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Some beliefs seem to be more resilient to change and extinction than others. This paper argues that some of the strong beliefs held by humans have deep biological roots in our evolutionary past, and the neuronal pathways and structures that support them can be found in other species. This paper describes four basic universal criteria present in persistent beliefs: intuitibility, predictability, reliability and utility (IPRU). The paper argues that the study of belief as a modern scientific discipline will require consideration of the evolutionary context through which the neural pathways associated with belief formation, maintenance and endorsement have emerged. We also suggest that the study of religious belief has discouraged the adoption of an overarching framework for understanding our belief system in all its breadth. Our approach incorporates evolution-driven cognitive and affective biases, attachment mechanisms and reward expectation. Rather than operating as genuinely adaptive phenomena associated with evolutionary advantage, we suggest that belief systems emerge as a by-product of evolutionary pressures. Religious beliefs take advantage of these evolutionary structures.