

Drama Pro Vita:
Farewell to Hippocrates
and *Just Like Us*

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ABSTRACT: Pro-life dramas can effectively present human life issues in a theatrical setting. These two short plays illustrate how dramatic scripts can treat the issues of medical ethics and eugenics. *Farewell to Hippocrates* criticizes our culture's abandonment of the moral principles stipulated by the Hippocratic Oath. *Just Like Us* depicts a sci-fi nightmare of a society transformed by eugenics into a culture of strict conformity.

DURING MY TIME as the Knott Professor of Philosophy and Theology at Loyola University Maryland, I have unexpectedly begun a new career as a playwright. My first play, *Govans Deed*, received a staged reading at the Fells Point Corner Theatre in Baltimore in 2006. Since that time I have had plays produced in Austin (Vestige Theatre Group), Baltimore (Run-of-the-Mill Theatre, Theatre Project, Vagabonds Theatre), Chicago (Irishfest, Heartland Theatre Festival), New York City (Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts), Washington, D.C. (John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts), and even in England (Stage One at University of Leeds). I have written in a variety of lengths (full, one-act, short) and genres (farce, romantic comedy, documentary, satire, fantasy). As my theatrical work progressed, I have often had the opportunity to import pro-life themes from my philosophical research and publication into my scripts. Perhaps the most ambitious of these is *Veiled*, an anti-euthanasia drama that premiered at the Gaithersburg Arts Barn in a production directed by Jeff Stevens on September 24, 2010. The play is loosely based on an actual case in France, where a woman dying from a cancer disfiguring her face was denied her request for physician-assisted suicide from the French courts.

The following two short plays focus on key pro-life issues: medical ethics and eugenics. *Farewell to Hippocrates* criticizes our culture's growing disengagement from the moral principles embedded in the Hippocratic Oath.

The linguistic chaos expresses the moral chaos of contemporary medical practice. Directed by Alec Lawson, the play premiered as part of the *Variations on Chaos* anthology produced at the Run-of-the Mill Theatre in Baltimore on April 14, 2011. In style the play is influenced by the dramaturgy of Berthold Brecht (direct address to the audience, political confrontation, blunt moral slogans) and techniques of post-modern drama (de-psychologized characters, verbal fragments, foreign phrases, simultaneous monologues).

Just Like Us depicts the nightmare of a eugenically re-engineered society in Baltimore a century from now. Part of the anthology of plays, *Baltimore 2115 and Beyond*, written by members of the Playwrights Group of Baltimore, the drama premiered on October 4, 2015 at the Single Carrot Theatre in a staged reading directed by Bret Englar. Like the other plays in the anthology, *Just Like Us* alludes to the racial riots that rocked Baltimore in the spring of 2015. In its critique of eugenicism, it focuses in particular on the historic link between the eugenics movement and racism. In style it is indebted to the absurdist drama of Eugene Ionesco and the futuristic novels of George Orwell and Ray Bradbury.

Farewell to Hippocrates

Setting: A medical school commencement ceremony. A lit candelabra stands on a table to the side. Time: The Present.

Characters: DOCTOR 1, DOCTOR 2, DOCTOR 3. The characters are clearly adults, preferably in their late twenties, but they may be any race or gender. All are dressed in white clinical coats and other emblems of the medical profession.

At rise: As the lights come up, the characters are lit only by the flicker of the candelabra and their own candles. The characters face the audience and recite the Hippocratic Oath. They speak in a solemn tone. Each doctor raises his/her right hand and holds a candle in the left hand during the recitation of the oath.

DOCTOR 1 I swear by the god Apollo, by the healer Asclepius, by the goddess Hygiea and Panaceas, and I take witness before the

entire pantheon of gods and goddesses, to keep the following sacred Oath of Hippocrates:

(The lighting becomes higher.)

DOCTOR 2 I swear that I will love my teacher of the medical arts as deeply as I love my own parents. If this teacher is in need, I will offer the teacher my own goods. I will consider my teacher's children as my own and will freely train them in this art.

DOCTOR 3 I swear that I will do no harm. I will prescribe remedies for the good of my patients according to my best judgment.

(The lighting becomes higher.)

DOCTOR 1 I swear that I will not give a lethal drug to anyone, even if a patient requests it. I will not give a woman any substance that would cause an abortion.

