

and many philosophers have found the solutions offered by theologians to be unsatisfactory. Some of these claims include the existence of, and explanations for, God, angels, miracles, prophecies, and immortality. A problem specific to evolution concerns why a morally good creator would permit natural selection—a process rife with death and suffering—to be a necessary mechanism in the appearance of the diverse life-forms on Earth, including humans.

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## Ian Stevenson

I was pleased to note the acknowledgment in the May/June 2007 issue of the recent death of Ian Stevenson in February 2007 (not 2006, as your notice read). Those of us who knew him knew that he embodied the best of skepticism. Though, in the latter part of his career, he turned his attention to controversial phenomena, his hundreds of scholarly works always considered multiple alternative interpretations of his data. Indeed, his 1983 paper on cryptomnesia ("source amnesia") and parapsychological claims remains a classic. With his characteristic empirical rigor and academic rectitude, he regarded the evidence from his 2,500 cases "suggestive of reincarnation" as strong enough to permit, but not strong enough to compel, a belief in post-mortem survival. His greatest legacy is the spirit of open-mindedness and allegiance to empirical data that he encouraged in his many students.

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## Art of Improvisation

As a student (though not a practitioner) of the conjuring and mentalist arts, I enjoyed Massimo Polidoro's series on "The Devious Art of Improvising" (concluded in May/June 2007). I have used the principles for years to amuse myself and astound my friends.

Upon arriving at the home of an unemployed actor friend to watch a rented movie, the telephone rang. As he left the room to

answer it, I joked, "It's Hollywood calling." He returned with a shocked look, asking how I had known that the Hollywood Video store had called to tell him he had left his credit card. I soberly insisted that I often had such psychic flashes. He is a fellow skeptic, and I strung him along until he was beside himself. Finally, I mercifully revealed the confusion.

In the days before caller ID, I took to answering the phone with a sunny, "Hi there, you little cutie!" About 90 percent of callers were stunned, and asked, "How did you know it was me?"

Joe Hutchings  
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## The NDE Scale

I appreciate Benjamin Radford's summation of the NDE Scale [for assessing Near-Death Experiences] in the May/June 2007 issue that it "is a legitimate effort at bringing rigor to a subject notoriously difficult to quantify." That was the scale's purpose, to foster a scientific approach in a field prone to claims by both spiritualists and materialists that went far beyond the meager data. The scale is imperfect, and, as Radford noted, it is possible to score high on it without being near death. It was developed simply to assure that various NDE researchers were investigating the same phenomenon.

Radford was mistaken, however, that the NDE Scale "is rarely used or cited today." Citations of the scale in peer-reviewed journals have in fact increased in recent years; virtually every recent prospective study of NDEs has used it, and it has been translated by Dutch, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Hindi, and Chinese researchers.

Although the NDE Scale was initially developed on a modest sample of seventy-four NDEs, it has been validated in a recent sample of 292 experiencers in a sophisticated Rasch analysis by skeptics Rense Lange and Jim Houran in the *British Journal of Psychology*, and a test-retest challenge found the NDE Scale statistically reliable over a twenty-year period. Of course, establishing the reliability and validity of a measure of NDEs implies nothing about the cause of the experiences.

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## A Little Matter of 2001

A publication devoted to accuracy must be particularly scrupulous in editing, since any errors may well be used to undercut the skeptical position. My jaw dropped when reading "Sylvia Browne's Year to Forget" in the May/June 2007 issue, which stated "there have been no foreign-instigated terrorist attacks on American soil since 1993." I seem to recall an exception on September 11, 2001. Please, please, fellas, be more careful. I don't want my favorite magazine to become a laughing-stock.

Joe Hutchings  
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*Our author attempted to correct the error, requesting in an e-mail well before production that we insert the missing phrase "with the exception of 9/11," but, somehow, I missed his message, and the error wasn't corrected in proof. My apologies to him and to readers.*

—EDITOR

## Framing Scientific Issues

Scientists with new ideas and frameworks whose peers dismiss or seemingly ignore them (but perhaps shouldn't), and those who write to justify science and scientific issues, should read George Lakoff's *Don't Think of an Elephant*. Benjamin Wolozin has done an excellent job of summarizing the book in his essay "The Art of Persuasion in Politics (and Science)" (SI January/February 2007). Wolozin nails the essence of Lakoff's message—that scientists and rationalists should carefully frame their issues, then use supporting metaphors, language, and talking points.

Who should read this book? All academics, students, and laypersons who wish to positively impact the national dialogue on evolution, paleontology, astronomy, and other issues important to science and society (stem cells, global warming, etc.). Lakoff has written another, more recent, paperback titled *Talking Points* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, N.Y.). It further guides and exhorts readers to the importance, and methods, of bringing others to support a particular view in politics, science, and society.

There are critical reasons for mastering the art of framing, communicating, and dialogue. About half of Americans buy into creationist or ID explanations for origins, for example, and more than half believe such should be considered in science curricula—including President Bush ("Why not hear both sides?"). It is thus