

Gene Roberts, the *Inquirer's* widely respected executive editor, to take early retirement in 1990. (He is now managing editor of the *New York Times*.) "If death comes to newspapers," he told Paterno,

"it'll be death by suicide. It'll be because we starved ourselves to death in the name of becoming healthier companies, starved to death our newsrooms, the very thing that makes it possible for us to exist."

## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

### *Piety or Faith?*

"Decencies for Skeptics" by Roger Scruton, in *City Journal* (Spring 1996),  
Manhattan Institute, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Distressed by America's social ills, many American conservatives look to a revival of organized religion for salvation. It's not just genuine believers, says Scruton, editor of the *Salisbury Review*, a British conservative journal. "All too often," he writes, the search for a religious solution to the problems of secular society "is conducted in a spirit of despair by people who are as infected by the surrounding nihilism as those whose behavior they wish to rectify. Their message is simple: 'God is Dead—but don't spread it around.'"

But it already has been spread around, Scruton says. Benjamin Disraeli and many other 19th-century conservatives could combine private skepticism with public support of the established church. Yet in a time of widespread skepticism, pretending makes little sense—and may even be harmful. In an age without faith, Scruton argues, it is still possible to do as the ancient Chinese and Romans did—"to cultivate a habit of piety, while being skeptical toward religious doctrine." Piety, which involves respect for the

dead and for the wisdom embodied in the inherited customs of society, can serve as an antidote to the "principal damage" done by liberalism, which "has come from the relentless scoffing at ordinary prohibitions and decencies, and the shrill advocacy of 'alternatives' that ordinary people are unable in their hearts to recognize." Crime, drug abuse, illegitimacy, and easy divorce, Scruton says, are rooted in a failure to acknowledge "obligations that are stronger than desire."

The conservatives who hope that a return to religious faith will safeguard "natural piety" are instead endangering this reverent attitude, Scruton maintains, because they make it seem irrational. "But piety is not irrational at all. It is the voice that tells us that the goods of society are inherited and could never be rediscovered by the generation that foolishly rejects them. . . . [It] speaks of duties that lie above and beyond our desires and contracts. If people cease to recognize such duties, society will crumble."

### *Mr. Kant's Peace Plan*

"Kant's Third Image: Systemic Sources of the Liberal Peace" by Wade I. Huntley, in  
*International Studies Quarterly* (Mar. 1996), 210 Woodburn Hall, Dept. of  
Political Science, Indiana Univ., Bloomington, Ind. 47405-6001.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who envisioned the liberal republic as the foundation of "perpetual peace," is the intellectual godfather of the foreign policy thinkers today who argue that spreading democracy abroad should be the chief goal of U.S. policy overseas. After all, they say, liberal democratic states do not wage war with one another.

Neorealist critics such as Kenneth Waltz contend that Kant and these modern liberal internationalists neglect the permanent condition of anarchy that prevails among

states, making the threat of war ever present. Kant's heirs respond that liberal states can, in fact, overcome the effects of international anarchy. Largely overlooked in this debate, argues Huntley, who obtained



*Immanuel Kant*

his doctorate from the University of California at Berkeley in 1993, is the large role that Kant himself gave to anarchy and conflict in bringing about the liberal peace.

In “Perpetual Peace” (1796), Kant argued that republics were inherently inclined toward peace, since citizens are more reluctant than kings to declare war. Republics could establish the rule of law among themselves by creating a federation of free states. War and the threat of war, in Kant’s view, serve as the “most essential” force for peace. “The growth of republics, and of the rule of

law among them (embodied in their federation),” Huntley explains, “is not an intentional creation as much as a gradual product of accumulating self-interested reactions to lawlessness and violence. Conflict is the fountainhead of progress—and so the propensity for war itself sows the seeds of war’s end.”

But “perpetual peace” was an ideal that might be destined, Kant said, “forever to remain a pious hope.” Since backsliding by a republic was always a possibility, peace would never be perfectly secured.

## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

### *Too Pretty to Be True?*

“Do We Have the Structure of DNA Right?” by Robert Root-Bernstein, in *Art Journal* (Spring 1996), College Art Assn., 275 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001.

The double helix of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) is one of the icons of the modern age. What most textbooks do not reveal, says Root-Bernstein, a professor of physiology at Michigan State University, is the real possibility that this is *not* the structure of DNA.

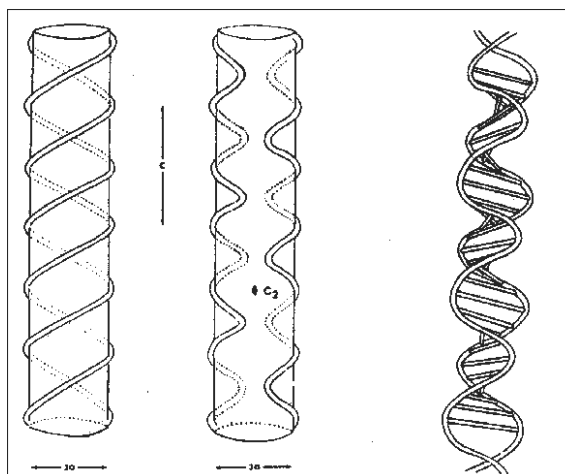
times since. However, the famous double-helix model remains “a bit doubtful,” Root-Bernstein says.

A big problem is that it is not clear how a DNA double helix is unwound so as to allow it to be replicated. Unwinding the DNA strands within the cell nucleus, Root-Bernstein says, would be like unwinding several hundred kilometers of twisted strands with the thickness of fishing line, inside a basketball: “Where does the energy come from to perform the unwinding of the strands? What mechanism can be imagined that could perform such a feat, even if the energy were available to do it?”

Watson and Crick themselves recognized in 1953 that the unwinding problem was “formidable,” and they noted a possible alternative to the double helix: a “ribbonlike” or “side-by-side” structure, in which the two chains were joined together by the base pairs but did not twist about each other. But the double helix, Root-

Bernstein says, had an aesthetic appeal for the two scientists that the ribbon-like alternative did not. As Watson himself often said, the double helix “was too pretty not to be true.”

Nevertheless, it may not be true, as some scientists have argued since the 1970s. Most researchers, however, cling to the double helix, avoiding the unwinding problems, Root-Bernstein says, by asserting “that the



DNA puzzle: Do the chains twine around each other (left), or are they “side-by-side” (center) and joined by base pairs (right)?

Biologists James Watson and Francis Crick proposed the double helix (with two chains twining around each other, connected by “steps” formed by pairs of nucleic-acid bases) as the structure in 1953, and later won the Nobel Prize for their work. Most features of their proposal—including the base-pairing idea, which is the basis for how information is encoded in genes—have been verified many