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J. Bricmont D. Dürr M.C. Galavotti  
G. Ghirardi F. Petruccione N. Zanghi (Eds.)

# Chance in Physics

Foundations and Perspectives



Springer

## Editors

Jean Bricmont  
Fyma: Unité de physique théorique  
et de physique mathématique  
Université catholique de Louvain  
Chemin du Cyclotron 2  
1348 Louvain la Neuve, Belgium

Detlef Dürr  
Mathematisches Institut  
Universität München  
Theresienstrasse 39  
80333 München, Germany

Maria Carla Galavotti  
Dipartimento di Filosofia  
Via Zamboni 38  
40126 Bologna, Italy

Giancarlo Ghirardi  
Department of Theoretical Physics  
International Centre  
for Theoretical Physics  
Strada Costiera 11  
34100 Trieste, Italy

Francesco Petruccione  
Fakultät für Physik  
Albert-Ludwigs-Universität  
Hermann-Herder-Strasse 3  
79104 Freiburg, Germany

Nino Zanghi  
Dipartimento di Fisica  
Via Dodecanesco 33  
16146 Genova, Italy

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## Preface

The conference *Chance in Physics: Foundations and Perspectives* was held from 29th November to 3rd December 1999 in Ischia, Italy. It was sponsored by the *Istituto Italiano Per Gli Studi Filosofici* in Naples, by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG), and by the *Società Italiana Di Fondamenti Della Fisica*. Sponsoring by the *International School for Advanced Studies* (ISAS) of Trieste, Italy, made the compilation of this volume possible; the funding by the *Istituto Italiano Per Gli Studi Filosofici* was crucial for the conference and is very gratefully acknowledged. The Istituto managed to provide a unique atmosphere for an interdisciplinary meeting, and these proceedings reflect indeed the very friendly but nevertheless intense and neverending discussions on one of the most debated issues of science: probability, and in particular probability in physics. We gratefully acknowledge the organisational work as well as the editorial work done by our secretary of the meeting PhD student Roderich Tumulka.

The meeting was intended to stimulate renewed reflection on the fundamental and practical aspects of probability in physics, in particular the foundations of statistical mechanics, the probability in the foundations of quantum mechanics, the algebraic view of probability and the philosophy of probability in its interrelation with physics.

Questions like what probability is, or what it is about, or how probability enters physics are of a subtle kind. They are difficult in various ways, often mixed up with the enormous complexity and the inescapable lack of mathematical rigor in the physical application, or with the foundational problems of quantum mechanics, where the probabilistic ignorance concerning the values of certain physical quantities has even been elevated to a matter of principle. At present, the understanding of probability in physics is almost as personal as the understanding of quantum theory.

The aim of the conference was thus to focus on ideas about probability in physics, its meaning and its philosophical implications, by reviewing the different facets of probability in physics in its modern settings and by taking into account modern quantum theories without observers, where the origin of probability is not mystified by dogmatism.

The reviews were given in one-hour talks, and the discussions were held in the form of roundtables, where shorter contributions were also given.

The speakers were asked not to dilute the main themes of the conference with technicalities and to focus sharply on the issue of probability. This was

taken to heart by all speakers and the meeting thus proved very successful. The contributions in this volume consequently focus on conceptual issues, and they make worthwhile reading for specialists in the field of foundations as well as for nonspecialists, because extensive technical prior knowledge is not required. The contributions have been left in the order they were discussed in the meeting, which proved to be a very natural one:

1. *Classical Statistical Mechanics*, where Boltzmann's understanding of statistical mechanics as arising from kinetic gas theory is reviewed and put into modern perspectives, with an outlook on relativistic statistical mechanics. The relative lack of emphasis on the effect of chaotic behaviour on the foundations of probability is noteworthy.
2. *Quantum Mechanics*, where we review those *ontological* quantum theories, that have been most seriously discussed in the recent years. Among these are a deterministic theory (Bohmian mechanics) and both the intrinsically random theories of wavepacket reduction and the operator-based consistent (decoherent) histories. It starts with the "orthodox" view, again with emphasis on the probabilistic aspects of these theories.
3. *Chaotic systems*, where the dynamical aspects for the foundations of probability in physics are addressed.
4. *Philosophy of Probability*, where the issues of the earlier sections are further scrutinized on philosophical grounds. These contributions have no abstracts.

The book starts with an introductory paper, in which almost all the topics which are discussed by the later contributions are critically presented.

