“A voice was heard in Ramah, 
Lamentation and bitter weeping, 
Rachel weeping for her children, 
Refusing to be comforted for her children, 
Because they are no more.”
— Jeremiah 31:15

This passage from Jeremiah is directly quoted in the Gospel of Matthew. Both passages “resurrect” Rachel to weep over her children. The passages echo a very particular kind of sadness, that of great loss and the fear that comes from being terrorized by a bloodthirsty tyrant. Jeremiah’s context is the Babylonian invasion of the southern kingdom. Matthew’s context is the fulfillment of Herod’s decree—the murder of all the boys two years old and younger in Bethlehem and its surrounding villages (Matt. 2:16). But why does Matthew’s Gospel quote Jeremiah’s passage of lament regarding Nebuchadnezzar’s bloody siege of Jerusalem? And why does Jeremiah refer to Rachel?

There is one very interesting answer to these questions, an answer that does justice to the larger purpose of both authors. This answer is hope: just as Moses escaped Pharaoh’s bloody decree, and a remnant of exiles survived the annihilating forces of the Babylonians, so too Jesus escaped the murderous decree of Herod.
God's covenant purposes are fulfilled in spite of the wickedness of men. But why Rachel? Why does Jeremiah refer to Rachel weeping over her children? Rachel was often viewed by Jewish rabbis as the mother of Israel. Thus “Rachel's children” are the children of the covenant promises. Throughout the history of Israel, the children of Israel were often subject to great suffering and the terrible pain of exile. In this condition of exile they waited—for the coming fulfillment of the covenant. As they waited, they wept, often bitterly.

As Rachel was dying, she named the son she had borne Ben-Oni (“son of my sorrow”). Rachel was buried on the way to Ephrathah, in Bethlehem. In Matthew's Gospel, the obvious link is both to Bethlehem, the sight of weeping and bitter lamentation for the children of Rachel who “are no more,” and to Rachel's son Ben-Oni, “son of my sorrow” (the son whose name is changed by his father, Jacob, to Ben-Jamin, “son of the right hand”). Rachel's sorrow, however, is interrupted by the great joy of the birth of the Messiah—the Messiah who will be the end of all sorrows. By God's providence, Jesus escaped Herod's decree so that one day He would end Rachel's weeping. In the biblical narrative of salvation history, great sorrow is often punctuated by even greater joy.

Central to the events that both Jeremiah and Matthew record is the tyrant. The tyrant is the corrupt and godless ruler who wantonly destroys life and has no concern for the innocent. The tyrant wields the sword in the name of unchecked power. Nebuchadnezzar's imperial commander, Nebuzaradan, had wielded the sword cruelly and rapaciously in the name of such power. He also wielded the sword as he gathered the remaining exiles at Ramah to take them into captivity in Babylon. The children of Israel (“Rachel's children”) wept as they saw their once great nation in ruins—their women and children cruelly and rapaciously massacred by a bloodthirsty tyrant. The children of Israel also wept as another tyrant, Herod, massacred the baby boys in and around the city of Bethlehem.

In the hands of tyrants (and those who do their bidding), the sword is an instrument of unchecked power, wanton devastation, and ultimately genocide. Have we made progress since then? The record of our most recent century suggests that humanists have not learned their lesson. The twentieth century, which began with unbridled humanistic optimism, tragically experienced the result of such optimism. The humanist, godless ideologies of the twentieth century spawned men like Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Pol Pot, and Idi Amin, state-sponsored genocidal machines such as the German National Socialist Party (Nazis), the Soviet Union, and the Khmer Rouge, and massive and mindless bloodletting events such as the death camps at Auschwitz, the Rape of Nanking, and the killing fields at Choeung Ek. Clearly, humanism is a form of regression, not progress.

Whereas in the hands of a tyrant the sword is death, devastation, and unchecked power, another art has been practiced for the opposite purpose: the preservation and protection of life. This is what the guild of doctors in the ancient world referred to as the “healing art.” However, the doctor and the tyrant are potentially not so different. Both wield power over life and death. Patients, not unlike the subjects ruled by tyrants, are quite vulnerable. Although the tyrant wishes to wield unchecked power, what of the doctor? Is there some means whereby the power that the doctor has over life and death might be restrained by a moral code?

For thousands of years, those practicing the “healing art” have taken an oath to place a restraint on the great power they wield. This oath is the Hippocratic Oath. Simply put, the Hippocratic Oath provides a very clear picture of the way that doctors should practice their craft. According to the central principle of the oath, doctors shall preserve and not destroy life when it is most fragile and vulnerable. Thus, the Hippocratic Oath explicitly set out to protect life where it is most vulnerable—the unborn, sick, infirm, and elderly. Therefore, the Hippocratic Oath explicitly forbids doctors either to abort babies or to euthanize patients. As the Hippocratic Oath is increasingly ignored in our society, and as doctors are murdering unborn babies and euthanizing the elderly, a question arises for us: has our medical profession become tyrannical?

**General Information**

**Author and Context**

It is difficult to identify a single author of the oath. It is quite possible that the oath was originally penned by Hippocrates (460–380 B.C.), a contemporary of Socrates. It is important, if we are to understand the context of the oath, to understand the central theme of the oath. The central theme of the oath is a simple distinction: healers versus killers. The oath determines, by its basic orientation, to make this distinction clear and undeniable.

The followers of the Greek god Asclepius (the god of healing) were referred to as Asclepiads. They were part of a guild of practitioners of the medical art. The history of Asclepius in mythology may be an interesting clue to the central purpose of the guild. According to one myth, Asclepius was the son of Apollo. His mother died during childbirth. As she was about to be consumed by flames on the funeral pyre, Apollo rescued his unborn son. He was cut out of his dying mother's womb and hence given
The Hippocratic Oath

Significance

The Hippocratic Oath was a central feature of the guild of healers from the fourth century B.C. to Galen (129–200 A.D.), the last of a great tradition of Asclepiad Greco-Roman philosopher-physicians. It has formed the foundation for the contemporary practice of doctors taking oaths as an essential element in the practice of medicine. Its significance is found in the way it helped to establish a “school” of physicians with a standardized moral vision. We take it for granted that a doctor is a medically and scientifically trained expert at his craft. But that was not always the case.

For the most part, those practicing the medical arts were nothing more than shamans, that is, witch-doctors performing ritualistic, occult activities. Divinization, crying, reading runes, sacrifice, controlling spirits—these were all activities considered to be “medicinal” in nature. Little to no attempt was made to study the body scientifically or to understand the relationship between anatomy, biology and healing. This is what set the Hippocratic, Asclepiad tradition apart. The members of the guild passed knowledge down from generation to generation. And according to some ancient scholars, by the time of Galen the science of medicine had become quite sophisticated.

Possibly the greatest ancient inheritor of the Hippocratic tradition, Galen was truly a philosopher and scientist. He had developed the art of anatomy and possessed a quite advanced understanding of such complex systems as the nervous and circulatory systems.

Perhaps the greatest significance of the Hippocratic tradition, however, is the way the oath defined the telos, or purpose, of the doctor. The most basic principle of the oath is defined in this simple Latin phrase: *primum non nocere* ("first do no harm"). In succinct form, the oath clearly articulates the basic goals and aims of medicine. This section of the oath helps us understand how clearly the oath articulates the moral purpose and function of the doctor’s art:

> Whenever I go into a house, I will go to help the sick and never with the intention of doing harm or injury. I will not abuse my position to indulge in sexual contacts with the bodies of women or of men, whether they be freemen or slaves.