DOCTOR 2 I swear that I will preserve the purity of my life and of my art. In every house I enter, I will serve only the good of my patient. I will refuse all seduction. I will spurn any amorous pleasures, be they with men or women, slaves or freemen.

DOCTOR 3 I swear that I will keep secret and never reveal anything that may come to my knowledge in the exercise of my profession.

(The lighting becomes higher.)

DOCTOR 1 If I keep this oath faithfully, may I enjoy my life and practice my art. May I receive the respect of everyone in every time and place. But if I violate this oath, may the opposite be my destiny.

(The doctors extinguish their candles and lower their hands.)

DOCTOR 2 Not that we believe it, of course.

DOCTOR 3 There are no gods anymore. We knifed Apollo. We poisoned Asclepius. It was inevitable.

DOCTOR 1 We're free now. We strangled Hygieia on her golden throne on Olympus. We can just do what we want.

DOCTOR 2 Honor our teachers? Sue them....Your child has a club foot? Sue the obstetrician.... You're still drinking Dewars and working in the mail room? Sue the psychiatrist.... Nightmares? Sue that teacher who looked at you a minute too long in the high school showers.

DOCTOR 3 I will give a lethal drug to anyone who requests it.

- DOCTOR 1 To the people with cancer, with Parkinson's, with Alzheimer's.
DOCTOR 2 To the depressed teenager, to the failed businessman, to the widow bored with cable.

(Doctor 1 moves toward a member of the audience and bends toward that audience member as he/she speaks.)

- DOCTOR 1 You don't need to be ashamed of it. You're tired of taking care of Uncle Frank. The bills, the whining, that hacking cough. It's not a necessary evil.... He *is* a burden. Why pretend otherwise? Keep telling him he has every right to free you from the burden. You want a little harmony in your life. I have the pills. And if he doesn't agree, well, I can just quietly slip something into his morning porridge. Just between us, all right?

(Doctor 1 moves back to the stage with the other characters.)

And who wants the burden of an unwanted child? No abortion? Hippocrates can't be serious. I'm here to free you, not hinder you.

- DOCTOR 2 Purity of life? Hippocrates must be kidding.

(Doctor 2 moves toward an audience member, preferably a young adult, and leans over.)

Surely, you don't want purity. You're like us. You want safety. I can't hand you safe sex but I can prescribe safer sex. Let's *manage* the risk. STD, pregnancy, scabies....Trojan condom, diaphragm, tubal ligation? ...Please, don't babble on about Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet, Jonathan and David. You only need one quick, sterile, outpatient cut. And then you're safe....*(sarcastically)* Purity of life.

- DOCTOR 3 Confidentiality? Privacy? That can't be right. The state is master here. Hand over the files. Publish the e-mails. Expose the x-rays. Only the state can save us.

(Doctor 3 moves toward an audience member and leans over.)

And even if the state has other business for the moment, you *must* know. Admit it. You *must* know just what drugs Prince had in his system when he died. You must know if Liberace had AIDS. You must know Lindsay Lohan's exact blood count at the last arrest.... Secrets? We pay millions because we *must* know.

(Doctor 3 moves back toward other characters) (Beat.)

DOCTOR 1 Hippocrates wrote his oath in the year four hundred before Christ –

DOCTOR 2 Correction: Four hundred before the Common Era.

DOCTOR 3 Doctors have sworn the oath at the end of their medical studies for over two millennia.

DOCTOR 1 On the barges of Alexandria –

DOCTOR 2 Under the gargoyles of Paris –

DOCTOR 3 Next to the Golden Gate in San Francisco.

DOCTOR 1 But we don't believe it. We don't want to.

DOCTOR 2 And *you* don't believe it. You just can't.

(The three doctors move to the candelabra where they relight their candles. They stand as they did at the opening of the play. The doctors recite the Oath as a round. Doctor 1 begins with the first paragraph, followed by Doctor 2, and then by Doctor 3. The effect should be a Babel of voices.)

DOCTOR 1, DOCTOR 2, DOCTOR 3

I swear by the god Apollo, the healer Asclepius, the goddess Hygieia and Panacea, and I take to witness before the entire pantheon of gods and goddesses, to keep the following sacred Oath of Hippocrates:

I swear that I will love my teacher of the medical arts as deeply as I love my own parents. If this teacher is in need, I will offer the teacher my own goods. I will consider my teacher's children as my own and freely train them in these arts.

