This course examines our Western ethical traditions and compares and contrasts them with modern medical practices, which, regrettably, often diverge from the ethical underpinnings of our ancestors.

By reminding ourselves of their wisdom, we modern practitioners get to benefit from the peace of mind, love, and kindheartedness which flow from the practice of their long and deeply considered ethical approach to medicine.

In the Western tradition, the famous quotation, “Life is short, art is long” actually was originally spoken by Hippocrates as a commentary only on the healing arts, not other artistic pursuits. This course illuminates the long reach these principles of our medical past have on our present. It also contrasts these with modern medical practice which often sadly does not approximate the spirit of our ancestors.

In the ensuing passages you will read the Oath of Medical Ethics first articulated by Hippocrates in his lifetime between 460 and 377 B.C. It is worthwhile to compare the views of this ancient Greek doctor with those of the present day.

You will also read The Hippocratic Oath – Modern Version, written in 1964 by Louis Lasagna, Academic Dean of the School of Medicine at Tufts University, and used in many medical schools today. Please compare and contrast Dr. Lasagna’s version of medical ethics with that of the ancients – a bit watered down, wouldn’t you say?

Finally, offered for your consideration is an interesting essay written by the New Zealander Keith Blayney on The Caduceus vs. the Staff of Asclepius (Asklepian). This provides historical insight into two different symbols of Western medicine, what these symbols truly represent, and the attendant shift in medical ethics brought about by the adoption of a more mercantile view of the healing arts.
Today we think of the Nazi Dr. Mengele as being the nadir of medical ethics, someone who would perform torturous experiments on unwilling patients. However, have the modern medical professions really been practicing with a significantly higher standard of ethics than Dr. Mengele? This statement is not intended as hyperbole. Consider the following breaches in modern medical ethics and their costs to humanity:

- Sixty million (60,000,000) Chinese girls are missing from the general mainland Chinese population because of female infanticide made possible by medical procedures.
- Fully 20% of all children under 21 in mainland China have been infected with Hepatitis B because of reuse of unsterile hypodermic needles.
- Twenty thousand (20,000) Americans die each year from nosocomial infections picked up in hospitals. Only 40-50% of M.D.s wash their hands between patients.
- Ionizing radiation from medical imaging (X-rays, CT Scans) has been documented by Dr. John Gofman, M.D. to be the essential co-factor in 50% of all deaths from cancer and 60% of all deaths from heart disease in the U.S.A. in the 20th century. In 2002 there were 553,251 deaths from cancer – half of which may be attributable directly to ionizing radiation. In 2001 there were 725,192 deaths from heart disease – 435,115 of which may be attributable directly to ionizing radiation.
- A 1998 study by California researcher Richard Ko, Pharm.D., Ph.D. for the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) of Chinese patent herbal remedies imported into the U.S. offers some disturbing news. The report reveals that of 260 traditional Chinese patent medicines tested, 32% contained unlabeled and potentially harmful ingredients. Twenty-four of these remedies tested with high levels of lead; 36 contained unacceptable levels of arsenic; 35 were contaminated with the poisonous heavy metal mercury; and 17 contained unlisted pharmaceutical drugs. Is this ethical manufacturing, labeling, and prescribing?
- Shocking statistical evidence is cited by Gary Null PhD, Caroly Dean MD ND, Martin Feldman MD, Debora Rasio MD and Dorothy Smith PhD in their recent paper Death by Medicine - October 2003, released by the Nutrition Institute of America. "A definitive review and close reading of medical peer-review journals, and government health statistics shows that American medicine frequently causes more harm than good. The number of people having in-hospital, adverse drug reactions (ADR) to prescribed medicine is 2.2 million. Dr. Richard Besser, of the CDC, in 1995, said the number of unnecessary antibiotics prescribed annually for viral infections was 20 million. Dr. Besser, in 2003, now refers to tens of millions of unnecessary antibiotics. The number of unnecessary medical and surgical procedures performed annually is 7.5 million. The number of people exposed to unnecessary hospitalization annually is 8.9 million. The total number of iatrogenic deaths shown in the following table is 783,936. It is evident that the American medical system is the leading cause of death and injury in the United States. The 2001 heart disease annual death rate is 699,697; the annual cancer death rate, 553,251.

Health Care expenditures in the US have reached 14% of the Gross National Product and a staggering $1.6 trillion in 2003. No wonder, one might be tempted to say. With such an appalling record of efficacy and such an unbelievable death rate for the treatments routinely administered, the current medical system can only be said to be in great need of deep reform.

