

## Obituary for Richard Jeffrey

Richard Jeffrey, professor of philosophy emeritus at Princeton University, died on Nov. 9. He was 76. Having previously taught at Stanford, the City University of New York, and the University of Pennsylvania, Jeffrey joined the Princeton faculty in 1974 and became emeritus in 1999. His work is primarily in decision theory and epistemology, reaching into philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, and ethics. Jeffrey's work is unified by his commitment to (and development of) *Bayesianism*, the view that making up one's mind is a matter of adopting an assignment of judgmental probabilities, or features of such assignments. A simple view to state, Bayesianism has implications not only for traditional areas of philosophy such as the theory of knowledge and the philosophy of science, but also for the methodology of the social sciences. Over the last fifteen years or so, Bayesian statistics has become the dominant approach in statistics. Philosophers like Jeffrey have prepared and accompanied this development over decades by clarifying the foundations of this methodology. The only other person whose work in this area reaches comparable importance is the eminent statistician Leonard Savage.

A native of Boston and a World War II Navy veteran, Jeffrey earned his M.A. from the University of Chicago in 1952 and his PhD 1957 from Princeton. As a graduate student he worked with Rudolph Carnap and Carl Gustav Hempel, German émigrés whose arrival in the US following the rise of the Nazis forever transformed philosophy in this country. Jeffrey was a research engineer, a Fulbright Scholar and an assistant professor of electrical engineering before starting his career teaching philosophy in 1959. His main work is a book called *The Logic of Decision* (first published in 1965), which

presents a new theory of decision-making under uncertainty and of probable knowledge. Much of that book was written while Jeffrey was a Fellow at the distinguished Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton under the supervision of Kurt G`del, an Austrian émigré and one of the most distinguished logicians of all times. Jeffrey's other books include two widely-used textbooks in logic: *Formal Logic: Its Scope and Limits* (first published 1967), and *Computability and Logic*, with G. Boolos, and, more recently, with J. Burgess (first published 1974). Generations of students have learned both elementary and advanced logic from these books. In 1992, Jeffrey published a collection of articles called *Probability and the Art of Judgment*, developing his approach to Bayesianism. Jeffrey's famously crisp writings vary from historical and philosophical overviews to close technical studies. He is the most influential philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century working in decision theory, and a main proponent of developing and securing the heritage of logical empiricism, a tremendously influential philosophical reform movement originating in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that methodologically aimed to bring philosophy to greater clarity and rigor and that substantively focused on areas like logic, philosophy of science, philosophy of language, and epistemology. Jeffrey continued logical empiricism by championing *radical probabilism*, a view denying objective probability and abandoning attempts to analyze judgment into a rational and an empirical component, without residue.

Beginning with work under Carnap, Hempel (whose posthumous writings he edited), and G`del, through his path-breaking contributions to new areas of philosophy, and through his continuation of logical positivism, Jeffrey's work epitomizes one of the most original and innovative philosophical movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jeffrey was

elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1994, and he served as president of the Philosophy of Science Association from 1999 to 2000. He is survived by his wife Edith, one daughter and one son, and two grand-children.