Respect for the Natural: A Resource When Values Are in Conflict

Margaret Somerville

Abstract: Some time ago, I came to the conclusion that we were wasting our time trying to convince many young people that certain so-called "progressive values" were unethical or even just a bad idea for individuals and society, and that some "traditional values" merited reconsideration. Those who rejected these latter values saw them as having nothing good to offer, indeed, even harmful, entirely passé, outmoded, and superseded by the unprecedented discoveries of our new science. I proposed that we needed to take a new positive approach in communicating traditional values that saw what the new science revealed about the natural and Nature, including ourselves, as amazing, wondrous, and awesome. In short, I argued that, viewed correctly, new science and many old values were complementary, not in opposition. This approach requires people of all values persuasions to start our conversations about values from where we agree, in order to have an experience of belonging to the same moral universe. That experience gives a different tone to our disagree-

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ments, which arise when we explore where we disagree and why. This approach also requires identifying a large number of factors relevant to making decisions about ethics and detailed consideration of them. They include all our "human ways of knowing," such as experiences of "amazement, wonder, and awe," "examined emotions," moral intuition, and so on. Note, these factors do not displace foundational ethical analysis, but are "add-ons" to it. This article focuses on one such factor. It examines and compares the role that a value of "respect for the natural" plays for people with traditional values and those with progressive values in their decision-making about ethics and, in each case, how it plays that role.

Keywords: common good; individual autonomy; liberalism; values conflicts; wonder

Here are some of the questions which led me to writing this article: Might promoting respect for the natural help to reduce current, hostile societal values conflicts? Does the natural have any intrinsic value that requires respect? What role does and should respect for the natural play in bioethics decision-making? Could deconstructing current societal values conflicts help us to deal with them more ethically? Are hostile values conflicts a threat to democracy and why is that question relevant to bioethics and medicine?

As a bioethicist, part of my job is dealing with values conflicts in individual cases. Bioethics, however, does not exist in a vacuum, it is applied or practical ethics, especially in medicine and healthcare; therefore, what happens in the real world is important to bioethics and *vice versa*. In other words, thinking about bioethics is not just a theoretical philosophical exercise; the conclusions reached affect real people and real societies.

Currently, hostile, conflictual polarisation in relation to certain values is so prominent in some Western democratic countries, that people are questioning whether the functioning and viability of democracy, itself, is threatened. While we still have many shared values, there

are some where we strongly disagree and these are a main focus of our contemporary disputes in the political public square. Some of these latter values reflect major socioeconomic, political, and religious divides. In particular, the legal status of abortion and euthanasia have been in issue. This is not surprising. The values governing the two great events in every human life, its beginning and its end, have always been among the most important loci for the articulation and application of the values that govern both individual humans and their societies.

The persons in conflict can be identified as groups with respect to a given value or issue, but dividing them into collectives whose members are *ad idem* on the values that should govern all ethical issues is not possible, because of the wide variety of values espoused by these participants to a wide variety of ethical issues. They agree on some values and ethics issues, but not on others on which they can be in conflict. In other words, although people may share some values on some issues, their total "values packages" are not the same.[1] This variation leads to an unstable and unpredictable political public square. Stable democracies, however, require that there are some foundational values on which most people agree. In this article I ask, might one of these be respect for the natural, including Nature? What constitutes that respect is a further question, one discussed in this article.

Although it might not be possible to divide people consistently into progressives and conservatives, one rough division of some of the values in contention into two groups, "progressive values" and "traditional or conservative values," is possible. The conflict between the adherents of each of these two groups in relation to certain ethical issues is threatening important societal institutions, such as respect for the law; social order, for instance, law enforcement by police; and precipitating the use of violence as a political weapon. Some fear that it might even be challenging the viability of democracy itself. To deal with this conflict in the least destructive ways requires that we under-

1 Margaret A. Somerville, "Could 'The Wonder Equation' Help Us to Be More Ethical? A Personal Reflection," *Ethics & Behavior* 32:3 (2021): 226–240, DOI: 10.1080/10508422.2020.1867861.

stand its origins, features and, to the extent possible, its likely future evolution.

With seeking that understanding in mind, I have been musing on whether "progressive values" have a common thread and, likewise, whether "conservative or traditional values" do, and whether these threads are different or the same, and what they might tell us. I start by identifying, comparing, and contrasting features of each group of values. I am interested, in particular, in what role respect for the natural might play in informing decisions taken about ethics by adherents of one or the other group of values.