The oath, therefore, clearly recognizes the possibility of doctors having tyrannical power over their patients. Not only did the Hippocratic tradition encourage doctors to be scientists and not shamans or witch doctors, but it also encouraged them to practice their art with great moral self-restraint and with the highest respect for the sacredness of life and of the doctor/patient relationship.

For some time now, medical students have taken some version of the Hippocratic Oath, as almost every medical school administers some form of the oath as an essential part of its tradition. It is important to note, however, that most medical schools have removed key elements of the oath. Most notably, references to abortion and euthanasia have been removed from many of the modernized versions of the oaths administered at medical schools.
Setting

As with any oath that has value, the context for this oath is religious. Since a man can swear by nothing higher than God (or the gods, for the Greeks and Romans—Christian doctors, of course, could not take an oath to a false deity), the oath begins with the following: “I swear by Apollo the physician, and Asclepius, and Hygieia, and Panacea and all the gods and goddesses as my witnesses, that, according to my ability and judgment, I will keep this Oath and this contract.”

Hygieia was the offspring of Asclepius and was the goddess of good health (the word hygiene is derived from her name). Her sister Panacea’s name means “all-cure.” As was traditional in Greco-Roman religion, practitioners of certain arts dedicated their activities to the gods who were considered to be the divine benefactors or patrons of their craft. In devoting their activities to the gods, the Asclepiads (the guild of doctors) were recognizing the sacred responsibilities and moral boundaries of their craft. Another important element in the opening declaration is the recognition of the legally binding quality of the oath. Many translations give the following version of the binding nature of the oath: “...to keep according to my ability the following oath and promise.” Some will put in place of “promise” the word “agreement.” This is closer to the appropriate translation. Better is the translation given previously: “contract.” The Greek word being translated is syngraphe. It refers to a written (legally binding) agreement, not merely a verbal agreement. So the best translation would not be “promise” or “agreement,” but something like the following: “...to keep according to my ability the following oath and legal agreement.”

The oath has seven main elements, with a final, capstone promise (to keep everything contained in the oath). They can be broken up into the following abbreviations:

A Responsibility to fellow practitioners of the art
B Prohibition against doing harm and promise to do good
C Prohibition against euthanasia and abortion
D Promise to preserve purity of life and practice
E Recognition of the need for specialists to provide specialized services (like certain specialized surgical activities)
F Prohibition against abusing power to seduce patients
G Prohibition against teaching the secrets of the craft to those untrained or who have not taken the oath

Worldview

During World War II, Nazi doctors practiced medicine in a horrific manner. What was their stated purpose? Their purpose was to pursue the “common good” of the state as a whole. Who suffers when this objective operates unchecked? Given the history of Nazi Germany, it is clearly the weak and vulnerable, the unwanted or “useless,” who suffer the most. Many of the Nazi experiments were employed with the justification that they served the greater common good.

For instance, Nazi doctors conducted hypothermia (freezing) experiments on human subjects to simulate the conditions Nazi soldiers might face in extreme cold conditions. The experiments attempted to determine how quickly someone would typically freeze to death and, if possible, how best to resuscitate the body. They used two basic methods to bring patients to a point of freezing: putting them in tanks filled with ice water, and putting victims outside, naked, in freezing temperatures. In the concentration camp at Auschwitz, the extreme cold conditions in the winter made it the perfect place to perform cold-weather “exposure” experiments. The “warming” experiments (used to bring the person back from a state of extreme hypothermia) were no less cruel than the
The Hippocratic Oath

The moral worth of actions is not determined with respect to outcomes or consequences, utilitarian ethics are consequentialist. This means the value of an action is not only based upon its utility, but also upon the desirability of the outcome. The desirability of the outcome becomes the overriding moral principle that justifies the means used to achieve the outcome.

Nazi medical ethics were explicitly utilitarian and consequentialist in form. They determined that achieving the greatest good for the greatest number in the German state demanded the sacrifice of some (the weak, infirm, Jews, captured enemy soldiers, etc.). Often, this principle was justified on the basis of utilitarian social Darwinism: the herd as a whole (the German state) is strengthened when the weaker members of the herd (the weak, elderly, infirm, ethnically inferior, genetically inferior, etc.) are killed.

Out of this terrible and horrific moment in the history of medicine emerged a very important document. It was influenced by the important work of Dr. Leo Alexander (expert medical adviser to the U.S. Chief of Counsel for War Crimes, and important participant in the Nuremberg war crimes trials). The document is called the “Nuremberg Code.” The purpose of the document is to provide a moral framework for experimentation on human subjects. In it the principle of “informed consent” is established as preeminent. In it we can also see the influence of the Hippocratic Oath. The goal of the Nuremberg Code is the same as that of the Hippocratic Oath: to define the moral objectives (and limits) of medical practitioners. Nazi Germany provides an important reminder—those practicing medicine need to be limited by a binding moral code. From this we can see that the 2,400-year-old lesson Hippocrates sought to teach us is no less relevant today than it was in 400 B.C.

Nazi Germany provides such an explicit and historically memorable example of heartless inhuman injustices, we are tempted to see it as an anomaly—something that happened once in history but will never happen again. However, the biblical picture of man suggests that he is always tempted to act according to naked self-interest and according to a “way” whose end is death: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12). In our pride we may believe we have learned the lessons we needed to learn from the medical horrors of the Holocaust. And yet the evidence suggests the opposite.

Contemporary medicine has strayed quite far from the basic principles of the Hippocratic Oath. There are two obvious instances of this: abortion and euthanasia/physician-assisted suicide. For some time the Netherlands has been the most supportive of euthanasia and

Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, is depicted practicing his art on a patient.
Oregon were the first U.S. citizens to be recipients of a legally supported physician-assisted suicide. These patients were killed under the terms of the 1994 Death with Dignity Act.

Christians are also painfully aware of how the legalization of abortion in the infamous Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision has profoundly changed the landscape of American medicine. Since the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, there have been over fifty million abortions. If we use the round number of five million Jews killed in the Holocaust, we have had the equivalent of ten Holocausts in the United States since 1973. Also, we have heard arguments from the floor of Congress, from presidents, and from medical experts justifying selective (eugenic) abortion, abortion as population control, and embryonic research. These arguments are philosophically utilitarian and consequentialist in nature. So are we really that far from the ethic used to justify the Nazi approach to life issues? In removing explicit references to euthanasia and abortion from the modernized versions of the Hippocratic Oath, are our doctors in danger of becoming indistinguishable from tyrants?

Another sign that America is in danger of being unable to avoid the temptations of a utilitarian ethic is the career of Peter Singer. Peter Singer is an open and self-avowed proponent of infanticide—killing a baby after he has been born. Not only is Peter Singer pro-abortion, but he also believes that infanticide is morally justifiable by the principles outlined in his utilitarian ethics. Operating with a strange form of strict and cold consistency, Singer is both a proponent of abortion on demand and infanticide and yet an avid supporter of

**THE HIPPOCRATIC OATH** (Original Version)

I SWEAR by Apollo the physician, Aesculapius, and Health, and All-heal, and all the gods and goddesses, that, according to my ability and judgement, I will keep this Oath and this stipulation.

