

The language of money and sometimes greed is celebrated in the business section. I rarely understand the instructions. Like most people, I'm far too busy working to ever be rich. My favourite part here is the cartoon Dilbert. Corporate identity is defined for the masses.

The triviality of the entertainment section barely rates any time except on weekends. Then I can wonder briefly at why celebrity couplings enlist so much interest. Am I filled with such quiet desperation that I need to live vicariously through the rich and famous. These pages are a guilty pleasure.

I find myself wandering through the obits more than I used to, and noticing

the ages of those who have died. Here there is recognition of my own mortality, uncomfortable but unavoidable.

And while drinking the last of my coffee I scan the editorial page. By now I'm in a hurry. I glance at the columns to get their flavor and then, time permitting and interest aroused, I may read on in detail. Occasionally I'm quite captured. And at times I am truly fascinated and appreciative of the analysis and understanding of complexities beyond my grasp.

When my breakfast is done, I get up and go to work. My day hasn't changed because of whom I've met. No matter. We'll meet again tomorrow, like old

friends who gather each day to review lives that never change. More is the pity for all of us.

I imagine the distance between us is very great. But I know that isn't so. Often I feel gratitude for not being one of the newspaper people. Yet a part of me knows that there is little difference, save good fortune, that separates their stories and mine. The distinction becomes less clear. They can be me. They can be all of us.

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Book review

Ethics in conflict

**Bioethics and armed conflict:
Moral dilemmas of medicine and war**

Michael L. Gross

The MIT Press; 2006

384 pp US\$26.00 ISBN 0-262-57226-5

Medical ethics or bioethics is a core component of contemporary Western medical education and practice. Health care providers look to medical ethicists to help navigate health care's complex ethical issues. In Canada and the United States, hospital, medical school and postgraduate training accreditation include evidence of active medical ethics programs. Michael Gross of Haifa University in Israel, in his book *Bioethics and Armed Conflict: Moral Dilemmas of Medicine and War*, has taken up the daunting challenge of providing an historical, societal, medical, legal and ethical context to the conundrum of bioethics in armed conflict. In an engaging and deliberative fashion, he explores the ethical challenges to contemporary health care providers within and outside the military establishment.

Beyond the relatively protected environment of civilian health care sys-

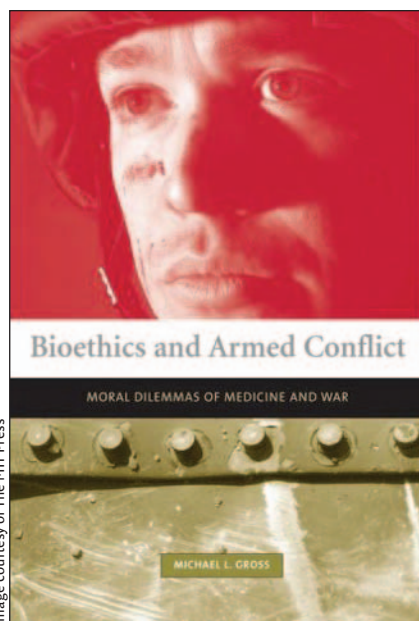


Image courtesy of The MIT Press

tems, many Western nations have had to contemplate how bioethical principles are used in the face of armed conflict. Some nations are currently engaged in military actions, often in contexts different from traditional wars fought by opposing national armies. The current nontraditional so-called "low-level conflicts," which include "wars of liberation," "guerrilla" wars, "terrorist" activities and other unconventional hostile and lethal actions have led to ethical challenges with new dimensions of complexity.

Gross poses a central question: "How does medical ethics help provide

an acceptable framework by which nations and their military health care personnel provide care to their own combatants as well as to those of their adversary and to the non-combatants that often get caught up in the conflict with devastating results?" Then he connects the premises and actions to societal values, laws and ethical practices that guide nations in their military and medical decision-making processes. He guides the reader, using an historical perspective, to understand the arguments and counter-arguments about the potential spectrum of the rules of engagement. One nation's approach to medical care within a framework of armed conflict may conflict with that of another nation or what international judicial or medical associations might recommend.

An important section of the book, addresses controversies related to "low-level" conflicts. The contemporary rules for war stem from the major 19th and 20th centuries' wars between nation-states. Many recent armed conflicts such as Vietnam and current conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Sri Lanka and parts of Africa are between armed factions. External nations get involved as members of international bodies like the United Nations or NATO.

It is with less conventional armed conflicts that the roles, responsibilities and the ethical principles of medical care become more contentious. There are often

charges that the enemy is not respecting the medical “rights” of the combatants and non-combatants. Participants often refer to various Geneva Conventions to support their arguments, even when those Conventions may not actually pertain to the events in question.

One of the book’s most controversial chapters focuses on torture, ill-treatment and interrogation. Gross spans the spectrum of argument from eschewing all medical involvement in such activities, to finding examples of justification using various conceptual approaches to traditional medical ethics. He cites the tension between the arguments for a total prohibition of torture and the potential roles of physicians and its use in com-

elling situations, “While international conventions make a strenuous effort to safeguard life and self-esteem as fundamental primary goods, the contemporary dilemma of torture and ill-treatment sets the lives of some against the self-esteem of others.”

Gross, with potent arguments and cogent examples, delves into the roles of physicians in armed conflict held by some ethics scholars and how they collide with the recommendations of the World Medical Association within the context of actual “low-level” hostilities.

The last chapter of the book, “The moral dilemmas of medicine and war,” presents a compelling summary of dichotomies that arise from various posi-

tions taken about “ethically” acceptable activities. Whatever preconceived and contrary strong opinions one may have about medical ethics in armed conflict, Gross provides an excellent historical, socially sensitive, sound, stimulating and provocative overview of the subject. For readers interested in exploring this complex matter in depth, Gross’s book provides an excellent and most readable opportunity.

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Lifeworks

Exploring beyond our limits

Robert Davidson: The abstract edge

Curator: Karen Duffek

Organized by Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia

Circulated by the National Gallery of Canada
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When is the last time you explored beyond the limits, to the edge, of your experiences? Perhaps you travelled somewhere in the past year and encountered different cultural, linguistic and gastronomic experiences. Or you took up a new sport, read a new author, gave birth to a child, chose to walk a new route to work.

The abstract edge is an exhibit of works by Haida painter, printmaker, jeweler and sculptor, Robert Davidson. The exhibit is the first collaboration between the Museum of Anthropology and the National Gallery of Canada, and is touring across Canada.

Davidson grew up on the northern coast of British Columbia at Old Massett, Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands) where he erected his first totem pole in 1969. He was taught by his grandmother, grandfather and father,



National Gallery of Canada

Robert Davidson, *Ravenous* (2003). Red cedar and acrylic. 68.6 × 52.7 × 10.2 cm. Private collection, Goderich, Ont. Photograph: Kenji Nagai. In *Ravenous*, Davidson draws on Haida mythology to make a statement about the myopia of our behaviour in contemporary society. Davidson depicts the Haida story of a trickster raven who eats one eye from each person in a fishing village. Davidson remarks, “Raven creates an imbalance with his voraciousness, because if you take away one eye, you take away depth of vision” (quoted in Duffek¹ [page 36]).

apprenticed with Haida artist Bill Reid, and later studied at the Vancouver School of Art (now the Emily Carr In-

stitute of Art and Design). A recipient of the Order of Canada (1996), Order of British Columbia (1995), National