Before proceeding, I want to emphasise, again, that in speaking of people with progressive values or conservative values, I mean in relation to the ethical issue being considered and not that any given person necessarily has a "values package" in which all of their values are of the one or other persuasion.[2]

I also want to point out that I am not judging whether progressive or conservative values are preferable and I am not trying to convert those with either kind of values to the other side. Rather, as I have explained at length in a previous paper,[3] which I discuss later in this article, I am looking for "add on" approaches to the ways that we use, currently, to decide our values, which will help us to make more insightful decisions about ethics. In the "Wonder Equation" article, I argued that experiences of "amazement, wonder, and awe" could be such an "add on." I hope such "add ons" might help us to understand better and more comprehensively our own values and those of others, whose values differ from ours, and to adjust our decisions about ethics accordingly, which could decrease conflict and hostility. This is relevant to the future of democracy, because, to be able to function, democracy requires mutual respect when we disagree. Moral humility and moral courage, which are also discussed later, are essential precursors to mutual respect.

2 Somerville, "Could 'The Wonder Equation' Help," 230–231.

3 Somerville, "Could 'The Wonder Equation' Help."

In this article, I consider whether respect for the natural and Nature (neither of which I define, but leave for exploration and definition in a future article) could be such an "add on" and, thereby, have a role to play in furthering better ethical decision-making. In order to understand whether that might be a possibility, we need first to identify the current features of each group of values.

Features of Each Group of Values

Focuses

In making decisions about ethics, the focus of people with progressive values in relation to the issue differ from the focus of those with conservative values. Progressives tend to focus primarily on the individual, upholding their rights to autonomy, and on consequences, especially for the individual, in the present. That said, a major exception in both these regards is progressives' deep concern about damage to the environment.

Conservatives, while also considering the individual and consequences in the present, give much more weight to protecting the "common good"—the impacts on others, especially vulnerable people and society. This concern for more than themselves—self-transcendence—can lead them to experience a feeling of belonging to something much larger than themselves, give them a sense of purpose, and help them to find meaning in life. They are open to exploring what they can learn from the past from collective human memory and imagine as future consequences through collective human imagination.[4] They too, however, can be intensely focused on individuals' rights regarding certain issues, such as parents' rights to educate their children without state interference or to refuse vaccination for them.

Many people's position on various contentious ethical issues, for instance, abortion or euthanasia, is, however, more complex than

4 See John Ralston Saul, *The Unconscious Civilization* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1998), 76–116.

being informed by straightforward "pure progressive" or "pure traditional" values. Rather, they can manifest a combination of elements of both progressive and traditional values. We can imagine a spectrum with progressive values at one end and traditional values at the other end. Some people, who tend to be the people featured in media reports, adopt absolute values at one or other pole. Many people, however, fall somewhere along the spectrum between the poles. We need to understand these poles and this spectrum. We also need to take into account what we learn, if we are to avoid destructive conflict and hostility that could cause serious damage to the values base of our democratic societies and their institutions. The values that need to be upheld, at both the level of individual persons and society, include protection of vulnerable people, justice, respect for life, honesty, and integrity. I would argue that respect for the natural and Nature should be included among them, too.

Wise political decision-making in a democratic society requires a nuanced approach, much as the parties engaged in values conflicts might wish otherwise. That said, such an approach can result in outcomes that will not be accepted by those who believe that what it would permit is inherently unethical and must never be imposed on them or, perhaps, only with the strongest justification. An example of the latter could include compulsory vaccination of children in an outbreak of a life-threatening disease. We need ethical guidelines and laws that most people can live with, even though they are not what they consider would be ideal. It merits keeping in mind, here, that just because a majority votes for something or supports it in a survey does not mean it is ethical. Likewise, research and surveys indicating what the general practice or attitude is do not necessarily indicate what it should be ethically.

We need a critical minimum number of shared values to create the glue that binds us together as a society and we need to affirm these values through exchanging stories with each other and buying into them, identifying principles that should guide us, participating in community events, volunteering, fostering the arts, for some people

belonging to a religious community, and so on. Doing this creates our metaphysical ecosystem. We are all aware that our physical ecosystem is under great stress and could be irreversibly damaged or even destroyed. The same is true of our metaphysical ecosystem; it is not indestructible. The fear that possibility generates might be what people fearful of the failure of democracy could be expressing.[5]

Basic Presumptions and Freedom

All decisions are founded on a basic presumption, whether or not we recognise or articulate what it is. Our choice of basic presumption can affect our decisions about ethics. A primary difference between progressives and conservatives might be their choice of a basic presumption to govern their decisions about values and ethics.