TO RECKON him who taught me this Art equally dear to me as my parents, to share my substance with him, and relieve his necessities if required; to look up his offspring in the same footing as my own brothers, and to teach them this art, if they shall wish to learn it, without fee or stipulation; and that by precept, lecture, and every other mode of instruction, I will impart a knowledge of the Art to my own sons, and those of my teachers, and to disciples bound by a stipulation and oath according to the law of medicine, but to none others.

I WILL FOLLOW that system of regimen which, according to my ability and judgment, I consider for the benefit of my patients, and abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous. I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked, nor suggest any such counsel; and in like manner I will not give a woman a pessary to produce abortion.

WITH PURITY AND WITH HOLINESS I will pass my life and practice my Art. I will not cut persons laboring under the stone, but will leave this to be done by men who are practitioners of this work. Into whatever houses I enter, I will go into them for the benefit of the sick, and will abstain from every voluntary act of mischief and corruption; and, further from the seduction of females or males, of freemen and slaves.

WHATEVER, IN CONNECTION with my professional practice or not, in connection with it, I see or hear, in the life of men, which ought not to be spoken of abroad, I will not divulge, as reckoning that all such should be kept secret.

WHILE I CONTINUE to keep this Oath unviolated, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and the practice of the art, respected by all men, in all times! But should I trespass and violate this Oath, may the reverse be my lot!

physician-assisted suicide. In 2002 euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide were officially legalized in the Netherlands (although for over twenty years doctors had not been prosecuted if they had euthanized patients or assisted in suicide). In 1998 two terminally ill patients in the Ira W. DeCamp professor of bioethics at Princeton University is remarkable.
animal rights. Singer claims to have been a vegetarian since 1971, and his famous Animal Liberation has become a sort of bible for animal rights activists. That Singer could be promoted to such a prestigious position at a top Ivy League school suggests that the outrage we experience in relationship to the Holocaust, which is visceral, natural and immediate, doesn't exist when it comes to an exactly equivalent moral issue (infanticide) that should be just as visceral, natural, and immediate.

Singer and his ilk promote a utilitarian bioethics. Utilitarian bioethics uses a quality-of-life argument to determine how to make basic ethical decisions. Yet this is exactly the kind of reasoning used to justify human experimentation and the euthanization of infants, the sick, and the elderly in Nazi Germany. To determine how little we've learned from World War II Germany, we will take a look at a chilling passage from Dr. Leo Alexander's now famous article from the July 1949 New England Journal of Medicine, titled “Medical Science Under Dictatorship.”

Whatever proportions these crimes finally assumed, it became evident to all who investigated them that they had started from small beginnings. The beginnings at first were merely a subtle shift in emphasis in the basic attitude of the physicians. It started with the acceptance of the attitude, basic in the euthanasia movement, that there is such a thing as life not worthy to be lived. This attitude in its early stages concerned itself merely with the severely and chronically sick. Gradually the sphere of those to be included in this category was enlarged to encompass the socially unproductive, the ideologically unwanted, the racially unwanted and finally all non-Germans. But it is important to realize that the infinitely small wedged-in lever from which this entire trend of mind received its impetus was the attitude toward the non-rehabilitable sick.5

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**THE HIPPOCRATIC OATH** (A Modern Version)
Written by Louis Lasagna in 1964

I swear to fulfill, to the best of my ability and judgment, this covenant:

I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.

I will apply, for the benefit of the sick, all measures which are required, avoiding those twin traps of over-treatment and therapeutic nihilism.

I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon’s knife or the chemist's drug.

I will not be ashamed to say “I know not,” nor will I fail to call in my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient’s recovery.

I will respect the privacy of my patients, for their problems are not disclosed to me that the world may know. Most especially must I tread with care in matters of life and death. If it is given me to save a life, all thanks. But it may also be within my power to take a life; this awesome responsibility must be faced with great humbleness and awareness of my own frailty. Above all, I must not play at God.

I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being, whose illness may affect the person's family and economic stability. My responsibility includes these related problems, if I am to care adequately for the sick.

I will prevent disease whenever I can, for prevention is preferable to cure.

I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings, those sound of mind and body as well as the infirm.

If I do not violate this oath, may I enjoy life and art, respected while I live and remembered with affection thereafter. May I always act so as to preserve the finest traditions of my calling and may I long experience the joy of healing those who seek my help.
deontological, rule-based ethics to a utilitarian ethic based upon quality-of-life judgments. As a nation, we continue to use quality-of-life reasoning and utilitarian ethical principles.

For instance, aborting babies with disabilities has become a common practice. Some estimates have the abortion rates for babies identified with Down syndrome as high as 80 to 90 percent. Furthermore, we are constantly hearing that abortion reduces the number of “unwanted pregnancies” and “unwanted children” and therefore increases the percentage of “happy children.” In short, abortion increases the overall quality of life of American children. The rationale given for selective (eugenic) abortion and abortion to control population or reduce “unwanted pregnancies” is exactly the same as what Dr. Alexander warns us against; it is the “small beginning” that led to the terrible and horrific consequences of the Holocaust. It assumes that we can, by playing God, calculate the status of a life “not worthy to be lived.”

So how has our “enlightened” and “progressive” world become so deluded as to have failed to learn the important (and obvious) lessons from the Holocaust? As Christians, we cannot be reminded enough of one of the most basic aspects of sin: “suppressing the truth in wickedness.” Romans 1:18 tells us that sinners actively and intentionally suppress the truth in wickedness. The Greek verb for “suppress” means “to actively hold back” or “restrain” or “hold down.”

This is precisely what we as a society are doing as we ignore (intentionally) the most basic elements of the Hippocratic Oath. If the majority of medical colleges throughout the country have removed references to abortion and euthanasia from their modernized, updated versions of the Hippocratic Oath, we can be certain they are “suppressing the truth in wickedness.” What is frightening is that this active suppression of the truth is done in the name of justice and liberation.

So how might we respond to this trend in our culture? We must return to the most basic elements of the doctrine of creation and the anthropology that emerges from it. One of the most basic responsibilities that Christians have is to be “fruitful and multiply” and to “fill the earth and subdue it.” In order to do this, however, we must have an ethic, theology, and anthropology that explicitly and unwaveringly protects the mystery and “gift quality” of life. The mystery of life is an essential component of our situation as finite and limited human beings. We do not see the future, and we are not called to attempt to manipulate the future through some kind of alchemical calculus that reduces (and even destroys) the mystery of the gift of life. There are many instances in Scripture in which disastrous consequences come from people attempting to control life through some kind of alchemy or technique.

Synonymous with the mysterious quality of life is its gift character. According to Exodus 3:14, God is life. We, on the other hand, merely have life. For this reason, life is a sacred gift given to us from the fountain of all life. It is never something that we own, nor is it ever something that is an ungifted “right.” This understanding is in danger of being lost when we articulate life as a “right.” Although it is true that human beings have a “right” not to have life unjustly taken away from them by another human being, it does not follow that we have a “right to life” per se.

For creatures who are created and whose essence is not to exist—only God has essential existence—life always retains its gift quality. Even the universe does not uphold itself, but is actively upheld by the power of Christ (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). As St. Augustine reminds us in Confessions, if God withdrew His sustaining power, the universe would fall back into the nonexistence out of which it came (this is a logical extension of the doctrine that God created the universe ex nihilo).