München,  
January 2001

*J. Bricmont, D. Dürr, M.C. Galavotti,  
G.C. Ghirardi, F. Petruccione, N. Zanghì*

# List of Participants

Adami, Riccardo, Roma, Italy  
adami@mat.uniroma1.it

Adams, Stefan, München, Germany  
adams@rz.mathematik.uni-muenchen.de

Adler, Stephen, IAS Princeton, USA  
adler@sns.ias.edu

Agnese, Angelo, Genova, Italy  
agnese@ge.infn.it

Albert, David Z., New York, USA  
da5@columbia.edu

Allori, Valia, Genova, Italy,  
allori@mi.infn.it

Arntzenius, Frank, New Brunswick, USA  
arntzeni@rci.rutgers.edu

Bacciagaluppi, Guido, Cambridge, UK  
guido.bacciagaluppi@philosophy.oxford.ac.uk

Bassani, Franco, Pisa, Italy  
bassani@sns.it

Bassi, Angelo, Trieste, Italy  
bassi@ts.infn.it

Beltrametti, Enrico, Genova, Italy  
beltrametti@ge.infn.it

Benci, Vieri, Pisa, Italy,  
benci@dm.unipi.it

Ben-Menahem, Yemima, Jerusalem, Israel  
msbenhy@mscc.huji.ac.il

Bergia, Silvio, Bologna, Italy  
silvio.bergia@bo.infn.it

Bernardini, Carlo, Roma, Italy  
carlo.bernardini@roma1.infn.it

Blanchard, Philipp, Bielefeld, Germany  
blanchard@physik.uni-bielefeld.de

Booss-Bavnbek, Bernhelm, Roskilde, Denmark  
booss@mmf.ruc.dk

Breuer, Heinz-Peter, Freiburg, Germany  
breuer@physik.uni-freiburg.de

Bricmont, Jean, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium  
bricmont@fyma.ucl.ac.be