Please consider such points when reading the following essays.
Hippocratic Oath -- Classical Version

I swear by Apollo Physician and Asclepius and Hygieia and Panaceia and all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will fulfill according to my ability and judgment this oath and this covenant:

To hold him who has taught me this art as equal to my parents and to live my life in partnership with him, and if he is in need of money to give him a share of mine, and to regard his offspring as equal to my brothers in male lineage and to teach them this art - if they desire to learn it - without fee and covenant; to give a share of precepts and oral instruction and all the other learning to my sons and to the sons of him who has instructed me and to pupils who have signed the covenant and have taken an oath according to the medical law, but no one else.

I will apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgment; I will keep them from harm and injustice.

I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody who asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy. In purity and holiness I will guard my life and my art.

I will not use the knife, not even on sufferers from stone, but will withdraw in favor of such men as are engaged in this work.

Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick, remaining free of all intentional injustice, of all mischief and in particular of sexual relations with both female and male persons, be they free or slaves.

What I may see or hear in the course of the treatment or even outside of the treatment in regard to the life of men, which on no account one must spread abroad, I will keep to myself, holding such things shameful to be spoken about.

If I fulfill this oath and do not violate it, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and art, being honored with fame among all men for all time to come; if I transgress it and swear falsely, may the opposite of all this be my lot.

Translation from the Greek by Ludwig Edelstein. From The Hippocratic Oath: Text, Translation, and Interpretation, by Ludwig Edelstein. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1943.
Hippocratic Oath—Modern Version

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 [that] 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.

Written in 1964 by Louis Lasagna, Academic Dean of the School of Medicine at Tufts University, and used in many medical schools today.
The Caduceus vs the Staff of Asclepius (Asklepian)
Keith Blayney Sept 2002, revised Oct 2005

Mercury (Hermes) & merchant approach disapproving Asclepius (Physician) and the naked Graces (Meditrine, Hygeia and Panacea) [Engraved from an original in the then Museum Pio Clemens in Rome. Galerie Mythologique, Recueil de Monuments by Aubin Louis Millin, Paris 1811.]

- Asclepius dealt with patients - merchants make deals with clients
- Asclepius is linked with a constellation of idealistic medical ideas
- Hermes is linked with hermetic occultism
- Mercury is identified with mercantile mercenary views

The Caduceus of Mercury (Roman) and the Karykeion of Hermes (Greek)

Many "medical" organisations use a symbol of a short rod entwined by two snakes and topped by a pair of wings, which is actually the caduceus or magic wand of the Greek god Hermes (Roman Mercury), messenger of the gods, inventor of (magical) incantations, conductor of the dead and protector of merchants and thieves. It is derived from the Greek karykeion = "herald's staff", itself based on the word "eruko" meaning restrain, control.

It is interesting to see that most of organisations using this symbol are generally either commercial or military (or American). New Zealand examples include drug and pharmaceutical companies. A study by Friedlander confirms this impression.
The link between the caduceus of Hermes (Mercury) and medicine seems to have arisen by the seventh century A.D., when Hermes had come to be linked with alchemy. Alchemists were referred to as the sons of Hermes, as Hermetists or Hermeticists and as "practitioners of the hermetic arts". There are clear occult associations with the caduceus.

The caduceus was the magic staff of Hermes (Mercury), the god of commerce, eloquence, invention, travel and theft, and so was a symbol of heralds and commerce, not medicine. The words caduity & caducous imply temporality, perishableness and senility, while the medical profession espouses renewal, vitality and health.

**The Staff of Asclepius (Æsclepius, Asklepios)**

[Personification of Medical or healing Art and its ideals]

Professional and patient centred organisations (such as the NZMA, in fact most medical Associations around the world including the World Health Organization) use the "correct" and traditional symbol of medicine, the staff of Asclepius with a single serpent encircling a staff, classically a rough -hewn knotty tree limb. Asclepius (an ancient greek physician deified as the god of medicine) is traditionally depicted as a bearded man wearing a robe that leaves his chest uncovered and holding a staff with his sacred single serpent coiled around it, (example right) symbolizing renewal of youth as the serpent casts off its skin. The single serpent staff also appears on a Sumerian vase of c. 2000 B.C. representing the healing god Ningishita, the prototype of the Greek Asklepios. However, there is a more practical origin postulated which makes sense [See Dracunculus medinensis].

**Asclepius and His Staff**

**Who was Asclepius?**

Asclepius was most probably a skilled physician who practised in Greece around 1200BC (and described in Homer's Iliad). Eventually through myth and legend he came to be worshipped as Asclepius, the (Greek) god of Healing.