What does this mean for ethics? It means we must promote an ethic that recognizes the mystery, sanctity, and gift quality of life and our role as Christians to protect it. It is hard to do this without an explicitly theological approach to ethics. It is interesting to note that the Hippocratic Oath invokes the gods at the beginning. Although these gods are obviously false, it is no less true that the Hippocratic Oath begins with recognition of the sacred nature of the doctor’s vocation. This understanding translates into an ethic that asks doctors to avoid the temptation to abuse their vocation as autonomous tyrants. They have a sacred vocation to protect and preserve the sanctity of life. To do this they must respect the gift quality of life. Therefore, we Christians have a great responsibility to take the insights at the heart of the Hippocratic Oath and support (and develop) the tradition it represents.

So how do we protect doctors from becoming tyrants? We do so by reminding them of the sacred mystery and gift quality of life, and asking them to hold themselves to a rule-based standard that promotes respect for these things. Supporting an appropriate ethic in the context of life issues is an essential part of the cultural mandate that God has given the church. The church has a powerful responsibility: to take what is most noble and true in the Hippocratic tradition of medicine and support that tradition, enlightening it with the clearer and more certain truths revealed in sacred Scripture and the luminous dogmas forged in the nearly 2,000 years of church history.

—Graham Dennis
For Further Reading

SESSION I: PRELUDE
A Question to Consider
Is it ever right for a doctor to intentionally kill a patient? This answer unveils what we think about words like “right” and “kill.” Few would argue that doctors should always continually keep a person alive on machines when, in fact, their death is inevitable. Sometimes it seems that our culture is intent on creating eternal life through technology—some who have read That Hideous Strength might recall with horror Jack Kevorkian (1928– ), nicknamed “Dr. Death,” is a former pathologist and promoter of euthanasia who claims to have assisted more than 130 terminally ill patients in committing suicide. He is most famous for inventing a “death machine” that allowed patients to self-administer lethal drugs to end their lives.
From the General Information above answer the following questions:

1. Who is Asclepius, and what is his role in the history (or mythology) surrounding medicine?

The story of Asclepius in mythology may be an interesting clue to the central purpose of the guild. According to one myth, Asclepius was the son of Apollo. His mother died during childbirth. As she was about to be consumed by flames on the funeral pyre, Apollo rescued his unborn son. He was cut out of his dying mother’s womb, and hence given the name Asclepius (“to cut out”). Being instructed in the art of medicine (by the centaur Chiron), Asclepius gained great power and the ability to restore patients to health. His art, therefore, was considered “the healing art.” Followers of the Asclepiad guild, therefore, were practitioners of the “healing art.”

2. How did the Hippocratic Oath define the telos of the medical profession?

The most basic principle of the oath is defined in this simple Latin phrase: primum non nocere (“first do no harm”). In succinct form, the oath very clearly articulates the basic goals and aims of medicine. This section of the oath helps us to understand how clearly the oath articulates the moral purpose and function of the doctor’s art:

Whenever I go into a house, I will go to help the sick and never with the intention of doing harm or injury. I will not abuse my position to indulge in sexual contacts with the bodies of women or of men, whether they be freemen or slaves.

3. What horrifying experiments did Nazi doctors practice, justifying their horrendous actions by claiming they were for the “common good”?

Nazi doctors used hypothermia experiments on human subjects to simulate the conditions that Nazi soldiers might face in extreme cold conditions. The experiments attempted to determine how quickly someone would typically freeze to death and, if possible, how best to resuscitate the body. They used two basic methods to bring patients to a point of freezing: putting them in tanks filled with ice water and putting victims outside, naked, in freezing temperatures. The “warming” experiments (used to bring the person back from a state of extreme hypothermia) were no less cruel than the “cooling” experiments. One of the worst warming techniques was one in which the unconscious victim had boiling hot water forced into such internal organs as the...
stomach and intestines. This was done to see how quickly the body temperature would return to normal (and to see if the patient could be revived).

4. What are utilitarian ethics, and what does this ethic lead to in medical practice?

In this ethical theory, the “greater good” (the end) justifies the morally questionable means employed to achieve such a “good.” On this reasoning, the value of an action (or a thing—even a person) is determined by its utility or use-value in relationship to the end or goal pursued. Use-value is often based upon the following principle: an action has utility (use-value) insofar as it best promotes the greatest good of the largest number. Doctors practicing a utilitarian ethic take into account their judgment on what the patient’s quality of life will be. If in the doctor’s judgment the patient’s quality of life is insufficient, then the doctor might kill the patient for the “common good” or because the doctor believes it to be in “the best interest” of the patient.

5. What are some changes that medical colleges have made to the Hippocratic Oath recently?

The majority of medical colleges throughout the country have removed references to abortion and euthanasia from their modernized, updated versions of the Hippocratic Oath. We can be certain they are “suppressing the truth in wickedness.” What is frightening is that this active suppression of the truth is done in the name of justice and liberation. They have also often chosen to remove all reference to any deity or higher source of truth.

6. Do human beings have a “right” to life?

The best answer is “yes” and “no.” It is true that human beings have a “right” not to have life unjustly taken away from them by another human being. For creatures who are created and whose essence is not to exist, life always retains its gift quality. Even the universe does not uphold itself, but is actively upheld by the power of Christ (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). As St. Augustine reminds us in Confessions, if God would withdraw His sustaining power, the universe would fall back into the nonexistence out of which it came (this is a logical extension of the doctrine that God created the universe ex nihilo).

Reading Assignment:
The Hippocratic Oath (original and modern versions)

Session II: Discussion

A Question to Consider

What are the responsibilities of a physician to his patient, and what relevance does that answer have to anyone who is not in the medical profession?

A physician’s duty is to respect the life and health of his patient, preserve it to the best of his ability, and to reject gain that comes at the cost of harm to his patient. This question is relevant to all of us, especially Christians, because it addresses the foundational issue of a culture’s attitudes toward human life. When a stone is tossed into a still lake on a windless day, concentric circles ripple far across that lake in all directions. In like manner, when this question is asked of a culture, the repercussions of the answer extend far beyond the individual physician/patient relationship. As we explore the responsibilities of physicians, we will apply those principles to the Christian’s obligation to honor life, and to love his neighbors in ways that model Christ’s healing and life-giving work.

Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:

Text Analysis

1. What are the five major elements of the original Hippocratic Oath? What central principle unifies these tenets?

The five major elements of this oath are: 1) a swearing in the name of divinity (with consequences for failing to keep the vow about to be made); 2) a commitment to honor and reverence the physician’s teachers in the art of medicine, and to impart his knowledge to others; 3) a promise to protect life, from conception to natural death, and not to cause any death; 4) a commitment to integrity and professionalism, refraining from abusing the physician’s privilege and power; and 5) a promise to maintain discretion and confidentiality in all matters, professional or otherwise. The oath sets forth the central principle that a physician must always act for the patient’s good and preserve life and health to his fullest ability.

2. What is meant in the original oath by the promise not to cut “persons laboring under the stone”? (Think of stones you might have in your body—or your parents might have in theirs.)

“Laboring under the stone” refers to a patient who suffers from kidney stones or gallstones. In Hippocrates’ time, surgery was a separate disci-
pline from the practice of the physician, and was
done by barbers. This vow to refrain from oper-
ating on people suffering from stones, leaving
such surgery instead to the "practitioners of this
work," acknowledges the physician's limitations
and defines his expertise. It is a promise to leave
more specialized work to those better equipped
or trained for it, in order to provide the patient
with the best treatment available for his problem
and not to risk the patient's life or health unnec-
esarily.