Butterfield, Jeremy N., Cambridge, UK  
jb56@cus.cam.ac.uk

Casati, Giulio, Como, Italy  
casati@fis.unico.it

Castellani, Elena, Firenze, Italy  
castella@philos.unifi.it

Cercignani, Carlo, Milano, Italy  
carcer@mate.polimi.it

Clark, Peter, St. Andrews, UK  
pjc@st-andrews.ac.uk

Correggi, Michele, Pisa, Italy  
micorre@libero.it

Costantini, Domenico, Bologna, Italy  
costanti@stat.unibo.it

Cufaro Petroni, Nicola, Bari, Italy  
nicola.cufaro@ba.infn.it

Dalla Chiara, Marisa, Firenze, Italy  
dachiara@risc.idg.fi.cnr.it

Dell'Antonio, Gianfausto, Roma, Italy  
dellantonio@mat.uniroma1.it

Dewdney, Chris, Portsmouth, UK  
chris.dewdney@port.ac.uk

Dinges, Herrmann, Frankfurt, Germany  
dinges@mi.informatik.uni-frankfurt.de

Dorner, Uwe, Freiburg, Germany  
dorner@physik.uni-freiburg.de

X List of Participants

- Dürr, Detlef, München, Germany  
duerr@rz.mathematik.  
uni-muenchen.de
- Festa, Roberto, Genova, Italy  
festa@fisica.unige.it
- Fronzoni, Leone, Pisa, Italy  
fronzoni@mailbox.difi.unipi.it
- Fuchs, Christopher, Los Alamos, USA  
cfuchs@lanl.gov
- Galavotti, Maria Carla, Bologna, Italy  
galavott@philo.unibo.it
- Galgani, Luigi, Milano, Italy  
galgani@mi.infn.it
- Garuccio, Augusto, Bari, Italy  
garuccio@bari.infn.it
- Gentili, Fausto, Bologna, Italy  
gentili@bo.infn.it
- Ghirardi, Gian Carlo, Trieste, Italy  
ghirardi@trieste.infn.it
- Giannerini, Simone, Bologna, Italy  
giannerini@posta.statfac.  
unibo.it
- Goldstein, Sheldon, New Brunswick, USA  
oldstein@math.rutgers.edu
- González Jiménez, Edgar, Bogotá,  
Colombia  
edgar.gonzalez@jol.net.co
- Gray, Lawrence, Minneapolis, USA  
gray@math.umn.edu
- Grigolini, Paolo, Denton, USA  
gpaolo@unt.edu
- Guerra, Francesco, Roma, Italy  
guerra@romagt.croma1.infn.it
- Guttman, Yair, Stanford, USA  
guttman@csl.stanford.edu
- Gwirceman, Orit, New Brunswick, USA  
orit@spacelab.net
- Hemmo, Meir, Haifa, Israel  
meir@research.haifa.ac.il
- Horton, George, Portsmouth, UK  
george.horton@port.ac.uk
- Huggett, Nicholas, Chicago, USA  
huggett@uic.edu
- Jona-Lasinio, Giovanni, Roma, Italy  
jona@roma1.infn.it
- Kastner, Ruth, Maryland, USA  
rkastner@wam.umd.edu
- Kent, Adrian, Cambridge, UK  
a.p.a.kent@damtp.cam.ac.uk
- Khrennikov, Andrei, Växjö, Sweden  
andrei.khrennikov@masda.vxu.se
- Kiessling, Michael, New Brunswick, USA  
miki@math.rutgers.edu
- Knauf, Andreas, Erlangen, Germany  
knauf@mi.uni-erlangen.de
- Loewer, Barry, New Brunswick, USA  
loewer@rci.rutgers.edu
- Marinatto, Luca, Trieste, Italy  
marinat@ts.infn.it
- Maudlin, Tim, New Brunswick, USA  
maudlin@rci.rutgers.edu
- Morato, Laura, Verona, Italy  
morato@sci.univr.it
- Nelson, Edward, Princeton, USA  
nelson@math.princeton.edu
- Noja, Diego, Milano, Italy  
noja@berlioz.mat.unimi.it
- Omnès, Roland, Paris, France  
roland.omnes@th.u-psud.fr
- Panati, Gianluca, Trieste, Italy  
panati@sissa.it
- Penrose, Oliver, Edinburgh, UK  
o.penrose@ma.hw.ac.uk
- Peruzzi, Giulio, Padova, Italy  
peruzzi@pd.infn.it
- Petruccione, Francesco, Freiburg,  
Germany  
petruccione@physik.  
uni-freiburg.de



- Pizzo, Alessandro, Trieste, Italy  
pizzo@sissa.it
- Pohlmeyer, Klaus, Freiburg, Germany  
trunk@physik.uni-freiburg.de
- Poschadel, Norbert, Saarbrücken,  
Germany  
norbert@math.uni-sb.de
- Posilicano, Andrea, Como, Italy  
posilicano@mat.unimi.it
- Prestipino, Santi, Trieste, Italy  
prestip@sissa.it
- Redei, Miklos, Budapest, Hungary  
redei@hps.elte.hu
- Ridderbos, Katinka, Cambridge, UK  
tmr23@cus.cam.ac.uk
- Rimini, Alberto, Pavia, Italy  
rimini@pv.infn.it
- Robotti, Nadia, Genova, Italy  
robotti@fisica.unige.it
- Rosa, Rodolfo, Bologna, Italy  
rosa@stat.unibo.it
- Ruffo, Stefano, Firenze, Italy  
ruffo@avanzi.de.unifi.it
- Saunders, Simon, Oxford, UK  
simon.saunders@linacre.oxford.ac.uk
- Satzger, Helmut, München, Germany  
helmut.satzger@physik.uni-muenchen.de
- Shenker, Orly, Jerusalem, Israel  
oshenker@cc.huji.ac.il
- Sklar, Lawrence, Michigan, USA  
lsklar@umich.edu
- Spohn, Herbert, München, Germany  
spohn@mathematik.tu-muenchen.de
- Stokley, Martin, Portsmouth, UK  
martin.stokley@port.ac.uk
- Storck, Tim, München, Germany  
tim.storck@physik.uni-muenchen.de
- Suppes, Patrick, Stanford, USA  
suppes@csl.stanford.edu
- Teta, Alessandro, Roma, Italy  
teta@mercurio.mat.uniroma1.it
- Teufel, Stefan, München, Germany  
teufel@mathematik.tu-muenchen.de
- Tumulka, Roderich, München, Germany  
tumulka@rz.mathematik.uni-muenchen.de
- Uffink, Jos, Utrecht, The Netherlands  
j.b.m.uffink@phys.uu.nl
- Ugolini, Stefania, Verona, Italy  
ugolini@sci.univr.it
- Ullmann, Philipp, Frankfurt, Germany  
ullmann@math.uni-frankfurt.de
- Valentini, Antony, London, UK  
antonyvalentini@hotmail.com
- van Lith, Janneke, Utrecht, The Netherlands  
j.h.vanlith@phys.uu.nl
- Vulpiani, Angelo, Roma, Italy  
angelo.vulpiani@roma1.infn.it
- Yorke, James A., Maryland, USA  
yorke@ipst.umd.edu
- Zanghì, Nino, Genova, Italy  
zanghi@ge.infn.it