

Professor Sir Ronald Fisher, F.R.S.
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14 September 1954

Dear Sir Ronald,

I am only just now returned from a summer of work and play in the Pyrenees. Please accept this as my apology for not replying earlier to your kind and generous letter of 25th July.

I speak of your letter as 'kind and generous' because when you were asked to speak to our Philosophy of Science Club a year ago you said that you would rather just reply to someone else's paper, instead of preparing one of your own. Now you seem to be ready to give with just the sort of thing the Club is after.

However, your happy change of plan does pose a problem of organization, - as you suspected it would. The programmes and posters for Michaelmas Term have already been printed announcing that Professor Braithwaite will deliver a lecture on 'Deciding Between Statistical Hypotheses', whilst you will open the discussion of such points as he raises in that paper. This arrangement was made in light of your earlier position, and your letter to me of 11th May (where you express willingness to open discussion of Braithwaite's paper).

The following scheme flashed on me as the best of all possible: how about you opening discussion of Braithwaite's exposition of Wald's Minimum procedure in Michaelmas Term (November 22nd), whilst Braithwaite opens discussion of your (most welcome!) attack on the Neymann-Pearson-Wald school in Lent Term? This scheme has the advantage of beginning with a straightforward exposition of Wald's ideas (via Braithwaite) which will make your Lent Term target more apparent to our Club members.

I have discussed this with Braithwaite and he is amenable. In an announcement at the first meeting I will make it clear what is afoot; that Braithwaite will talk and you open discussion in Michaelmas, whilst you talk and Braithwaite open discussion in Lent. You will agree, I am sure, that this is the best plan. For your own paper (I gather) would require the spotlight for an evening, and not do as a follow-up to Braithwaite's own, - whilst after your paper Braithwaite might have nothing left to say.

[May I just say, in passing, how I look forward to your paper. I have long felt that the place for Neymann-Pearson-Wald techniques was in actuarial work or industrial mass production, - not natural science. Part of my review of Braithwaite's book in

the Cambridge Review for October, 1953 is devoted to showing how inadequate Braithwaite's Chapter VII is as an account of the probability and statistics that is useful and necessary in fundamental physics (side: Minimax is the trade-name of a fire-extinguisher, - scientific research is not an extinguishing but a spreading! , - a lousy analogy but I could not resist)

So, - may we put the matter thus: you open fire on Braithwaite's paper in Michaelmas, and vice versa in Lent. This will give the year's work a remarkable continuity, - particularly as we will close the Michaelmas Term meetings with Braithwaite's exposition and, I hope, open the Lent Term with your own paper.

If this scheme poses any unforeseen difficulties for you, please write to me and I'll visit you straightaway for further discussion.

Thank you for your help
Sir Ronald,

Yours,
Harwood Percell-Hamson