3. What are the significant differences between the
ancient and modern versions of the oath? What
do these differences tell us about how culture has
changed since Hippocrates' time?
The main difference is in what the modern version
leaves unsaid. Both claim to have a commitment
to protect and value life, but when it gets down
to specifics like abortion and euthanasia, the
modern oath makes no commitments, while the
original oath explicitly commits doctors not to
be involved in these practices. The ancient oath
calls upon Apollo (Christian versions, of course,
changed this to Christ or God), while the modern
version calls on no deity but reminds doctors that
they are not to "play God." This tells us a lot
about the transformation—the negative transfor-
mation—of our culture.

The first aspect of this transformation is the
destruction of language and meaning. The mod-
ern oath is long on nice sounding platitudes, but
it commits doctors to few specifics. This transfor-
mation of the use of language makes room for
the other changes.

Second, it reveals the change in culture by
showing us practices that were once judged to be
horrible but are now acceptable. (Of course, these
practices always were and always will be uncon-
ceptable to God.) Babies in the womb were to be
protected. The elderly were to be respected. In
any sane culture this continues. Our culture, how-
ever, has lost its biblical moorings and its sanity.
We now kill children for convenience and are on
the verge of doing the same with the elderly and
infirm.

Finally, it reveals the root cause for both of the
other "transformations" by omitting the pledge
to the deities. Our culture has lost its faith. It
does not believe that there is any god holding it
responsible and accountable—much less the God
of the Bible. Because our culture believes there is
no God and that God has not spoken, it feels free
to destroy and denigrate language and has lost
respect for man—the image of God.

4. In the third paragraph of the original oath, what
specific examples of respecting life does this oath
promise to uphold? How are these examples possi-

bly surprising in light of current medical practice in
America today?
The Hippocratic Oath contains the vows not to
perform abortions, nor to intentionally give a
lethal dose of medicine to end a life, even if
requested. However, abortion is legal in the
United States and other countries today, legally
performed by medical doctors, and physician-
assisted suicide is legal in some places. Opinion in
the medical community—and throughout our cul-
ture—is divided on ethical issues such as abortion,
euthanasia, and embryonic stem-cell research,
among other controversial issues. Still, it is clear
that today's medical community as a whole does
not consistently follow the original guiding prin-
ciples of the Hippocratic Oath.

Cultural Analysis
1. Hippocrates was instrumental in forming the basis
for medicine in the West. Medicine in ancient Greece
was originally practiced by temple priests, and char-
acterized by superstition, charms, and religious ritual.
Hippocrates and others like him rejected the idea that
diseases were arbitrary punishments by the gods;
they sought natural causes and rational treatments
through observation and experimentation. Many
people today believe that the conflict between reli-
gion and reason in Hippocrates' day is a permanent
conflict, and that religious faith (considered supersti-
tious and irrational) impedes scientific advancement.
How should the Christian respond to such an attitude
when he encounters it?

Christians should not be afraid to acknowledge
that Hippocrates and his followers did, in fact,
free medicine from dependence on philosophy
and superstition, and brought it into the realm of
reason, observation, and experience. The world-
view of ancient Greece taught that the gods—and
there were many—were capricious and arbitrary.
These gods lacked an absolute standard of ethics
based in the unchanging character of one holy
God; to be in the thrall of that religion really was
to inhibit scientific advancement and rational
study. While religious faith in itself does not con-
tradict true science, the way it was practiced in
ancient Greece did.

Yet comparison of Christianity to the pagan
religion of ancient Greece is unwise and fails to consider important distinctions. It is important for Christians to remember, and to communicate winsomely, that all religions are not the same. Any philosophy will miss the mark if it does not recognize a Creator God who loves, designs, and gives purpose. Christianity is consistent with science and rational medicine; it assumes an ordered cosmos that reflects an intelligent, consistent, and loving Designer. This worldview is actually the most conducive to scientific study, which depends on observation of repeatable, testable data and seeks patterns and rational explanations rather than arbitrary caprice.

2. How does our culture today view the principles of the original Hippocratic Oath?

   Many people today are in favor of practices that harm life rather than respect and protect it, such as abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, human cloning, and various other ethical violations of the Hippocratic Oath and scriptural principles. This tendency in culture has extended into actual medical practice, and many physicians no longer uphold the stated values of the Hippocratic Oath—nor does society care to hold them to those.

3. How does our culture justify practices that violate the principles of respect for life set forth in the oath?

   Three important arguments used by culture today are quality of life, the notion that change equals positive progress, and a utilitarian evaluation of human life. The first argument is that what matters is not life per se, but the quality of one’s life; therefore, if someone’s experience is extremely circumscribed through disability or brain damage, or is extraordinarily painful physically or psychologically, then many in modern society have deemed such life not worth living or preserving.

   Many today also embrace what C.S. Lewis termed “chronological snobbery”—the belief that an idea is valid, true, or good simply because it is new (or old). Modern society values the “new and improved” and has accepted the notion that change equals progress and advancement, especially change in values or mores from the past. Some believe that the promises of the Hippocratic Oath are “outdated” because they are old and do not match the desires of a more “enlightened” society. The question of whether they are true or good is considered irrelevant or else settled by their very antiquity.

   Finally, many people have adopted a utilitarian attitude toward human life. People are considered worthy of life and protection only to the extent that they are useful or convenient and not intrinsically because they are created in God’s image. Of course, not many would explicitly admit to this belief, perhaps even to themselves, but it is nevertheless widespread in modern culture, as evidenced by increasing acceptance of abortion on demand, the use of embryonic stem cells in research, and countless other “controversial” ethical debates that would not be so difficult to solve were human life properly valued.

4. Christians ought to be vigilant against compromising biblical truth and practice. Yet not all change is compromise, any more than all change is positive progress. As the field of medicine changes rapidly with advances in technology, what standard can we use to determine the difference between true improvement and ethical compromise?

   It is necessary to distinguish between principles and the application of those principles to individual circumstances. Principles and convictions must be constant and rooted in an unchanging standard. Christian morality is based upon the unchanging character of God and on His law as revealed to us in Scripture. The Hippocratic Oath, while not Christian, still reflects the concept Christians know as imago Dei, and requires respect for human life because of this. Specific applications of unchanging principles, however, will alter according to circumstances. This requires wisdom and great familiarity with God’s Word in order to make sure its principles are faithfully kept.

   An example of a wise change regarding the Hippocratic Oath is the modern version’s lifting of the prohibition against surgery by physicians. Modern medical training now prepares physicians for surgery, though it didn’t when the oath was developed. The principle, therefore, of protecting the patient from unnecessary harm is unchanging and remains firmly in place in both cases, but the specific way this principle is lived out has changed from ancient times to today. Christians must use discernment in their judgments in order to properly distinguish between standing firm against compromise and missing legitimate opportunities for advancement.