Medical schools developed, which were usually connected to temples or shrines called Asclepiions (Asclepieia) dedicated to Asclepius. The Asclepion became very important in Greek society. Patients believed they could be cured by sleeping in them. They would visit, offering gifts and sacrifices to the god, and be treated by priest healers (called the Asclepiadae). The worship of Asclepius spread to Rome and continued as late as the sixth century.

The Asclepiadae were a large order of priest physicians who controlled the sacred secrets of healing, which were passed from father to son.
Harmless Aesculapian snakes were kept in the combination hospital-temples built by the ancient Greeks and, later, by the Romans in honor of the god. The snakes are found not only in their original range of southern Europe, but also in the various places in Germany and Austria where Roman temples had been established. Escaped snakes survived and flourished.

Smooth, glossy, and slender, the snake has a uniformly brown back with a streak of darker color behind the eyes. The snake's belly is yellowish or whitish and has ridged scales that catch easily on rough surfaces, making it especially adapted for climbing trees. Scientific classification: The Aesculapian snake belongs to the family Colubridae. It is classified as Elaphe longissima.

**The Myth**

Asclepius is the god of Healing. He is the son of Apollo and the nymph, Coronis. While pregnant with Asclepius, Coronis secretly took a second, mortal lover. When Apollo found out, he sent Artemis to kill her. While burning on the funeral pyre, Apollo felt pity and rescued the unborn child from the corpse. Asclepius was taught about medicine and healing by the wise centaur, Cheiron, and became so skilled in it that he succeeded in bringing one of his patients back from the dead. Zeus felt that the immortality of the Gods was threatened and killed the healer with a thunderbolt. At Apollo's request, Asclepius was placed among the stars as Ophiuchus, the serpent-bearer.

The children of Asclepius included his daughters Meditrina, Hygeia and Panacea who were symbols of medicine, hygiene and healing (literally, "all healing") respectively. Two of the sons of Asclepius appeared in Homer's Iliad as physicians in the Greek army (Machaon and Podalirius).

Note that the classic Hippocratic Oath is sworn "by Apollo the physician, by Æsculapius, Hygeia, and Panacea,..."

The probable medical origin of the single serpent around a rod: In ancient times infection by parasitic worms was common. The filarial worm Dracunculus medinensis aka "the fiery serpent", aka "the dragon of Medina" aka "the guinea worm" crawled around the victim's body, just under the skin. Physicians treated this infection by cutting a slit in the patient's skin, just in front of the worm's path. As the worm crawled out the cut, the physician carefully wound the pest around a stick until the entire animal had been removed. It is believed that because this type of infection was so common, physicians advertised their services by displaying a sign with the worm on a stick.

**The Staff as a Medical Symbol**

From the early 16th century onwards, the staff of Asclepius and the caduceus of Hermes were widely used as printers’ marks especially as frontispieces to pharmacopoeias in the 17th and 18th
centuries. Over time the rod and serpent (the Asclepian staff) emerged as an independent symbol of medicine.

Despite the unequivocal claim of the staff of Asclepius to represent medicine (and healing), the caduceus, a rod with two entwined serpents topped by a pair of wings appears to be the more popular symbol of medicine in the United States, probably due to simple confusion between the caduceus and the staff of Asclepius, the true symbol of medicine. Many people use the word caduceus to mean both of these emblems.

The Caduceus of Hermes

The Greek Hermes found his analogue in Egypt as the ancient Wisdom god Thoth, as Taaut of the Phoenicians and in Rome as the god Mercury (all linked with a magic rod with twin snakes).

The mythical origin of his magic twin serpent caduceus is described in the story of Tiresias. Poulenc, in "Les Mamelles de Tiresias" (The Breasts of Tiresias) tells how Tiresias--the seer who was so unhelpful to Oepidus and Family- found two snakes copulating, and to separate them stuck his staff between them. Immediately he was turned into a woman, and remained so for seven years, until he was able to repeat his action, and change back to male. The transformative power in this story, strong enough to completely reverse even physical polarities of male and female, comes from the union of the two serpents, passed on by the wand. Tiresias' staff, complete with serpents, was later passed on to Hermes...

Occult Hermetic Connection

An occult description of the Caduceus of Hermes (Mercury) is that the serpents may represent positive and negative kundalini as it moves through the chakras and around the spine (the staff) to the head where it communicates with MIND by intellection, the domain of Mercury [wings].

