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List of Contributors

Bozhena Bidyuk, Google, USA
Blai Bonet, Departamento de Computación, Universidad Simón Bolívar, Venezuela
Carlos Brito, Departamento de Computacao, Universidade Federal do Ceara, Brazil
Adnan Darwiche, Computer Science Department, UCLA, USA
Philip Dawid, Statistical Laboratory, University of Cambridge, UK
Thomas Dean, Google, USA
Rina Dechter, School of Information and Computer Sciences, UC Irvine, USA
Felix Elwert, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA
Ariel Felner, Department of Information Systems Engineering, Ben-Gurion University, Israel
Hector Geffner, ICREA and Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain
Michael Gelfond, Department of Computer Science, Texas Tech University, USA
Clark Glymour, Department of Philosophy, CMU, USA
Moises Goldszmidt, Microsoft Research, Silicon Valley, USA
Sander Greenland, Departments of Epidemiology and Statistics, UCLA, USA
Joseph Y. Halpern, Computer Science Department, Cornell University, USA
Eric A. Hansen, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Mississippi State University, USA
David Heckerman, Microsoft Research, USA
Christopher Hitchcock, Division of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Caltech, USA
Robert Holte, Department of Computing Science, University of Alberta, Canada
Michael I. Jordan, Departments of EECS & Statistics, UC Berkeley, USA
Michael Kearns, Computer and Information Science Department, University of Pennsylvania, USA
Daphne Koller, Computer Science Department, Stanford University, USA
Richard E. Korf, Computer Science Department, UCLA, USA
Vladimir Lifschitz, Department of Computer Science, The University of Texas at Austin, USA
Robert Mateescu, Microsoft Research, Cambridge, UK
Brian Milch, Google, USA
Dana Nau, Computer Science Department, University of Maryland USA
Nils J. Nilsson, Computer Science Department, Stanford University, USA
Austin Parker, Computer Science Department, University of Maryland, USA
Preface

This book is a collection of articles in honor of Judea Pearl written by close colleagues and former students. Its three main parts, heuristics, probabilistic reasoning, and causality, correspond to the titles of the three ground-breaking books authored by Judea, and are followed by a section of short reminiscences.

Judea Pearl was born in Tel Aviv and is a graduate of the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology. He came to the United States for postgraduate work in 1960. He received his Master’s degree in physics from Rutgers University and his Ph.D. degree in electrical engineering from the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, both in 1965. Until 1969, he held research positions at RCA David Sarnoff Research Laboratories in Princeton, New Jersey and at Electronic Memories, Inc. at Hawthorne, California. In 1969 Pearl joined the UCLA faculty where he is currently an emeritus professor of computer science and director of the cognitive systems laboratory.

Judea started his research work in artificial intelligence (AI) in the mid-1970s, not long after joining UCLA. In the eyes of a hard scientist, AI must have been a fascinating but slippery scientific discipline then; a lot of AI was done through introspection and programming, building systems that could display some form of intelligence.

Since then, AI has changed a great deal. Arguably no one has played a larger role in that change than Judea. Judea Pearl’s work made probability the prevailing language of modern AI and, perhaps more significantly, it placed the elaboration of crisp and meaningful models, and of effective computational mechanisms, at the center of AI research. This work is conveyed in the more than 300 scientific papers, and in his three landmark books Heuristics (1984), Probabilistic Reasoning (1988), and Causality (2000), where he deals with the basic questions concerning the acquisition, representation, and effective use of heuristic, probabilistic, and causal knowledge. He tackled these issues not as a philosopher or mathematician, but as an engineer and a cognitive scientist. His “burning question” was (and still is) how does the human mind “do it”, and he set out to answer this question with an unusual combination of intuition, passion, intellectual honesty, and technical skill.

Judea is the recipient of numerous scientific awards. In 1996 he was selected by the UCLA Academic Senate as the 81st Faculty Research Lecturer to deliver an annual research lecture which presents the university’s most distinguished scholars to the public. He received the 1999 IJCAI Research Excellence Award in Artificial Intelligence for “his fundamental work on heuristic search, reasoning under uncertainty, and causality”, the 2001 London School of Economics Lakatos Award for the “best book in the philosophy of science”, the 2004 ACM Allen Newell Award for “seminal contributions that extend to philosophy, psychology, medicine, statistics, econometrics, epidemiology and social science”, and the 2008 Benjamin Franklin
Medal for “creating the first general algorithms for computing and reasoning with uncertain evidence”.


On a sadder note, Judea is the father of slain Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl and president of the Daniel Pearl Foundation, which he co-founded with his wife Ruth in April 2002 to continue Daniel’s life-work of dialogue and understanding and to address the root causes of his tragic death.

This book will be presented to Judea on March 12, 2010 at a special event at UCLA honoring his life and work, where many of the contributing authors to this book will speak. Two of the editors of this volume, Rina and Hector, are former students of Judea, and the third, Joe, is a close colleague and collaborator. The three of us would like to thank all the authors whose articles are included in this volume. Special thanks go to Adnan Darwiche and Rich Korf of the UCLA Computer Science Department, who helped to organize this event, and to Avi Dechter, Randy Hess, Nir Lipovetzky, Felix Elwert, and Jane Spurr, who helped in the production of the book.

Judea, on behalf of those present in the book, and the many of your students and colleagues who are not, we would like to express our most profound gratitude and admiration to you, as an advisor, a scientist, and a great human being. It has been a real privilege to know you, to benefit from your (truly enjoyable!) company, to watch you, and to learn from you. As students, we couldn’t have hoped for a better role model. As colleagues, we couldn’t have benefited more from your collaboration and leadership. We know that you don’t like compliments, but you are certainly the light in our candle!

Thank you Judea!!!

Rina, Hector, and Joe