Biblical Analysis

1. What is the biblical teaching on protecting and respecting life (Gen. 1:26–28, Deut. 30:15–20, John 1:4,
applied to medicine (Matt. 22:34–40, Rom. 13:8–10, 1 John 4:7–13)?
While the Bible offers a multitude of specific applications for how we are to treat others, many places in Scripture distill those commands into the single essential principle of loving one’s neighbor (Matt. 22:34–40, Rom. 13:8–10, 1 John 4:7–13). The whole counsel of Scripture teaches that man has value and dignity because he is the image-bearer of God, and that all men have an obligation to honor each other and respect life accordingly. For the Christian, these actions are actually expressions not merely of courtesy, but of love. Christians, who have been loved by the Father, are charged as His sons with demonstrat-

“Above all, I must not play at God.” Although human cloning is not (yet) a reality, proponents believe it could bring mankind a host of medical blessings. It also raises a host of ethical issues. Simply by engaging in human cloning experiments scientists are certain to destroy human lives “in the name of science.” Is it up to our healers to decide who must die that others might live?
The Hippocratic Oath

Chart 1: **MEDICAL ETHICS COMPARISON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>DUTY TOWARD GOD</strong></th>
<th><strong>DUTY TOWARD FELLOW MAN</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hippocratic Oath</strong></td>
<td>The original oath recognizes that man has gifts and abilities and the choice to exercise them for good or ill. While not explicitly acknowledging the <em>imago Dei</em>, this oath reflects an ancient understanding of the nobility of man, in both himself (the physician) and others (the patient). This understanding results in an obligation not to harm one's neighbor, nor use him for selfish benefit. The concept of treating others with dignity and respect was understood and honored, even if not always practiced (as is still the case today).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The original oath calls on the witness of the healing gods of its polytheistic pantheon. The modern version omits all reference to God except to call on doctors to avoid playing God. The language in the original oath implies a responsibility toward the divinities to honor with reverence and dignity the arts they practice, and it presumes that these gods have the power to punish as well as heal.</td>
<td>In a postmodern culture, there is little consensus on the nature—much less the very existence—of God. These beliefs will, of course, depend upon the individual physicians and patients. Still, the medical profession and society as a whole tend to look mostly toward materialistic explanations for diseases and their treatments and cures. In many cases, today's society tends to view religious faith as a private matter, and thereby focuses more on one's duty to fellow man than to God. This can result in the presumption of ignoring God's law and creating a standard for ethics apart from Him; sometimes those ethics still hit upon the law of God written on our hearts—as the Hippocratic Oath did in a pre-Christian, pagan society—but sometimes it does not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Cultural Values</strong></td>
<td>Today's cultural understanding of the nature of man is informed by Christianity, but does not always explicitly follow it. There is often a tension between recognizing the <em>imago Dei</em>, with its attendant responsibility to protect and respect life—yet at the same time “rating” human life on a utilitarian scale instead of seeing intrinsic value. Thus, our society can at the same time believe that individual patient rights must be respected, and require informed consent before a medical procedure—but at the same time believe that some lives are more valuable than others. So, for example, many consider abortion acceptable because the concerns and “rights” of the mother outweigh those of the baby; similarly, some see embryonic stem-cell harvesting as acceptable because the babies’ lives are not as valuable as those already born who are suffering from diseases that might be cured by research done with those stem cells. This utilitarian view of human life is dangerous and unbiblical.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Christianity starts with the foundational understanding that God created the cosmos, and all of it is by and for Him: “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). Because we belong to Him, we owe all obedience and reverence to Him. Jesus tells us that our first duty—the greatest commandment—is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:36–38). He also tells us that loving Him means obeying His commandments (John 14:15). Thus our duty to God is to love and obey Him, and a great part of this duty to God is to love our fellow man, whom He has also created in His image (Matt. 22:36–40).

Our duty to our fellow man is inextricably linked with our duty to God. If the greatest commandment is to love God, the second—to love our neighbor—is “like unto it” (Matt. 22:39) and completes the central message of the Scriptures. Man is made in the image of God; we, especially believers, are called to honor others above ourselves, and in so doing we honor God.

**POSITION ON CURRENT MEDICAL TOPIC:**
*Example: The use of human embryonic stem cells, resulting in the destruction of the embryo*

**Hippocratic Oath**
The principles of the original oath forbid the harvesting and use of stem cells from human embryos which results in their destruction. In the modern version the same sort of respect for life seems to be there, but, in fact, the language commits the physician to few specifics and does not forbid them from practices expressly and explicitly forbidden in the original oath—like abortion. The original holds that embryos are humans, the result of fertilization of an egg by sperm, and are living according to the standard scientific definition of life. The harvesting of stem cells from embryos destroys human life, and sacrifices individuals without their consent for the sake of research to benefit others. It is therefore forbidden by the original oath.

**Current Cultural Values**
Many in today’s society condone the practice of using stem cells from human embryos for research. This is based on a worldview that begins with man rather than God—thus eliminating the standard of God’s law in determining ethics. Once man, not God, has become the primary focus, it is an easy step to justify the use of these embryos for utilitarian and pragmatic reasons. Some justifications typically used are that the embryos are frozen and wouldn’t be implanted in a womb anyway; that they are just “embryos” and not yet “persons” (a claim that science and reason do not back up, much less theology); or that the good of the many who would benefit from the research outweighs the good of the embryos. They are valued only for their pragmatic, short-term worth to society and not because they are humans created in God’s image, so their destruction is considered acceptable.

**Christianity**
As demonstrated above, using human embryonic stem cells destroys life. The Scriptures make clear that God desires His people to honor, protect, and respect life, most especially the life of man, who is made in God’s image. Further, James tells us that the practice of religion that most pleases God includes caring for widows and orphans (James 1:27). In a sense, embryos that have been abandoned and left frozen in cold storage are orphans. Far from supporting the destruction of these embryos for pragmatic use, which the Scriptures forbid, Christians should lead the charge in preventing this assault on life, and in restoring and renewing respect for human life and dignity in our society.
ing His love for the world to see. Applied to medicine, biblical ethics express the principle of loving one’s neighbor by respecting human life and the individual patient.

3. What is the importance of healing imagery in the Scriptures (Gen. 3:22–24, Matt. 9:12–13, Rev. 22:2)? Jesus, often called the Great Physician, came to heal the sick and to bring life to the dead, both physically and spiritually. His miracles of physical healing are a picture of the greater miracle of his spiritual healing. He refers to Himself as a physician who has come to save the sick and not the well (Matt. 9:12–13).

In addition to Jesus’ work during His earthly ministry, two important images of life and healing parallel each other as bookends of Scripture. In Genesis we see a tree of life planted in the Garden of Eden, but this tree is closed off to man and fiercely guarded once he has sinned (Gen. 3:22–24). Yet in John’s vision of the New Jerusalem, which he describes in Revelation, we see once more a tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2). Jesus heals man and restores him to life again. The practice of medicine is a reflection of the work of our Great Physician, whose authority and power heal souls as well as bodies.

**Summa**

Write an essay or discuss this question, integrating what you have learned from the material above.

What are the responsibilities of a physician to his patient, and what bearing does that answer have on your own Christian life and witness?

The essence of medical ethics in ancient Greece was contained in the Hippocratic Oath, which revolved around the central principle of preserving life. The basis for this oath was a respect for life and an acknowledgement that the physician has a duty to use his knowledge and power for preserving life and not destroying it. Although plenty of men in ancient times had hubris (inordinate pride, considered an offense against the gods), their society still recognized in its better moments that it was dangerous and misplaced—and often led to severe consequences in the form of punishment from the gods.

In today’s society, this hubris can still be seen when our culture, and some in the medical profession, abandon the principles of respect for human life and commitment to its protection. These people give place instead to other competing considerations such as quality of life, convenience, utilitarian value, and financial profit. In doing so, they reject both the ancient principle of honoring one’s fellow man (as set forth in the Hippocratic Oath), and the biblical duty to love our neighbor, who bears imago Dei. This failure to value and protect human life from conception to natural death is a grave error, one that demonstrates a lack of the sacrificial love we are required to practice. It is a dangerous path.

