper by the English clergyman Thomas Bayes in the mid-eighteenth century. McGrayne provides a fascinating account of the modern use of this result in matters as diverse as cryptography, assurance, the investigation of the connection between smoking and cancer, RAND, the identification of the author of certain papers in The Federalist, election forecasting and the search for a missing H-bomb. The general reader will enjoy her easy style and the way in which she has successfully illustrated the use of a result of prime importance in scientific work."--Andrew I. Dale, author of "A History of Inverse Probability From Thomas Bayes to Karl Pearson" and "Most Honorable Remembrance: The Life and Work of Thomas Bayes"

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"A book simply highlighting the astonishing 200 year controversy over Bayesian analysis would have been highly welcome. This book does so

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--Robert E. Kass

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"For the student who is being exposed to Bayesian statistics for the first time, McGrayne's book provides a wealth of illustrations to whet his or her appetite for more. It will broaden and deepen the field of reference of the more expert statistician, and the general reader will find an understandable, well-written, and fascinating account of a scientific field of great importance today."--Andrew I./i>--Andrew I. Dale "Notices of the American Mathematical Society "

""The Theory That Would Not Die" is the first popular science book to document the rocky story of Bayes's rule. At times, her tale has everything you would expect of a modern-day thriller. . . . To have crafted a page-turner out of the history of statistics is an impressive feat. If only lectures at university had been this racy."--David Robson, "New Scientist"--David Robson"New Scientist" (07/02/2011)

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"Delightful ... [and] McGrayne gives a superb synopsis of the fundamental development of probability and statistics by Laplace."--Scott L./i> --Physics Today "Scott L. Zeger "

About the Author

Sharon Bertsch McGrayne is the author of numerous books, including *Nobel Prize Women in Science: Their Lives, Struggles, and Momentous Discoveries* and *Prometheans in the Lab: Chemistry and the Making of the Modern World*. She lives in Seattle.

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