

A Brief Intro to Bayesian Inference



Thomas Bayes (c. 1701 – 1761)

$$P(A | B) = \frac{P(B | A)P(A)}{P(B)}$$

Tossing a Coin


- Suppose the coin came up Heads 65 times and Tails 35 times. Is the coin fair?
- Model: $P(\text{heads}) = \theta$
- Log-likelihood: $\log P(\text{data}|\theta) = 55 \log \theta + 45 \log(1 - \theta)$
 - Maximized at $\theta = .65$
- But would you conclude that the coin really is not fair?

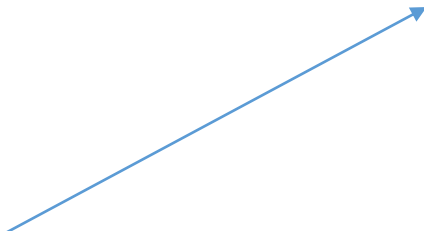
Prior Distributions

- We can encode our beliefs about what the values of the parameters could be using

$$P(\theta)$$

- Using Bayes' rule, we have

$$P(\theta = \theta_0 | \text{data}) = \frac{P(\theta = \theta_0, \text{data})}{P(\text{data})} = \frac{P(\text{data} | \theta = \theta_0) P(\theta = \theta_0)}{P(\text{data})}$$


$$= \sum_{\theta_1} P(\text{data} | \theta = \theta_1) P(\theta = \theta_1)$$


Maximum a-posteriori (MAP)

- Maximize the *posterior probability* of the parameter:

$$\operatorname{argmax}_{\theta_0} \frac{P(\text{data}|\theta = \theta_0)P(\theta = \theta_0)}{P(\text{data})}$$

$$= \operatorname{argmax}_{\theta_0} P(\text{data}|\theta = \theta_0)P(\theta = \theta_0)$$

$$= \operatorname{argmax}_{\theta_0} \log P(\text{data}|\theta = \theta_0) + \log P(\theta = \theta_0)$$

- The posterior of probability is the product of the prior and the data likelihood
- Represents the *updated* belief about the parameter, given the observed data

Aside: Bayesian Inference is a Powerful Idea

- You can think about anything like that. You have your prior belief $P(\theta)$, and you observe some new data. Now your belief about θ *must be* proportional to $P(\theta)P(data|\theta)$
 - But only if you are 100% sure that the likelihood function is correct!
 - Recall that the likelihood function is your model of the world – it represents knowledge about how the data is generated for given values of θ
 - Where do you get your original prior beliefs anyway?
- Arguably, makes more sense than Maximum Likelihood

Back to the Coin

- (See `bayes.py`)

Gaussian Residuals Models

- Log-likelihood:

$$\log P(\text{data}|\theta) = \sum -\frac{(y^{(i)} - \theta^T x^{(i)})^2}{2\sigma^2} + 2m/\log(2\pi\sigma^2)$$

- Suppose we believe that $P(\theta_i) = N\left(0, \left(\frac{1}{2\lambda}\right)\right)$
 - I.e., the coefficients in θ will generally be in $[-1.5\lambda, 1.5\lambda]$
- $\log[P(\text{data}|\theta)P(\theta)]$ is $\log P(\text{data}|\theta) + \lambda|\theta|^2 + \text{const}$
(exercise)
- Maximize $\log[P(\text{data}|\theta)P(\theta)]$ to get the θ that you believe the most

$$\text{Why } P(\theta_i) = N\left(0, \left(\frac{1}{2\lambda}\right)\right)$$

- More on this later
- If the θ_i 's are allowed to be arbitrarily large, the ratio of the influences of the different features over the decision boundary could be arbitrarily high
 - Difficult to believe that one of the features still matters, but it matters a 10000000 times less than some other feature
 - Easy to believe a feature doesn't matter at all, though
 - Mostly when we fit coefficients, they don't get crazy high, so it's a reasonable prior belief