Regardless of their vocation, all Christians have a duty to live by biblical ethics—to love our neighbor as ourselves. Applied to medical ethics, this means loving even the “least of these” neighbors such as the unborn, frozen embryos, the ailing elderly, and the disabled who are dependent on us, and fighting to defend and protect them. When we do this, we truly live as the body of Christ, serving, healing, and bringing life to our world, as He does to our lives.

Instead of a reading assignment you have a research assignment. Tomorrow’s session will be a Current Events session. Your assignment will be to find a story online, in a magazine, or in the newspaper that relates to the issue that you discussed today. Your task is to locate the article, give a copy of the article to your teacher or parent and provide some of your own worldview analysis to the article. Your analysis should demonstrate that you understand the issue, that you can clearly connect the story you found to the issue that you discussed today, and that you can provide a biblical critique of this issue in today’s context. Look at the next session to see the three-part format that you should follow.

**Issue**

Medical Ethics and the Dignity of Human Life

**Session III: Current Events**

**Issue**

Medical ethics and the dignity of human life

Current events sessions are meant to challenge you to connect what you are learning in Omnibus class to what is happening in the world around you today. After the last session, your assignment was to find a story online or in a magazine or newspaper relating to the issue above. Today you will share your article and your analysis with
your teacher and classmates or parents and family. Your analysis should follow the format below:

**Brief Introductory Paragraph**

In this paragraph you will tell your classmates about the article that you found. Be sure to include where you found your article, who the author of your article is, and what your article is about. This brief paragraph of your presentation should begin like this:

Hello, I am (name), and my current events article is (name of the article) which I found in (name of the web or published source) . . .

Hello, I am Jennifer Harger, and my current events article is titled Comatose woman in euthanasia debate dies, which I found on CNN's health website. The article tells the story of Eluana Englaro, an Italian woman who had been in a coma for 17 years after a car accident. She was brain-damaged and needed a feeding tube to live. Though euthanasia is illegal in Italy, patients there have the right to refuse treatment. Englaro’s father argued that prior to the accident she had expressed a wish not to live in such a state, and she would wish for treatment to be refused—thus he wanted to do so on her behalf. After a long legal battle, which eventually involved the Vatican and the Italian government, Englaro’s father was awarded the right to remove her feeding tube, causing her death four days later from dehydration.

**Connection Paragraph**

In this paragraph you must demonstrate how your article is connected to the issue you are studying. This paragraph should be short, and it should focus on clearly showing the connection between the book you are reading and the current events article you have found. This paragraph should begin with a sentence like:

I knew that my article was linked to our issue because . . .

I knew that my article was linked to our issue because it addresses the core principle of the Hippocratic Oath, which is an obligation to protect and respect life “until natural death.” It deals with euthanasia, which is specifically addressed in the oath. This article raises the question of who determines whether a patient lives, and on what basis that determination is made.

**Christian Worldview Analysis**

In this section, you need to tell us how we should respond as believers to this issue today. This response should focus both on our thinking and on practical actions that we should take in light of this issue. As you list these steps, you should also tell us why we should think and act in the ways you recommend. This paragraph should begin with a sentence like

As believers, we should think and act in the following ways in light of this issue and this article.

As believers, we should think and act in the following ways in light of this issue and article. First, we must acknowledge the value of life from a scriptural standpoint. This value is not dependent on a person's "quality of life" or their usefulness or convenience to society, but on the fact that they bear the image of God. Eluana Englaro did not enjoy the "quality of life" that anyone understandably desires, and caring for her must have been a burden for her family and loved ones, but we must humbly remember that all of us are dependent on others to some degree, and we must still honor the life that God has created without presuming to determine which lives are worth preserving.

Second, we must have compassion for those in difficult situations, praying for both the patients and their loved ones. It is difficult to imagine the weariness, frustration, and sense of despair that these people experience, and we must lovingly pray for them to receive wisdom and strength to act on right decisions.

Third, we must fight for the legal protection of life. Eluana Englaro’s situation inspired debate in the Italian senate regarding legislation to protect life. Our society allows citizens a choice in our leaders and an influence on their decisions, so we have an obligation to work for the enactment of godly principles in our laws.

Finally, we must live in ways that honor and respect others in our own lives. We have a responsibility to show the world that we are not prideful and "issue-driven," but that our positions on the issues grow out of lives that bear real fruit in everyday living with our neighbors. Without vigilant and intentional reliance on the Holy Spirit, we Christians are susceptible to the sin of seeking our own convenience from others instead of sacrificially loving them. Our witness gains credibility and winsomeness as we model the respect for life and for other people that we profess with our words.
The Hippocratic Oath

Reading Assignment: None

Session IV: Worldview Analysis

Medical Ethics Comparison

Choose a current medical topic. Research the ethical questions surrounding it, as well as our culture’s—and the medical community’s—common position on that topic.

Then, compare and contrast the worldviews expressed in the oaths, current medical practice, and Christianity by completing Chart 1. In the last column write in your selected topic—then identify the position of each of these three on that issue. In your answers, you must explain why each entity takes that position (or why you believe it would), based on its worldview.

Suggested topics to research and evaluate: abortion, forms of birth control that can result in the loss of a fertilized embryo, euthanasia, in vitro fertilization, the use of human embryos in stem cell research, and human cloning.

Session V: Activities

Medical “Examination”

1. Interview someone in the medical profession to learn their perspective on how modern medicine upholds the ethical values stated in the Hippocratic Oath. Some questions you might want to ask are:
   - Did you choose to take the oath (or another one), and if so, why?
   - If you did, how do you interpret and specifically apply the principles of the oath in your daily practice?
   - How do those in the medical field who support violations of the oath justify those violations?
   - What long-term effects do you predict for the practice of medicine and for our culture, due to the increased acceptance of practices that do not protect and preserve life? (You will learn more if you ask open-ended questions, and avoid those that can be easily answered with a yes or no.)

2. Expand upon the topic you chose for the Current Events or Worldview Analysis Sessions. Conduct further research on that topic and write a paper or give an oral presentation on it. Your paper or presentation should be both informative and persuasive; educate your audience on the topic and its surrounding ethical issues, and evaluate it biblically, offering a Christian response.

(Oral presentation) Good day, ladies and gentlemen. Today I’d like to share with you some information about embryonic stem cell research.

Stem cells are undifferentiated cells that are able to develop into specialized cells with the functions of specific organs or tissues in the body. Another way to understand this is to think of them as “wild card” cells, which can turn into different kinds of specific tissue for different organs.

Upon conception, all human cells are initially stem cells; as babies develop in the womb, their stem cells quickly differentiate and grow into specific organs and tissues. Adult tissues and organs continue to produce stem cells, which the body uses to replace cells that die or become damaged.

Because stem cells have so much versatility, scientists believe they can be used in finding treatments for diseases that destroy or damage cells. The hope of relief from diseases such as Parkinson’s and juvenile diabetes, or the restoration of muscles and nerves lost to paralysis or injury, is comforting to victims and their families. However, it is troubling that some scientists want to use embryonic, rather than adult, stem cells in their research. The harvest of embryonic stem cells results in the destruction of the embryo—or, to put it more plainly, the death of a living human being. An embryo is simply a baby in its earliest stages of development.

