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Cover: Research psychologists have long theorized that judgments of one's own personality and the characteristics of others often prove inaccurate. New investigations indicate that people are better at such social appraisals than they have been given credit for being. (Painting: Nicholas Africano, "He Is Afraid" (detail), 1977. Courtesy of Holly Solomon Gallery, New York)

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Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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Letters

Tips on tops

An ordinary thumbtack makes an excellent tippe top ("Topsy-Turvy Top," SN: 8/13/94, p.108). Small and light, it gets to the point quickly, but it does get the job done.

Homer B. Clay
Phoenix, Ariz.

There is a simple way to infer (not prove) that friction causes the top to flip. If you put a sharp point on the base of the sphere and then spin it, it will not flip.

Another observation: If you remove the stem from any spinnable top, it spins practically without wobble until its inertia is nearly spent; then it collapses suddenly. If you add a light, upright stem, the top will start to wobble before collapsing. The longer the stem, the worse the wobble.

Carl E. Saari
Kennewick, Wash.

Sixty-five years ago, every boy had at least one wooden "peg" top that sold for about a nickel in the toy stores. Each had a nail-like point on the pointy end of its cone-shaped body.

To spin the top, you wound a couple of feet of string around the cone. Then you threw it at the ground. The trick was to throw the top point up ("A" on your diagram). If you succeeded, the top spun point down until it ran down, just like "D." It worked every time!

Go find one of your grandfather's tops in his toy box and try it.

Arthur W. Orton
Napa, Calif.

Waves of confusion

Tell me if I'm wrong, but the reference to "gravity waves" in "Comet Impact Poses Intriguing Riddles" (SN: 7/30/94, p.68) is not to the gravity waves (gravitational radiation) of Einstein's theory of relativity, which I understand to be the gravitational analog of electro-

magnetic radiation. Rather, it's a reference to seismic waves — mechanical waves in the solid material of a planet.

One must deplore use of the term "gravity waves" by two segments of the scientific community to refer to two such vastly different things.

Homer B. Tilton
Tucson, Ariz.

The waves postulated in Einstein's theory are "gravitational waves." Atmospheric scientists use the term "gravity wave" to denote a specific type of wave in a planetary atmosphere. The similarity is indeed confusing. — The Editors

CLARIFICATION

Reed B. Wickner originated the idea that the yeast gene *sup35* could have a prionlike form ("Prying into Prions," SN: 9/24/94, p.202).

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