Caduceus Power Wand

This wand is sold at occult, new age & witchcraft stores such as Abaxion with descriptions such as "It's central phallic rod represents the potentiality of the masculine, and is intimately surrounded by the writhing, woven shakti energies of two coupling serpents. The rod also represents the spine [sushumna] while the serpents conduct spiritual currents [pranas] along the ida and pingala channels in a double helix pattern from the chakra at the base of the spine up to the pineal gland".

According to occultists, there are three principal nadis (Sanskrit for channel) in the human body. The sushumna (the spinal column through which the life-forces flow), by which means we enter and leave the body, the Ida (refreshment
and stimulation of spirit), which is associated with the higher mind or manas and the Pingala, (reddish-brown), associated with kama or the force of desire. (G. de Purucker "Man in Evolution" ch. 15 & 16; and "Fountain-Source of Occultism", pp. 458-63).

**Hermetic**

There are few names to which more diverse persons and disciplines lay claim than the term "Hermetic". Alchemists have applied the adjective "Hermetic" to their art, while magicians (not the entertaining type) attach the name to their ceremonies of evocation and invocation. Followers of Meister Eckhart, Raymond Lull, Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme, and most recently Valentin Tomberg are joined by academic scholars of esoterica, all of whom attach the word "Hermetic" to their activities.

The most abiding impact of Hermeticism on Western culture came about by way of the heterodox mystical, or occult, tradition.

Renaissance occultism, with its alchemy, astrology, ceremonial magic, and occult medicine, became saturated with the teachings of the Hermetic books. This content has remained a permanent part of the occult transmissions of the West, and, along with Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, represents the foundation of all the major Western occult currents. Hermetic elements are demonstrably present in the Rosicrucian and Theosophical movements.

**The Caduceus in Pseudo-Science**

There are amazing claims that a Cadeuceus Power Wand has zero impedance and infinite resonance!

**The Caduceus as a Medical Symbol**

The link between Hermes and his caduceus and medicine seems to have arisen by Hermes links with alchemy. Alchemists were referred to as the sons of Hermes, as Hermetists or Hermeticists and as "practitioners of the hermetic arts". By the end of the sixteenth century, the study of alchemy included not only medicine and pharmaceuticals but chemistry, mining and metallurgy. Despite learned opinion that it is the single snake staff of Asclepius that is the proper symbol of medicine; many medical groups have adopted the twin serpent caduceus of Hermes or Mercury as a medical symbol during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Like the staff of Asclepius, the caduceus became associated with medicine through its use as a printer’s mark, as printers saw themselves as messengers of the printed word and diffusers of knowledge (hence the choice of the symbol of the messenger of the ancient gods). A major reason for the current popularity of the caduceus as a medical symbol was its ill-informed [03] official adoption as the insignia for the Medical Department of the United States Army in 1902.
Friedlander surveyed 242 logos or insignias of American organizations relating to health or medicine in which the caduceus or staff of Asclepius formed an integral part dating from the late 1970s to early 1980s. He found that professional associations were more likely to use the staff of Asclepius (62%) while commercial organizations were more likely to use the caduceus (76%). The exception is for hospitals, where only 37% used a staff of Asclepius versus 63% for the caduceus [but remember that US hospitals are usually commercial ventures]. Friedlander notes that while the prevalent use of the caduceus for the commercial aspects of medicine might be seen as "more or less appropriate", he thinks the reason is that professional associations are more likely to have a real understanding of the two symbols, whereas commercial organizations are more likely to be concerned with the visual impact a symbol will have in selling their products. "Friedlander, Walter J. The Golden Wand of Medicine: A History of the Caduceus Symbol in Medicine." New York, Greenwood, 1992

Further information on the two symbol confusion at:
[01] Bruce Grainger "A Survey of Symbols of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine" and
[02] Darren Nichols "Walk Among Gods -The Symbols of Medicine" and more recently,
And to Add Some Biblical Confusion, We Have...

And the Lord said unto him [Moses], What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand and caught it and it became a rod in his hand. Exodus 4:2-4

And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten [by a serpent], when he looketh upon it, shall live. Numbers 21:8.

The etching "The Brazen Serpent" (to the right) by Schnorr von Carolsfeld shows this as only one snake, suggesting he interpreted this as a medical rather than mystical or magical symbol.

Apparently an Israelite cult subsequently formed worshipping Nehush'tan, the serpent Moses made (apparently twin snake images were inscribed on standards of the time) but the cult was eventually suppressed (over 600 years later) by King Hezekiah - "He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. 2 Kings 18:4

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up. John 3:14-15

Now just in case you thought you had it all sorted out about which was the "good" symbol.... nothing is that simple, take a look at this interesting painting of Adam & Eve.......