Adult stem cells, on the other hand, can be harvested without harming the donor. Yet some insist that embryonic stem cells are needed because they are more versatile: embryonic stem cells can become any type of cell, but adult stem cells are believed to be more limited in their potential, and more difficult to isolate and multiply in laboratory settings.

Proponents argue that the death of embryos is not murder because embryos are not “fully human.” To justify this idea, some claim that life does not begin at conception; they say that embryos only a few days old (and a few cells big) are not yet alive. Others acknowledge that life begins at conception—and therefore, that embry-
adopter to destroying that same worldview that allows embryonic stem-cell research in the first place), it is certainly fair to recognize and cite the good fruit of following biblical principles instead of sinful ones.

Embryonic stem-cell research, and federal funding for it, is now legal in the United States. Christians should vigorously oppose this type of research and the use of federal funds for it, and should pray for the success of other types of research that are not harmful to human life. We should be vigilant to help our society recognize the dignity and value of all people, born and unborn, because they reflect God's image and are His creation.

3. Research various systems of health care (such as managed care or socialized medicine). Examine how each system affects the physician’s ability to uphold the ethical guidelines, established in the Hippocratic Oath, to make his patient’s health his first priority.

**Optional Session**

**Writing Your Representative**

Biblical medical ethics are vitally important to the cultural health of our society, as well as its physical health. Our attitudes toward the weak, the sick, the elderly, and the unborn—and how we practically care for them—reflect the foundations of our culture's character and indicate the direction it will take in the future. Therefore, we all have a stake in the medical ethics and practices of our society. Because many people today base their practice on what is legal, rather than what is right, it is important to be aware of—and involved in—legislative decisions surrounding medical ethics and practice.

Choose a medical-ethics issue currently being considered in a legislative context. (This could be on a national, state, or local level—or perhaps more than one of these.) Identify your appropriate representatives and write them about this issue, urging them to uphold principles of wisdom, justice, and respect for life in their decisions. Do not merely ask them to vote a certain way; your letter should use solid information, sound logic, and persuasive rhetoric to show them why you request such a vote. Clearly state the issue in question and the position you request they take, then argue an effective case using the facts you have learned, citing sources where applicable. Be sure that your communication is clear and gracious.

- os are living humans—but rationalize that their destruction is still acceptable, because the rights of embryos are less than the rights of people who are already born. Supporters also cite the fact that these embryos are already marked for destruction anyway as unwanted “leftovers” from in-vitro fertilization; they argue that if the embryos will be destroyed, or left indefinitely in storage, they may as well be used for a “good” purpose instead of being wasted.

- Christians should oppose embryonic stem-cell research for many reasons. From a scientific standpoint, embryos meet the definition of life from the moment of conception; each embryo possesses unique human DNA, separate from its mother's and father's, and very soon after conception develops recognizable and functioning organs. Thus, claims that embryos are neither living nor fully human are scientifically false. From a biblical standpoint, we know that God is the Author and Giver of life, and that He knows us and loves us even when we are not yet born. The Scriptures make clear that God desires His people to honor, protect, and respect life, most especially the life of man, who is made in God's image. Because embryos are living humans, we cannot biblically support their destruction, even for the sake of a good thing such as treatment for disease and injury.

- From a medical ethics standpoint, even unbelievers who do not accept the authority of Scripture can see that embryonic stem-cell research is ethically dangerous. The harvesting of stem cells from embryos sacrifices those individuals without their consent for the sake of research to benefit others. This utilitarian “morality”—seen in the idea that the good of the many outweighs the good of the few, or that the rights of the already-born trump the rights of the unborn—opens the door to all kinds of horrific practices. It is a realistic concern that future scientists could use this same rationale to justify the creation of humans for the express purpose of conducting research and experiments on them, or to conduct research and experiments involuntarily on people deemed to have less worth or fewer rights than others.

- Finally, though the above reasons are enough, scientists are finding success with adult stem-cell research. There is even some evidence that adult stem cells are actually more effective than embryonic ones. While we ought not use pragmatic reasons as the foundation for our argument (thus adopting the same worldview that allows embryonic stem-cell research in the first place), it is certainly fair to recognize and cite the good fruit of following biblical principles instead of sinful ones.
(Letter to a U.S. Senator)

Dear Senator ______________,

I’m writing in regard to Senate Bill ________, which would expand federal funding for embryonic stem-cell research. Because this research destroys human life, I urge you to vote against using federal money to support it.

Advocates of embryonic stem-cell research deny or downplay the fact that it destroys life—often calling embryos “potential” life. Yet the attributes of a living organism include growth, reproduction, and being made of cells—characteristics that all embryos possess. Further, all human embryos have their unique human DNA and when allowed to grow to their fully developed form, they are clearly human. Therefore, according to scientific definitions and logic, human embryos are living humans.

Knowing this, it is tragic that our society would support research that purposely destroys human life. Medical ethical principles, such as those set forth in the Hippocratic Oath, prohibit physicians from conducting research and experimentation on human subjects against their will—most especially if that research results in their death. Yet supporters of this research want us to believe that the ends justify the means.

Such logic led to the atrocities of the Tuskegee Experiment on African-American men, and to Josef Mengele’s experimentations on Jews and Gypsies in Nazi concentration camps. In the same way, embryonic stem-cell research sacrifices a certain group of people—human embryos—against their will for the sake of potential benefit to others. It is appalling that our culture rightfully condemns the above-mentioned atrocities of the past, yet embraces the same practices today when they think it may lead to our benefit.

Please do not support this research with your vote. On behalf of all your constituents who value life and who do not wish for their tax dollars to support unethical practices, I urge you to vote against Senate Bill ________ and instead help affirm a culture of life and human dignity.

Sincerely,

ENDNOTES

1 Christian physicians actually altered the oath, removing references to the pagan deities and replacing them with references to Christ. Here is a version of the revised Creed used by Christian physicians in the Middle Ages:

   From the Oath According to Hippocrates in so far as a Christian May Swear It (Urbinus 64 mss)

   Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever and ever; I lie not.

   I will bring no stain upon the learning of the medical art.

   Neither will I give poison to anybody though asked to do so, nor will I suggest such a plan. Similarly I will not give treatment to women to cause abortion, treatment neither from above nor from below. But I will teach this art, to those who require to learn it, without grudging and without an indenture. I will use treatment to help the sick according to my ability and judgment. And in purity and in holiness I will guard my art. Into whatsoever houses I enter, I will do so to help the sick, keeping myself free from all wrong-doing, intentional or unintentional, tending to death or to injury, and from fornication with bond or free, man or woman. Whosoever in the course of practice I see or hear (or outside my practice in social intercourse) that ought not to be published abroad, I will not divulge, but consider such things to be holy secrets. Now if I keep this oath and break it not, may God be my helper in my life and art, and may I be honoured among all men for all time. If I keep faith, well; but if I forswear myself may the opposite befall me.

2 For an exhaustive treatment of these experiments, and of the Nuremberg trials in general, see Doctors From Hell: The Horrific Account of Nazi Experiments on Humans (Vivien Spitz, First Sentient Publications, 2005).

3 Text for the Nuremberg Code can be found through Link 1 for this chapter at www.VeritasPress.com/OmniLinks.

4 See Peter Singer’s chapter in Practical Ethics entitled “Taking Life: Humans.” (Cambridge University Press, 1993.)

5 This article can be found through Link 2 for this chapter at www.VeritasPress.com/OmniLinks.