Inside the baby mind

It’s unfocused, and extremely good at what it does. How we can learn from a baby’s brain. | By Jonah Lehrer

What if it’s like to be a baby? For centuries, this question would have seemed absurd; belief that the infant’s mind was a mostly empty head. A baby, after all, is missing most of the capabilities that define the human mind, such as language and the ability to reason. Rene Descartes argued that the young child was entirely bound by sensation, hopelessly trapped in the confusing rush of the here and now. A newborn, in this sense, is just a lump of need, a bundle of reflexes that can only eat and cry. To think like a baby is to not think at all.

Modern science has largely agreed, spending decades outlining all the things that babies couldn’t do because their brains had yet to develop. They were unable to focus, delay gratification, or even express their desires. The Princeton philosopher Peter Singer famously suggested that “killing a disabled infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person. Very often it is not wrong at all.”

Now, however, scientists have begun to dramatically revise our concept of a baby’s mind. By using new research techniques and tools, they’ve revealed that the baby brain is a highly active, capable of learning astonishing amounts of information in a relatively short time. Unlike the adult mind, which restricts itself to a narrow slice of reality, babies can take in a much wider spectrum of sensation — they see, in an important sense, more of the world than we are.

This hyperactivity comes with several benefits. For starters, NARGL Page C2

Beyond belief

Research on religion goes after a new target: the secular | By Nathan Schneider

Religion can BE good for more than the soul, a growing number of studies seem to say. Over the past decade, academic research on religiosity has exploded, and with it has come a raft of publications suggesting that spiritual beliefs and practices can add years to life, lower blood pressure, or keep us on the straight and narrow. As sociologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists turn their attention to measuring the effects of religion, often funded by grant money from private foundations, the results have percolated through weekend sermons and the popular media. Being nonreligious, one might conclude, looks more and more like a danger to your health.

But as the academic interest in religion has mounted, some scholars have begun to call this picture into question. What’s missing, they believe, is a comparable examination into the lives of nonreligious people.

INESSIDE

STU GORE
EX M CED

The world

Sneaking up

Looking harder for shifts in language. C2
By Jon Freeman

QA

Per Berthelsen
On building a new economy in Greenland. C3
By Joshua Kevery

UNCOMMON KNOWLEDGE

The power of a role model, border danger, and more. C4
By Kevin Lewis

Brainiac

Meeting the desert. C3. For the latest: boston.com/bostonmagazines/ideas/brainiac.
Religion

Continued from page C1

even the potential benefits of materialism. Galleryed by a dozen to the cool, these somnolent beings have been organizing academic centers to study the impulses, conducting major surveys, and charting their findings. They’ve already found that conventional atheists appear just as well-equipped to cope with hardships as conservative believers, and that some of the world’s wealthiest societies have the lowest lev-

els of religiosity.

“Now there seems to be a clear-cut case of people mattering socially,” says Paul Popenoe, a sociolo-
ger at Princeton College, and “I think that is a big new development.”

Philosophical reflection about materialism has been in the ascendance, yet God more than a century ago, but scientiﬁc research on it is only a baby. In recent years, a new work has already begun to draw the lines on the horizon, on the relationship between religion and some of the most serious social problems.

IT WASN’T UNTIL the late 1980s that social scien-
tists and medical researchers began to study religion. Thereby, just two decades, and for a long time, the spiritual had generally been as-
numed to be an inappropriate subject for empirical investigation. But a surge of academic interest in religion, together with an influx of money, changed that.

The researchers-based John Templeton Foun-
dation, whose board members funded up to $50 million for research, has given a shot of adrenalin to the study of religion.

In the social sciences, Templeton-funded older programs focused on the emergence of religion, how the concept of life after death emerged, and the role of religion in society.

The study of religion itself has come into its own in recent years. The number of religious studies programs in American universities has grown from a handful in the 1970s to over 100 today. The number of religious studies programs in American universities has grown from a handful in the 1970s to over 100 today. The number of religious studies programs in American universities has grown from a handful in the 1970s to over 100 today.

Religious studies is one of the few areas of study where there is no longer a debate about the existence of a “God” or a “higher power.” Instead, the focus is on how different traditions interpret and understand the divine.

The temple, which is the spiritual center of many different religions, is often seen as a place of refuge and solace. It is a space where people can come together and connect with their faith, with each other, and with the divine.

The temple serves as a source of comfort and strength, providing a sense of community and belonging. It is a place of worship, prayer, and meditation, where individuals can find peace and guidance.

The temple is also a place of learning, where the teachings and traditions of a particular religion are passed down from generation to generation. It is a space where individuals can deepen their understanding of their faith and connect with the wisdom of the past.

The temple is a physical structure, but it is also a concept, a symbol, and a source of inspiration. It represents the essence of a religion and the values and beliefs of its followers.

The temple is a reminder of the interconnectedness of all beings and the importance of compassion, empathy, and love for others. It is a place where individuals can reflect on their own lives and their relationship with the divine.

The temple is a source of comfort and inspiration, providing a sense of peace and tranquility in a world that can be chaotic and uncertain. It is a place where individuals can find solace and guidance, and where they can reconnect with their sense of purpose and meaning.

The temple is a symbol of hope and resilience, reminding us that even in the darkest of times, there is always a glimmer of light and a reason to keep going.

The temple is a place of creation and transformation, where individuals can grow and evolve in their faith and in their relationship with the divine. It is a source of inspiration and motivation, encouraging individuals to be their best selves and to make the world a better place.

The temple is a place of mystery and wonder, inviting individuals to explore their spiritual journey and to discover the meaning and purpose of their lives. It is a place of curiosity and discovery, challenging individuals to question their assumptions and to open their minds to new possibilities.

The temple is a place of love and compassion, where individuals can find acceptance and understanding. It is a space of healing and restoration, where individuals can find comfort and support in times of need.

The temple is a source of inspiration and guidance, reminding us of the power of faith and the importance of connection. It is a place of transformation and growth, where individuals can find the strength and courage to face the challenges of life.

The temple is a symbol of hope and resilience, reminding us that even in the darkest of times, there is always a glimmer of light and a reason to keep going. It is a place of mystery and wonder, inviting individuals to explore their spiritual journey and to discover the meaning and purpose of their lives. It is a place of love and compassion, where individuals can find acceptance and understanding. It is a space of healing and restoration, where individuals can find comfort and support in times of need. It is a source of inspiration and guidance, reminding us of the power of faith and the importance of connection. It is a place of transformation and growth, where individuals can find the strength and courage to face the challenges of life.