There are four basic presumptions: "Yes" with no exception; "No" with no exception; "Yes, but not if …"; and "No, unless …" Difficult ethical decisions, which involve values conflict, usually involve choosing between a "Yes, but …" and a "No, unless …" presumption.

Progressive values adherents are likely to adopt either a "Yes" or "Yes, but not if …" basic presumption.[6] More specifically, it is either "Yes," when the individual person should be free to make their own decisions (for example, about euthanasia or abortion), or "Yes, but not if …," when exceptions are formulated and articulated. Traditional values adherents are more likely to adopt either a "No" or a "No, unless …" basic presumption. "No, you are not free to make certain decisions, because the action, for example, euthanasia or abortion, is inherently wrong." Or, where the action is not inherently wrong, "No, you are not free to make certain decisions, unless you can show that you qualify for an exception, for instance, that what you will do is not seriously harmful to the 'common good' and benefits outweigh harms."

5 Margaret Somerville, *Bird on an Ethics Wire: Battles about Values in the Culture Wars* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 52–53, 55–56, 63–64.

6 Margaret Somerville, *The Ethical Imagination: Journeys of the Human Spirit* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2006), 44–45.

In choosing between these presumptions, we should keep in mind the axiom "freedom in fetters." To protect liberty we need to maintain the conditions that make liberty possible, which can require restrictions on freedom.

Depending on which presumption is chosen, the burden of proof of an exception differs between the person wanting to act and the person opposing that action. A "Yes, but not if …" presumption requires the opponent of the action to prove the "not if" exception is fulfilled. In contrast, a "No, unless …" presumption requires the person wanting to act to prove the "unless" exception is fulfilled. In situations of equal doubt as to whether the exception is fulfilled, the basic presumption governs. That is, in exactly the same factual circumstances, the outcome with respect to freedom to act is the opposite, depending on which basic presumption has been used. In other words, the starting points of progressives' and conservatives' reasoning and decision-making about a given ethics issue can differ and, even where there is no disagreement on the facts, this can lead to opposite decision outcomes regarding whether a proposed action is deemed ethical.

We also need to keep in mind that there can be conflict regarding the requirements for an exception to the basic presumption and whether these have been fulfilled.

Another difference between progressives and conservatives is that in deciding on their values, although each group takes into account both the needs and rights of individuals and impact on the "common good," when, as in the legalisation of euthanasia debate, the relevant values of respect for individual autonomy and protection of the "common good" are in conflict and both cannot be implemented, their choices are opposite. Conservatives are likely to give priority to the "common good" at the cost of individual autonomy; progressives, in contrast, are likely to give priority to individual autonomy at the cost of protecting the "common good." In short, conservatives give priority to the collective, to society; progressives, to the individual. This difference is sometimes also characterised as progressives giving priority to

change and innovation and conservatives to the *status quo* and safety or risk aversion.[7]

Progressives may choose, for example, to legalise euthanasia or abortion on demand, until ethically unacceptable risk and harm is manifested. Conservatives will oppose such changes because they believe euthanasia and abortion on demand are inherently wrong, but also, that they are unethical because of the risks and harms they entail on a broad range of considerations, and that progressives have not shown they are reasonably safe as a part of health or social policy.

Sometimes, the allocation to either progressives or conservatives of the burden of proof of reasonable safety of the values we adopt as a society can be introduced and used in subtle ways. For instance, America adopted a "precautionary approach" not a "precautionary principle" in relation to governing risks to the environment. They explained that a principle was mandatory, but an approach was not. A precautionary *principle* requires that before acting in a way that could harm the environment, the actor must show that it is reasonably safe to do so. A precautionary *approach* does not demand this. It is much more lax in its application.

Normally, in an "open legal society," a person is free to act until it is shown that they are failing to take reasonable care resulting in damage. In a "closed legal society" a person must not act in a way that could cause risks or harm, until they have permission to do so. Western democracies are "open legal societies" with some specific examples of using a "closed legal society" approach in order to protect people. A common example of the latter is the legal regulation of "therapeutic goods." New drugs or medical devices must not be marketed until they are shown to be "safe and effective."

