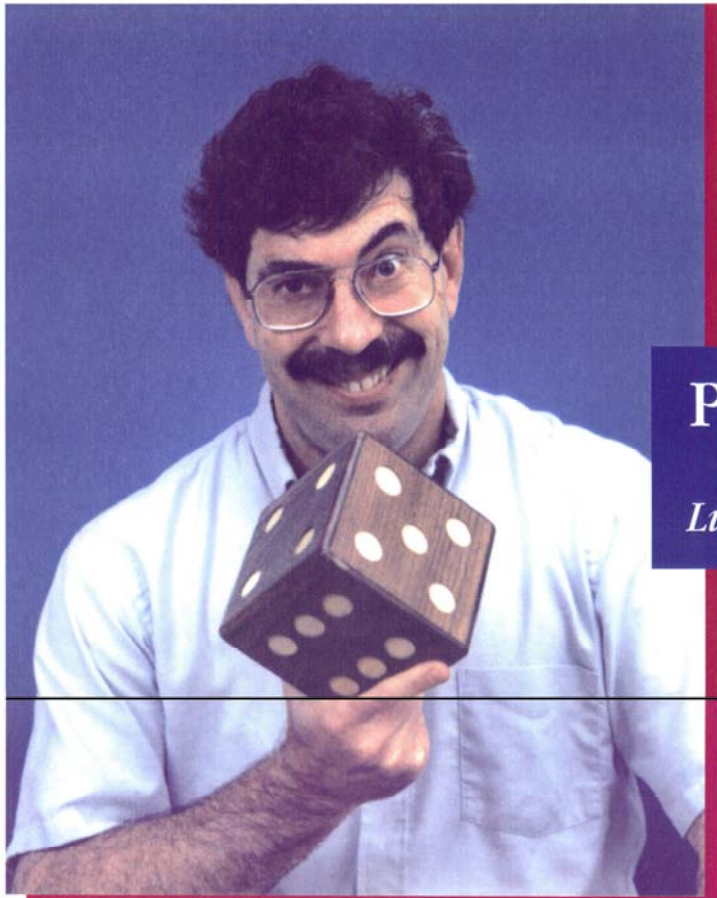


Probability and Intuition



Peter Winkler

*Bell Labs,
Lucent Technologies*

We think of mathematics as an aid to decision-making: an indispensable tool for building bridges, putting satellites in orbit and managing telephone networks. But 99.999% of our life-decisions are made without any computational help, and indeed without any numerical input that a computer would even understand. These decisions involve probability and rely on intuition, an immensely flexible and effective human power. Should I take I-65 to work this morning? Should I bring an umbrella? Should I quit smoking?

Mathematics has a role to play in these "soft" decisions as well, albeit a more indirect one: we can use it to refine our intuition, and keep it from playing "April Fool's" jokes on us.

In this talk I will illustrate some of the traps intuition has set for us, together with some tips which can help keep us from backing the wrong horse.

- April 1, 1998~~9~~ 7pm
- Floyd Theater (SAC)
- *Cosponsored by the Bullitt endowment and the Department of Mathematics*