



Bird on an Ethics Wire: Battles about Values in the Culture Wars

Margaret Somerville

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Our physical ecosystem is not indestructible and we have obligations to hold it in trust for future generations. The same is true of our metaphysical ecosystem - the values, principles, attitudes, beliefs, and shared stories on which we have founded our society. In *Bird on an Ethics Wire*, Margaret Somerville explores the values needed to maintain a world that reasonable people would want to live in and pass on to their descendants. Somerville addresses the conflicts between people who espouse "progressive" values and those who uphold "traditional" ones by casting her attention on the debates surrounding "birth" (abortion and reproductive technologies) and "death" (euthanasia) and shows how words are often used as weapons. She proposes that we should seek to experience amazement, wonder, and awe to enrich our lives and help us to find meaning. Such experiences, Somerville believes, can change how we see the world and live our lives, and affect the decisions we make, especially regarding values and ethics. They can help us to cope with physical or existential suffering, and ultimately put us in touch with the sacred - in either its secular or religious form - which protects what we must not destroy. Experiencing amazement, wonder, and awe, Somerville concludes, can also generate hope, without which our spirit dies. Both individuals and societies need hope, a sense of connection to the future, if the world is to make the best decisions about values in the battles that constitute the current culture wars.

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