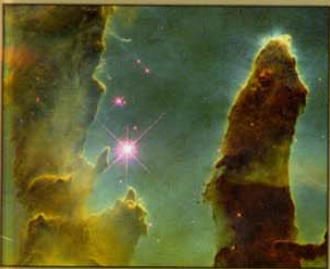


DISCOVER PRESENTS

# TOP 75 QUESTIONS OF SCIENCE



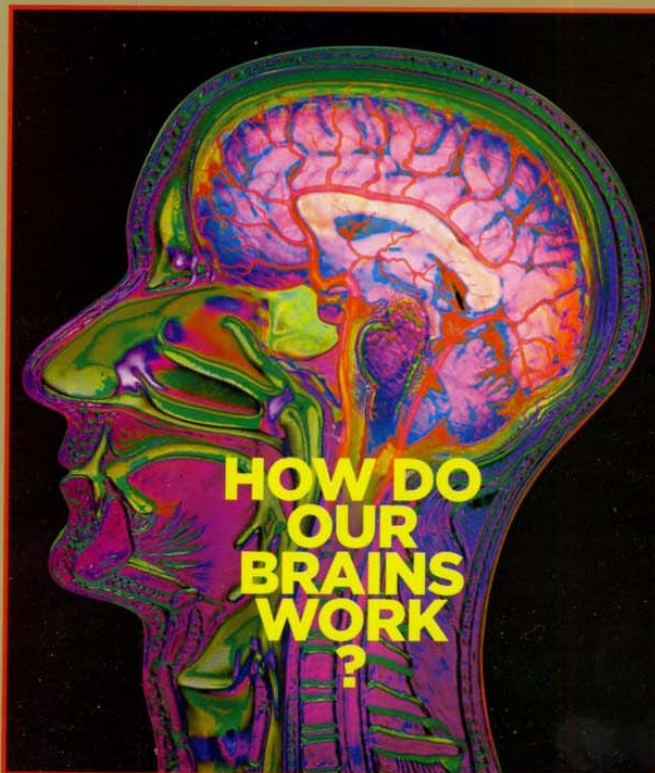
**CAN WE STOP  
CLIMATE CHANGE?**



**DOES LIFE  
EXIST IN OTHER  
GALAXIES?**

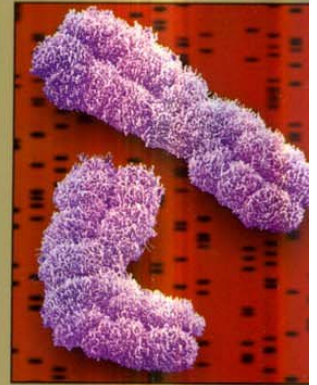


**WHO WAS  
HERE BEFORE  
US?**



**HOW DO  
OUR  
BRAINS  
WORK  
?**

**DO EMOTIONS SERVE A PURPOSE?**



**ARE WE  
CREATING A  
SUPER RACE?**

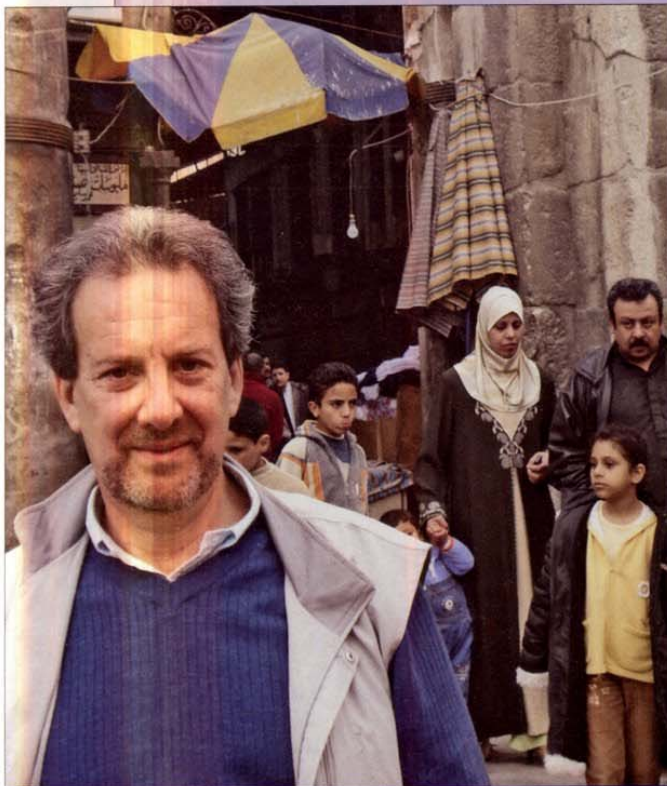
**WHO WILL BE  
THE FIRST TO  
LIVE FOREVER?**

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**SCOTT ATRAN** argues in his 2002 book, *In Gods We Trust*, that religion itself is part of our evolutionary inheritance.

## Q WHY DO WE HAVE SUICIDE BOMBERS?

**A Scott Atran, anthropologist, National Center for Scientific Research, Paris:** Since the invasion of Iraq and with the Internet, we are witnessing a more egalitarian, less educated, and more socially marginalized wave of would-be suicide bombers. There is a massive, media-driven transnational political awakening going on in the world, and the publicity associated with spectacular acts of violence in the name of justice is the oxygen that fires terrorism. Although millions of people support suicide bombing, very few are willing to do it. Those who do almost always come in small groups of action-oriented friends. They are usually from the same neighborhood or soccer team, sometimes a group of paintball or pinball buddies, or they may even first hook up in a chat room.

These young people constantly see and discuss among themselves images of war and injustice against “our people” and become morally outraged (especially

if injustice resonates personally, more a problem with immigrants in Europe than in the United States). They mostly self-radicalize in cafés, barbershops, and informal discussion groups (people pray in mosques; they don’t plot in them).

Most human violence is committed by young people seeking adventure, dreams of glory, and esteem in the eyes of their peers. They want to be and belong to something that is at once intimate and bigger and more permanent than a person alone. They die for faith and friendship, which is the foundation of all social and political union. The most heroic cause in the world today is jihad, where anyone from anywhere can hope to make a mark against the most powerful army in the history of the world. But they need their friends to give them courage, and it is more for love of comrades even than for the cause that they will kill and die in the end.

## Q WHY DOES RELIGION PERSIST?

**A Atran:** Humans are faced with problems they can’t solve. Think about death. Because we have these cognitive abilities to track memory, we are automatically aware of death everywhere.

Another problem is deception. For physical events, we have ways of verifying what’s real or not. For moral judgments, we have nothing. Evolution may endow us with innate notions of fairness, justice, and loyalty, but the combination of these elements can lead to different moral systems that are completely at odds with one another, from slavery and dictatorship to liberty and democracy—none of which are inevitable.

If someone says, “Oh, he should be a beggar and he should be a king,” what is there in the world that’s going to convince me this is true? There is nothing. If there is nothing, how are people ever going to get on with one another? Especially non-kin. How are they ever going to build societies, and how are they ever going to trust one another so they won’t defect? One way that humans seem to have come up with is to invent this minimally counterintuitive world developed by these deities, who are like big brothers who watch over us and make sure that there will be no defectors.

## Q WILL SCIENCE EVER REPLACE RELIGION?

**A Atran:** Never. Because it doesn’t solve any of the problems that religion solves, like death or deception. There is no society that survives more than a generation or two that isn’t religiously based—even the Soviet Union, where half the people were religious. Thomas Jefferson’s Unitarian God fell by the wayside. The French Revolution’s neutral deity also fell by the wayside. People want a personal God, for obvious reasons, to solve personal problems.