Both progressives and conservatives want freedom, but not necessarily of the same kind or in relation to the same elements of their lives.

7 Somerville, *Bird on an Ethics Wire*, 152–153, 195.

Conservatives tend to want *freedom from* government intervention in their private lives; they call such interventions "Big Government." They might oppose, for example, mandatory vaccination, fluoridation of the water supply, compulsory school curricula that conflict with their religious or social values or even compulsory out-of-home schooling, and so on.

Progressives are more likely to want *freedom to* implement their values, in particular, respect for individual autonomy to allow them to do what they believe is best for them, especially as individuals. They want control over what happens to them, which requires their having choice among a range of options, and change, for example, in laws that inhibit or prevent their choices. The progressives' goals in the debates about values can be summarised as their seeking Control, Choice, and Change. The legalisation of euthanasia is a prime example of this strategy being successfully used.

Is "Respect for the Natural" Relevant to Understanding Values Conflicts?

Is Respect for the Natural an Important Values Difference Between Progressives and Conservatives?

Might the deepest divide between those in conflict over which values our society should adopt be between those who believe that we need to have respect for the natural and those who do not believe this? Or, perhaps, and even more radically and divisively, those who deny the existence of the natural and those, such as myself, who believe it exists? Among philosophers, this debate seems to focus mainly on whether there is such an entity as "human nature."

Respect for the natural does not mean that we must not change it or intervene on it. Rather, it means that we must be able to justify doing that. Most of the time when we intervene to change the natural, it is so obviously justified, for example, providing life-saving interventions in medicine, that we do not need to articulate our justification. The basic

presumption is "Yes," with no exception, in favour of the intervention, although it bears keeping in mind that we can all be morally fallible, even when we all agree. This same caution also applies when we all agree that an intervention is unethical, that is, we adopt a "No" basic presumption, with no exceptions. It merits noting, as well, that advocating respect for the natural does not entail that everything natural is good or ethical or that what is not natural is wrong and unethical. Rather, implementing respect for the natural should enhance respect for life, all life, but in particular human life and flourishing for all people.

Attitudes to the worth or importance of the natural can differ and, like many other concepts, that of the natural can be wrongly defined, expanded, manipulated, or misused. For example, people currently concerned about irreversible damage to the environment will not agree with Benjamin Franklin, who is quoted as saying: "There cannot be a stronger natural right than that of a man's making the best profit he can of the natural produce of his lands."

At what is probably the most fundamental level in the debate over the ethics that should govern the natural, we need to keep in mind that there may be no consensus on what constitutes the natural, which needs to be respected.

Then there is debate as to whether the natural has any intrinsic value. Those who espouse what they call the "Naturalistic Fallacy" argue that it does not. One "response to the naturalistic fallacy is that it is based on a static view of 'essence' or 'nature,' rather than on how these develop over time to their full realisation … their dispositional qualities … is/ought takes on a different perspective with that latter consideration in mind"[8]—an argument developed by Anthony Lisska.[9] In short, "the is/ought contains an uncertainty and this is relevant to one's view of Natural Law."[10]

8 Thomas Ryan, personal email communication (18 August 2024).

9 See J. Anthony Lisska, *Aquinas's Theory of Natural Law: An Analytic Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 188–222.

10 Thomas Ryan, personal email communication (18 August 2024).

The most powerful and contentious belief about the natural is that there is an existential reality not created by humans, but one they can explore and declare what they find, namely, Natural Law. This is defined, by some, as "a body of unchanging moral principles regarded as a basis for all human conduct,"[11] which can guide us morally and ethically. However, moral theologian, Rev Dr Thomas Ryan, questions the global characterisation of Natural Law as "unchanging" and refers to American ethicist and theologian Professor Lisa Sowle Cahill who argues as follows: "certain goods for humans can be universally known, most obviously those based on the physical conditions of human survival and our natural sociality and need for cooperative relationships." This also can extend to "ecological goods" as both "public" and "global common goods." Nevertheless, Cahill is also of the view that "knowledge of the natural law is always perspectival and partial, even when it is also true and accurate."[12] In other words, as with all moral knowledge, it is an evolving part of human experience.

In the past, the precepts of Natural Law were usually found in religion and regarded as established by the Creator God. But one need not be religious or believe in God to accept Natural Law. It can be regarded as emanating from the essence of being human and having a purpose of protecting and realising that essence and its potentials. One expression of this view is that humans have a moral compass, which should guide them in making decisions regarding what is and is not ethical.

