ments themselves that encouraged honesty, but the mere contemplation of a moral benchmark of some kind.

If that were the case, then we could also use nonreligious benchmarks to raise the general level of honesty. For instance, what about the professional oaths that doctors, lawyers, and others swear to—or used to swear to? Could those professional oaths do the trick?

The word *profession* comes from the Latin *professus*, meaning "affirmed publicly." Professions started somewhere deep in the past in religion and then spread to medicine and law. Individuals who had mastered esoteric knowledge, it was said, not only had a monopoly on the practice of that knowledge, but had an obligation to use their power wisely and honestly. The oath—spoken and often written—was a reminder to practitioners to regulate their own behavior, and it also provided a set of rules that had to be followed in fulfilling the duties of their profession.

Those oaths lasted a long time. But then, in the 1960s, a strong movement arose to deregulate professions. Professions were elitist organizations, it was argued, and needed to be turned out into the light of day. For the legal profession that meant more briefs written in plain English prose, cameras in the courtrooms, and advertising. Similar measures against elitism were applied to medicine, banking, and other professions as well. Much of this could have been beneficial, but something was lost when professions were dismantled. Strict professionalism was replaced by flexibility, individual judgment, the laws of commerce, and the urge for wealth, and with it disappeared the bedrock of ethics and values on which the professions had been built.

A study by the state bar of California in the 1990s, for instance, found that a preponderance of attorneys in California