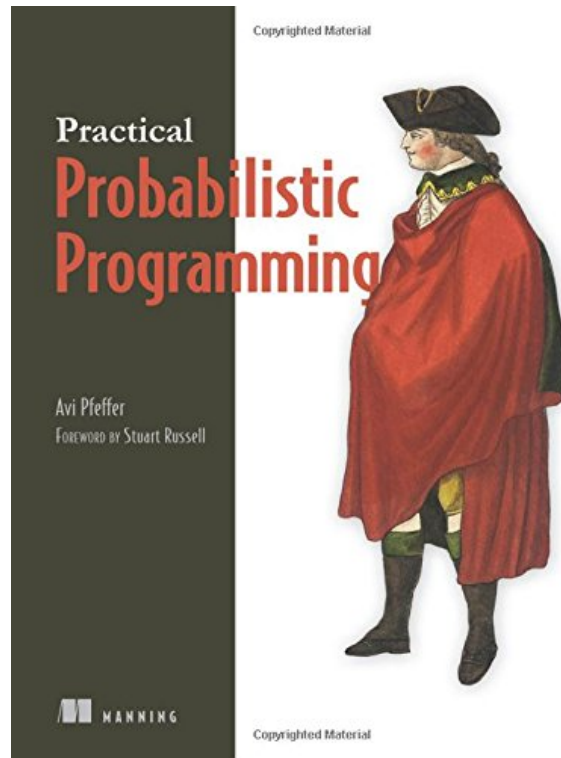
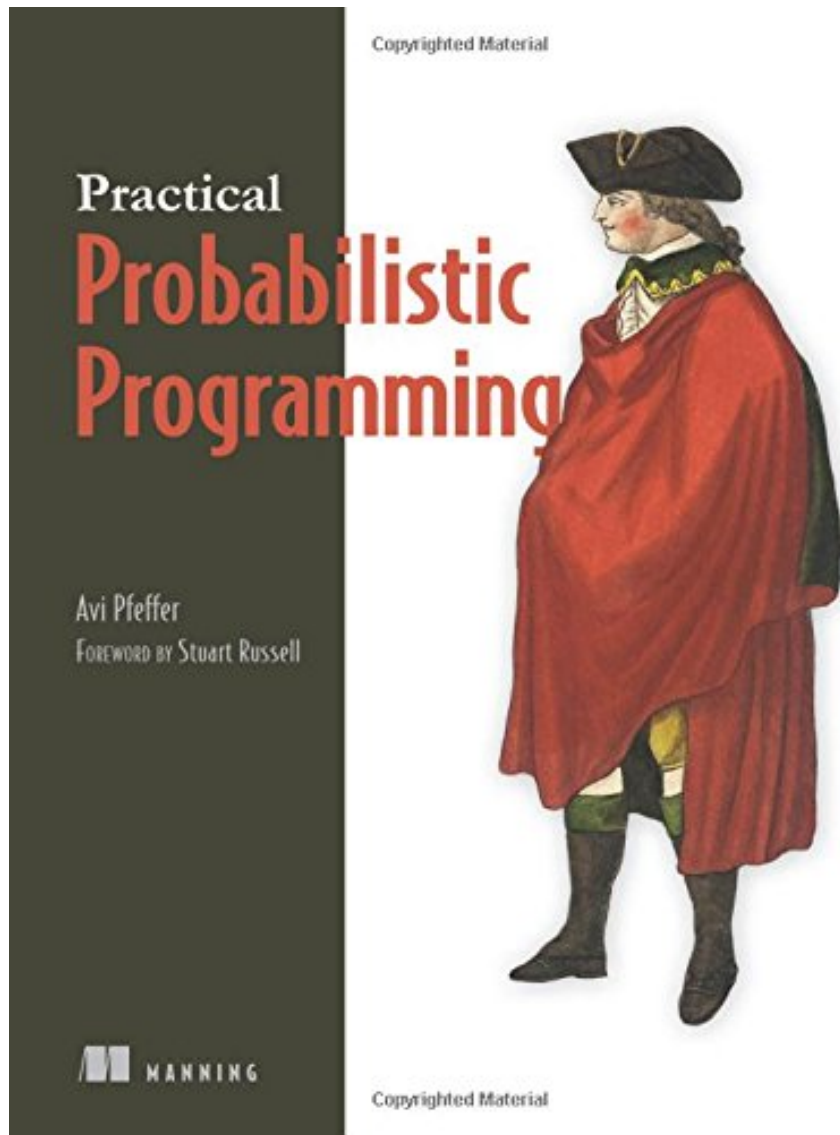


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About the Author

Avi Pfeffer is the principal developer of the Figaro language for probabilistic programming. He graduated from Stanford, taught at Harvard, and is currently a principal scientist at Charles River Analytics.

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Summary

Practical Probabilistic Programming introduces the working programmer to probabilistic programming. In it, you'll learn how to use the PP paradigm to model application domains and then express those probabilistic models in code. Although PP can seem abstract, in this book you'll immediately work on practical examples, like using the Figaro language to build a spam filter and applying Bayesian and Markov networks, to diagnose computer system data problems and recover digital images.

Purchase of the print book includes a free eBook in PDF, Kindle, and ePub formats from Manning Publications.