I note here that this human essence does not consist in our existing as solitary individuals who, above all, prioritise individual autonomy, but, rather, envisions us as social animals.[13] To flourish as a human being and to find meaning and purpose in life, we need others. The problem with over-prioritising individual autonomy is that

11 See "Natural Law" in *Oxford English Dictionary*.

12 Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Global Justice, Christology and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 265.

13 O. Carter Snead, *What It Means to Be Human: The Case for the Body in Public Bioethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

it does not take this into account sufficiently. In other words, even from a purely selfish point of view for our own survival we need to protect others, that is, to give sufficient weight to the "common good."

Often, those who see no worth in the natural deserving of respect, simply on the grounds that it is natural, also argue that the wisdom of history and tradition are irrelevant to decision-making about ethics in our contemporary world and, likewise, that religion should have no voice.

The relation between science and respect for the natural is important. Many progressive values adherents, such as Richard Dawkins, see science as the only valid way of knowing and see no mystery in what it reveals. Others, especially those who are religious or spiritual, see science as revealing knowledge that engenders awareness of even greater mysteries and a sense of contact with the mystical. I belong in the latter group. James Watson, Nobel Prize Winner for his work on DNA, was supporting the views of Dawkins with whom I was arguing at a meeting we were at in Oxford. Watson quietly told me that I was "full of mystical nonsense."[14] I hope that he is correct.

In 2021, I published an article titled "Could the 'Wonder Equation' help us to be more ethical?"[15] Here's the Wonder Equation, as it now stands, with Earned Trust as an addition, and its explanation:

$$\text{AWA} + (\text{S} - (\text{C} + \text{N})) \rightarrow \text{ET} + \text{G} + \text{H} \rightarrow \text{E}$$

Amazement, wonder, and awe (*AWA*) plus *(healthy) scepticism* (*S*), that is "think and question" scepticism *minus cynicism* (*C*) and *minus nihilism* (*N*), can create *earned trust* (*ET*) and elicit *deep gratitude* (*G*), including for life, and *hope* (*H*), the oxygen of the human spirit, which, in turn, can lead to *ethics* (*E*), a concern to act ethically. Earned Trust (trust me because I will earn your trust) as compared with Blind Trust (trust

14 Somerville, *The Ethical Imagination*, 10.

15 Somerville, "Could 'The Wonder Equation' Help," 237.

me because I have status, authority, and power)[16] requires many ethical practices, including transparency, integrity, honesty, compassion, empathy, to name just a few, which are features of both conservative and progressive values.

Linking Threads

Might an important linking thread between various conservative values be a *prima facie* requirement of respect for the natural? And might an important linking thread between various progressive values be a carefully understood absence of a *prima facie* requirement of respect for the natural? And might the presence or absence of this *prima facie* requirement help to explain some of the most fundamental differences in values between the two groups? Let's look at some examples.

Pro euthanasia/physician-assisted suicide proponents advocate for the legalisation of doctor-inflicted death at the time of a mentally competent, consenting, seriously suffering adult's choosing. This is inflicted death and, even if thought ethical, is premature death. Those who oppose such interventions promote high quality palliative care to relieve suffering and allow the person to die a natural death, that is, they implement respect for the natural. Similarly, regarding abortion. Respect for the natural requires respect for the life of the foetus. That respect is not breached in natural miscarriage, but is in intentionally ending the life of the foetus.

It merits repeating, as explained above, that advocates of progressive values tend to focus on individual persons and their rights to autonomy and self-determination, which is sometimes called "radical," "intense," or "expressive" individualism. They also tend to focus mainly, or even only, on the consequences occurring in the present, that is, immediate consequences. While not ignoring an action's consequences in the present or its impact on individuals, conservatives look also to the past for wisdom from collective human memory

16 See Jay Katz, *The Silent World of Doctor and Patient* (New York and London: Free Press, 1986).

and through collective human imagination to future risks and consequences. Importantly they also take into account risks and harms to the "common good"—especially risks and harms to vulnerable people as a group—not just to individuals.