I swear that I never do harm. I will prescribe remedies for the good of my patients, according to my best judgment.

I swear that I will not give a lethal drug to anyone, even if a patient requests it. I will not give any woman any substance that would cause an abortion.

I swear that I will preserve the purity of my life and of my art. In every house I enter, I will serve only the good of my patient. I will refuse all seduction. I will spurn any amorous pleasures, be they with men or women, slaves or free.

I swear that I will keep secret and never reveal anything that

may come to my knowledge in the exercise of my profession.
 If I keep this oath faithfully, may I enjoy my life and practice
 my art. May I receive the respect of everyone in every time and
 place. But if I violate this oath, may the opposite be my destiny.

(The doctors extinguish their candles and lower their hands. Only the light from the candelabra remains. The doctors then recite in unison, with some discordances, the opening of the Hippocratic Oath in Greek. Their voices dim to a whisper by the end of the lines.)

DOCTOR 1, DOCTOR 2, DOCTOR 3 *(chanting softly)*

Oo-num-ee A-pol-loan-a in-tron, kai As-clep-ee-on, kai Hee-jay-an, kai Pan-a-kay-an, kai thay-ous pan-tas tey pas-sus, is-to-ras poi-en-men-os, epi-tel-i-a poi-ay-si-ne ka-ta du-nam-een kai kri-sis ay-main hor-kon tov-de kai oi-graph-ain tain-de....
(Blackout.)

Just Like Us

Setting: Stark, sterile, futuristic living room in Baltimore

Year: 2115

Characters:

EUGENE, twentyish, white

EUGENIA, twentyish, white

At rise: As lights come up, EUGENE and EUGENIA are seated in futuristic armchairs. They are clothed in similar, uniform-like clothing.

EUGENE I'm all right with the pureed instant turkey, the pureed instant sauerkraut, and the pureed instant cranberry clusters, but the pureed instant crab cake is a bit dicey. After all, this *is* Baltimore!

EUGENIA But we can't confuse the guests, dear.... This way the food is all the same. And you know very well that the same unites—

EUGENE and EUGENIA

And the different divides! (Beat.)

EUGENE They'll be here any minute. Now, this has to be perfect.

EUGENIA Of course, it will be perfect. The clean-o-meter indicates that there is not a speck of dust left in this living room.... And the crab cake *must* be pureed. The Committee is crystal clear on that. And to obey –

EUGENE and EUGENIA

Is to be free! To be free is to obey!

EUGENIA I'll do the crab check right now. (*Eugenia exits stage left.*)

EUGENE Did you hear about that basket case?

EUGENIA Shocking, hon, shocking.... Someone must have been asleep at the switch at the concept-a-tron.

EUGENE I just don't understand it....The first baby born with "what's it called?" in fifty years.

EUGENIA I think they used to call it Down Syndrome or surplus-chromosonism. I thought we had done away with all the nons fifty years ago.

EUGENE But this one wasn't just a non-human. She was an anti.

EUGENIA Don't call an anti-human "she." They're just weeds waiting to be plucked – gently, of course – from the perfect garden. (*Beat.*)

EUGENE Now, Eugenia, I do hope you'll try to be civil with Vera tonight.

EUGENIA I'm always civil, love. I just find her so boring.

EUGENE She's the spitting image of you. The geneticists took special care right down to that ear lobe.

EUGENIA They certainly got that right. But what she says is always so predictable. I could have said exactly the same thing. I often have exactly the same thoughts. Even her tone of voice is the same.

EUGENE And that way there is no conflict, no quarrels, no war. Because harmony is ambrosia –

EUGENE and EUGENIA

And conflict is poison.

(*A muffled sound off stage of plastic bowls and cutlery falling.*)

EUGENE What was that?

EUGENIA It's just the Tupperware, Snuggles. I thought we'd use the good Tupperware tonight: the red plastic rather than the yellow

plastic. And the good Tupperware has three stripes rather than one stripe.

EUGENE As always, an excellent but properly limited option, Eugenia.... My grandfather once told me that there used to be different types of plates and cups and saucers. There was something called Wedgewood and something else called Fiesta-ware.

EUGENIA How utterly confusing! No wonder they were so imperfect! Didn't they understand that to choose –

EUGENE and EUGENIA
Is to confuse!

(EUGENIA enters stage left and sits on the lap of EUGENE.)