About the Technology

The data you accumulate about your customers, products, and website users can help you not only to interpret your past, it can also help you predict your future! Probabilistic programming uses code to draw probabilistic inferences from data. By applying specialized algorithms, your programs assign degrees of probability to conclusions. This means you can forecast future events like sales trends, computer system failures, experimental outcomes, and many other critical concerns.

About the Book

Practical Probabilistic Programming introduces the working programmer to probabilistic programming. In this book, you'll immediately work on practical examples like building a spam filter, diagnosing computer system data problems, and recovering digital images. You'll discover probabilistic inference, where algorithms help make extended predictions about issues like social media usage. Along the way, you'll learn to use functional-style programming for text analysis, object-oriented models to predict social phenomena like the spread of tweets, and open universe models to gauge real-life social media usage. The book also has chapters on how probabilistic models can help in decision making and modeling of dynamic systems.

What's Inside

- Introduction to probabilistic modeling
- Writing probabilistic programs in Figaro
- Building Bayesian networks
- Predicting product lifecycles
- Decision-making algorithms

About the Reader

This book assumes no prior exposure to probabilistic programming. Knowledge of Scala is helpful.

About the Author

Avi Pfeffer is the principal developer of the Figaro language for probabilistic programming.

Table of Contents

About the Author

Avi Pfeffer is the principal developer of the Figaro language for probabilistic programming. He graduated from Stanford, taught at Harvard, and is currently a principal scientist at Charles River Analytics. Most helpful customer reviews1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Introduction on Probabilistic Programming with Figaro/Scala

By Sukru Tikves

This is an introductory book on probabilistic methods, and bayesian reasoning using computer programs. It covers basics like distributions, sampling and inference, and should enable newcomers to understand these topics. But to learn more, you need to read a proper "graphical models" / "structured learning" book. For example, I did not see Markov Random Fields / Conditional Random Fields in here, which would be helpful in text mining.

Also, while the books content is fine for introductory level, the choice of the language (Figaro) is a strange one. It is an open source language working on Scale, which is another open source language working on Java. To be honest, I do not know anyone in the industry using it, and the research paper describing the language has about 60 citations. Making it an obscure choice. It does not mean Figaro is a bad choice, it might be the one helping you solve your problems, but the book is titles "Probabilistic Programming", not "Probabilistic Programming with Figaro/Scala". I would have expected more discussion on alternative libraries and programming languages in general.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Good substantive content that could have been presented better

By OnceMore

This book is divided into three parts. Part One has three chapters. Chapter One introduces probabilistic reasoning systems: what they are, why the interest in them, and what they typically consist of (e.g., a domain model, and modules for querying and carrying out evidence-based and other types of inferencing relating to the domain model). Chapter Two provides a quick introduction to Figaro, a Scala programming language-based software library that offers several modules for building probabilistic reasoning systems that integrate seamlessly with applications written in Java or Scala, an advantage that very few probabilistic programming languages currently provide; and Chapter Three provides a working but perhaps way too ahead (because of several yet to be explained concepts) example of a simple spam-filtering application that uses lightly described Figaro software constructs as building blocks.

Part Two has five chapters that provide tutorials on building various types of data models (e.g., Bayesian and Markov networks), and the five chapters in Part Three delve into various types of inferencing algorithms.

Source code for the examples discussed in the book and answers to select end-of-chapter exercises are available for download as separate files from the book publisher's website, the link for which as well as the instructions on how to get started with Figaro are provided in the book.

This book can be a tough read for readers who don't already have a reasonably good grasp of Scala and probability concepts. While the author has made a good effort at anticipating what Scala and probability concepts readers may need help on, this book provides no introductory chapters on both, and some concepts did go unexplained or could have been explained better.

Discussions of some concepts could have also benefited from a reordering. For example, the meaning of

"conjugate prior" was given only in Chapter Nine after it was first mentioned in Chapter Six.

The "javadoc" or "scaladoc" for the Figaro packages and classes are still in a relatively rudimentary form, so they most likely won't be a source of help for readers who have unresolved questions about the correct or appropriate ways of using particular Figaro constructs even after reading their discussions in the book.

The book does a good job showing off how versatile the Figaro library is, but if the goal of this book is to introduce Figaro to more people and get them to a point of actually being able to use it to build interesting probabilistic reasoning systems, then I would trade some of the book's breadth for better thought out discussions of a more limited number of concepts, foregoing coverage of some of the really advanced but perhaps infrequently used concepts in favor of more solid or efficacious discussions of the more likely to be used concepts. By more solid or efficacious discussions I mean giving readers a better feel for how something works. For example, if a construct produces a distribution of values, empower and show readers how to inspect (a sample of) those values to help them get a more concrete feel for what may be happening, instead of just keeping the discussion at a relatively abstract level. Showing more worked out examples and explaining them better will also help. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

OK - but Figaro? Really?

By J. Moore

I am interested in the topic, particularly Bayesian logic, but I didn't get far with this book. I'm sure Figaro and Scala are popular languages, but I'd like to get probabilistic in some other more common language.

It seems you're supposed to install Linux to do the exercises in the book properly. Meh, I just want to get my hands dirty.

That being said, there are few other alternatives for learning PP. If you're really into Figaro, with it's powerful abstractions for PP - this is your book. See all 10 customer reviews...

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