

moral description and moral experience. Medicine and bioethics must find ways to do the same.

In chapter 8, "A general antitheory of bioethics," Elliott finally pulls together his main themes while diagnosing where bioethics has gone wrong and recommending interventions that will direct it back on a healthy course. Part of the cure lies in recognizing the problem: we expect more from our ethical theories and moral concepts than

they can deliver. The notion that tidy truths can be spun out of simple theories is unreasonable and inconsistent with the complexities of our moral intuitions. Values are deeply rooted in culture and life experience and, as a result, are inseparable from contexts, are not fully under our control, and cannot meet the standards of systematic ethical theory. Following Elliott, bioethicists need to understand the nature and limits of their theories and to move beyond

them. We need to attend honestly to the intimate side of bioethics, to lived moral experience, and to the interweaving of moral concepts with moral life.

I thank Christy Simpson for her helpful comments on a draft of this review.

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Room for a view

Mr. Mavrocki and the bees

Perhaps I have such a clear recollection of Mr. Mavrocki because he was the very first patient I saw when I started my surgical practice in Canada. But that isn't the only reason. There was something else, something touching, and something, I would say, a little mischievous about him. He was sitting up in bed when I went in to see him, and he greeted me with a wonderful rich accent and an easy smile. He was solidly built in a soft way and he told me, among other things, that he was 50 years old and long since retired.

This surprised me. Every retired person I knew had worked until much later in life. As for me, I was just setting out in my career and had not yet started to earn a living. Financial independence seemed a long way away. I suppose I had little knowledge of financial matters, and that made me somewhat curious about anyone who had. Mr. Mavrocki pointed out with a contented grin that he was not retired on account of ill health or any difficult circumstance, but because he had enough money. He

seemed very pleased with himself. This seemed an enviable position to be in, and how anyone could ever achieve it was totally mysterious to me.

After the medical side of our meeting I steered back to the subject of retirement and told Mr. Mavrocki that I thought he must be very clever to have arranged it so early in life. He glowed with pride, and in a practised manner told me a little of his story.

He had been very poor when he first immigrated to Canada. He had little education and no special trade. After some hard times he managed to get a job on the railway. This job entitled him to

live in a small house on a lonely stretch of railway in the prairies. As far as I could gather from his description, he had a hammer and would walk up and down the line, tapping the track to

test it. Then he would walk up and back again, testing the other side. He was responsible for a few kilometres of track. He described how he grew vegetables in the garden of his little house. I found it hard to imagine how financial security

could come from such a life, but of course I didn't say anything. He continued as follows.

One day his neighbour threw away a couple of broken bee hives. Mr. Mavrocki decided to repair them and put them to use. He bought some bees and a couple of queens and installed them in his hives. Now this was in northern Alberta, one of the best places in the world for honey. It has something to do with the length of the days and the hours of sunshine during which the bees can work, and, I suppose, the number of flowers that they have to feed on. The honey is excellent, and at the height of the season, if the bees are well looked after and the conditions are right, about 50 000 bees will be working in the hive. Thus the hives are made in modular form. During the summer, box goes on box until the hive is about six boxes high. The bees live in the bottom and in the top they store honey. Perhaps the bees sense that a long and cold winter is coming, because they certainly work very hard. By late summer, an average hive can contain about 225 pounds of honey! I knew that in England 30 to 60 pounds was considered a reasonable harvest, but I suppose the conditions are quite different there.

Mr. Mavrocki became more and more enthusiastic as he told me the story. I could see that he loved those bees and that they had been good to



him. He had so much honey, he said, that it was far too much for his family's use, even with bread and honey and honey cakes and the thousand uses and recipes they had tried. So he sold the surplus and, with the money, bought more hives and more bees. The next year he sold even more honey and did the same again; after a while, the bees kept him too busy for railway work, so he gave up his job and became a professional beekeeper. Eventually, he was the proud owner of a thousand hives.

After a number of successful years, he sold his bee business and was set for the rest of his days. And that's how he retired early. He grinned again and looked very happy. Then his expression

changed. He looked momentarily sad, wistful, as if he were talking of a lost love. He sighed and then he started to tell me how wonderful the bees were and how he looked after them, and his face took on a beatific expression.

"You know," he said, "I loved those bees. On a warm sunny day I would go to the hives and watch them fly in and out and then I would lie on my back in the grass and look up at them. Hundreds and hundreds of them flying around, this way and that way, carrying honey, carrying pollen, busy, busy, busy. And you know..." (here he rolled his eyes and, suddenly, grinned a wide grin that revealed a couple of gold teeth) "...you know, I would lie on my back in the

grass, and look up at them and think, 'How wonderful, thousands and thousands of bees, and each and every one of them working for Mr. Mavrocki!'"

I can still imagine him lying on his back in the long grass laughing at the world, his teeth flashing in the bright Canadian sun, and all around him flying to and fro and humming and buzzing gently as they went, thousands and thousands of busy yellow bees and every one wearing on its back a little yellow M.

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Lifeworks

Eye on Uraba

A family practice clinic in Ottawa's Lowertown is not where you'd expect to learn about armed conflict in Colombia. But for Kevin Pottie, assistant professor of family medicine at the University of Ottawa, a busy health care facility whose clientele includes diplomats, artists and refugees is as good a place as any to promote internationalist perspectives. By the broadest definition, Pottie remarks, health comes "from opening things up." With some technical help from the National Gallery of Canada, a stone's-throw away, Pottie has transformed the main hallway of the Elisabeth Bruyère Family Medicine Centre into "The Bruyère Gallery," a place to reflect on cultural and societal determinants of health in our own communities and around the world.

The gallery's first installation, on view in November 1999, was photographer Ian Brown's *Lost Between River and Sky*. These 36 black-and-white images document the Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors Without Borders (MSF) project in Uraba, northwest Colombia, a region of waterlogged jungle adjacent to the Panamanian border and separated from the rest of Colombia by mountains. There are no roads in Uraba; the only



Ian Brown, *Lost Between River and Sky*. "Riosucio, where MSF has their field base, is the most strategic prize in the Uraba conflict. Whoever controls Riosucio controls the Atrato River basin and the region."

link to the outside world is the Rio Atrato, and travel within the region is by dugout canoe along the river's many tributaries. Uraba's strategic importance for arms and drug trafficking partly explains why, at the time the MSF project was be-

gun in 1997, the region could be described as "the most violent area in the most violent country in the world." The region is beset by armed conflict involving four distinct guerilla fronts, the paramilitary and state forces.