



DOMINION BUREAU OF STATISTICS

OTTAWA
CANADA

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Sir Ronald A. Fisher,
Dept. of Genetics,
University of Cambridge,
Whittingehame Lodge,
44 Storey's Way,
Cambridge, England.

Dear Sir Ronald:

I was delighted to see your article in the number of the JRSS which has just come in. It makes clear some very important issues about which I have been puzzled; several of my colleagues here join me in thanking you.

If we understand you, the difference between the situation of an acceptance sampler and that of an experimenter is the difference between facing a problem of human devising and facing a problem presented by nature. The acceptance sampler who has to discriminate between two distributions may perhaps be compared with a student of probability discriminating between two urns in a textbook problem exemplifying Bayes' Theorem. To make the investigation of nature analogous to sampling a controlled production process apparently is only useful if the capacity of nature for offering surprises is of the same order as the production process. You presumably fear that to promote acceptance methods in science does more harm than merely distorting the meaning of some words like "decision" and producing irrelevant mathematical embroidery; it helps hide from the investigator the tentative process by which alone he can uncover new facets of the real world. The ideological implications of a mechanical decision theory are terrifying if one thinks about them along the line to which your article points.

My plan to go to Europe last September was cancelled because of the heavy work here, partly on labour force sampling and partly on the sample check of our 1956 Census of Agriculture. I had been looking forward in particular to enjoying your hospitality at Cambridge. It is possible that I shall be able to get away sometime during 1956 and I shall hope that your invitation will still apply if I can adjust myself to your work schedule.

With best regards,

Yours sincerely,

Nathan Keyfitz