EUGENE Now, I want you to be especially careful in any discussion at dinner that focuses on religion. You almost started a quarrel last time with Vera –

EUGENIA I did not start a quarrel. I was just curious. She had studied some history when she was young. I know it's much better that we just have one religion now. One brand of faith, one type of church –

EUGENE and EUGENIA
One path to the Supreme Being known and loved by all.

EUGENIA But she was saying that years ago there were all these different religions. There were Jews. And they thought that God was going to get you. And there were Catholics and they thought that God was really going to get you. And then there were Protestants. And it wasn't too clear just what they thought, since they were always disagreeing with each other.

EUGENE Predictably, all those differences led to violence. Holy wars, crusades, there was something called "radical Islamic terrorism" a century ago.... We're much happier today with one view of God, one creed, one approved Bible.

EUGENIA Of course, darling. And it's so much easier to sing from the one hymnal and all sing together. My Aunt Dottie once told me that they used to have something called choirs. People spent hours learning to how sing different notes and sing them at the same time.

EUGENE Absurdity! What a waste of time!

EUGENIA They had something called sopranos and altos and tenors and I

think there were also something called basses. They'd spend hours working on this. Can you imagine that?

EUGENE At least, we live in a more rational age. Every movement has a clear purpose. Every thought is clear, simple, direct...not a wasted breath.

EUGENIA Just like our love, my love: simple, clear, functional.
(EUGENIA kisses EUGENE and walks over to a window, pauses, and looks out.)

EUGENE What are you looking at?

EUGENIA She's there again.

EUGENE Who?

EUGENIA That old lady with the big orange sign: "Remember Sandtown 2015. Lack Lives Matter."

EUGENE The one with the flower in her hat? The harpy who's always in front of the Washington statue?

EUGENIA The very same.... And what does it mean anyway?

EUGENE It means she is mentally ill and should be pruned out immediately.

EUGENIA But what does "Lack Lives Matter" mean?

EUGENE I think the sign has faded. It should read, "Black lives matter."

EUGENIA Still, what could that mean, "Black lives matter"?

EUGENE When I was six years old, my great uncle said that years ago people had different types of color. Some were white like us, but some were black, and some were yellow, and some were red or reddish at least.

EUGENIA But that was thousands of years ago when we were still hanging in the trees.

EUGENE Great Uncle Rex claimed otherwise. He said even just a hundred years ago there were people of different colors and that right here in Baltimore there were thousands who looked black.

EUGENIA That can't be right. In history class they always told us that Baltimore was a pure white city from the moment Lord Calvert came up the Chesapeake. Now, where did all these supposed black people come from? That's absurd.

EUGENE I only know what he told me. Apparently, there were lots of blacks and lots of whites and a few yellows here a century ago.
(Beat.)

EUGENIA I bet they didn't get along.

EUGENE Of course not. I heard there was a big riot here. Tear gas, rocks, arson, buildings on fire.

EUGENIA What do you expect when you let in too much difference? ...
One world, one race –

EUGENE and EUGENIA
One hue, one humanity!

EUGENE Fortunately, after the Final War, the Social Engineering Subcommittee solved the problem. Strategic sterilization, strategic abortion, strategic infanticide, and strategic euthanasia.... They say the last black one died in 2070.

EUGENIA And it was certainly for their own good. Who wants to suffer for being different? They were done a service. *(Beat.)*

EUGENE Now we're all white.

EUGENIA Now everyone is just like us. That's true peace, *mon amour*, isn't it?

(The doorbell rings. EUGENIA walks toward exit on right.)
That must be Vera. She's always the first.

(EUGENIA fixes her hair and straightens her uniform.)
I want to look just right.

EUGENE As always, you look just perfect.

(EUGENE walks up to EUGENIA and hugs and kisses her. The doorbell rings again.)

EUGENIA Darling, maybe you were right. I hope she won't be offended by the crab cake puree. I don't understand it but some people here still prefer the old recipe with the crab actually perched on the plate.

EUGENE You've already convinced me. She'll be enchanted. It's so hygienic and so Charm City.

(EUGENIA exits stage right. There is a sound of a door opening.)

EUGENIA Good evening, Vera. We're delighted to have you. You are looking wonderful. I just love the outfit, especially the matching blue pumps. I happen to have an outfit just like it upstairs.
(Blackout.)