These two approaches reflect very different visions of what it means to be human and what is required to live "the good life," that is, for human flourishing. We are not isolated atoms—even if the atoms of which we are composed come from the stars—but social beings who need companionship and form strong attachments to others.[17] This raises a host of other ethical issues, especially in relation to respect for the natural in the contexts of genetic manipulation and reproductive technologies. How important is genetic relationship? Does a child have a right to be born from untampered with natural human gametes from one, identified man and one, identified woman, a right not to be a clone, a right to their own unique ticket in the great genetic lottery of the passing on of human life?[18] To be gestated in a woman's body and not an artificial uterus? Should the body only be that of the child's biological mother and not a surrogate? Should uterine transplants to biological men be banned? And so on.[19]

In a powerful recent essay, Australian Journalist and commentator Stan Grant, a First Nations man, wrote about the "democratic malaise" that he claims has been engendered by "liberalism."[20] This is not a new concept and there are various definitions of "liberalism," a prominent current one being "neoliberalism." This is mainly described

17 Snead, *What It Means to Be Human*.

18 See Hans Jonas, *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 148–163.

19 See Somerville, *Bird on an Ethics Wire*, 14, 275; Margaret Somerville, "Children's Human Rights to Natural Biological Origins and Family Structure," *International Journal of the Jurisprudence of the Family* 1 (2010): 35–54, https://tinyurl.com/ymnnvb96; Margaret Somerville, "Children's Human Rights and Unlinking Child-Parent Biological Bonds with Adoption, Same-Sex Marriage and New Reproductive Technologies," *Journal of Family Studies* 13 (2007): 179–201.

20 Stan Grant, "J. D. Vance and the Politics of Resistance," *The Saturday Paper* 512 (10 August 2024), https://tinyurl.com/2yeb4378.

as promoting fiscally conservative values but, I suggest adding to that definition, combined with progressive social values.

Grant's reflections are relevant to understanding the risks and harms of progressive values, such as radical individual autonomy and "wokism," which implement liberalism. The further question is whether reviving respect for the natural could help us to avoid at least some of these risks and harms. Here are some statements from his article:

> Many thinkers, from the political right to the left, are resisting the politics of our time. To them, this is an age of convenience, hyper-rationality, scientism and technology that drains our souls… [However,] a resistance [is emerging to] the dispiriting, disenchanting, disengaged modernity. Liberalism, rather than the answer, is part of the problem.

> Patrick Deneen, an American political scientist, claimed Liberalism … had gone too far in dissociating culture from nature. The politics of the state, he argued, had suffocated the human. This is the triumph of the individual [becoming] "the basic unit of human existence, the only natural human entity that exists." The only liberation left, he argued, "is liberation from liberalism itself."

Grant proposes that the reason he and many Indigenous people are converting to Catholicism is that "Catholicism speaks to our culture and is a home of mysticism in a world that wants to tell us such things are superstitious or supernatural."[21]

This last statement raises the question of our attitudes to science and religion and the relation between them. Progressives often see them as being incompatible and in opposition, such that a choice must be made between them. This approach can be compared with seeing them as casting two different lenses on the same realities. Science opens up knowledge of Nature and the natural, knowledge of our

21 Grant, "J. D. Vance and the Politics of Resistance."

world, the universe, and all living beings, including ourselves. Religion, or spirituality, allows us to experience amazement, wonder, and awe regarding this knowledge and to recognise that the more we know, the more we know we don't know.[22] That recognition should elicit a response of respect for the natural and Nature, as a prime expression of the natural. Might agreement that we need to foster respect for the natural and Nature be a link between progressive and conservative values, even though we might disagree about what that respect requires? Could respect for the natural and Nature help us to be more ethical?[23]

Conclusion

In a world in which values conflicts are becoming more acrimonious, hostile, and dangerous, we all need to practice "moral humility." This requires us to recognise, first, that we are all morally fallible; second, that we need to listen open-mindedly, carefully, and respectfully to the arguments of those who disagree with us; and, third, that we must look beyond considering only ourselves and consider others and the larger picture. In short, we need to take into account the needs and wellbeing of others—the "common good"—when making decisions about ethics.

And "moral humility" has an essential companion virtue, "moral courage." This requires that when we conclude that something is unethical, we speak and act accordingly, despite cost to ourselves or, even more distressingly, to our loved ones, or to our colleagues and friends. It has been said that contemporary Western societies need old people and young people working together, as First Nations cultures recognise in respecting their Elders. Old people are needed to bring the wisdom from memory and young people to bring the courage needed to implement that wisdom. It can be argued that courage is the most important virtue, because it is not possible to practise any of the other virtues without it.

22 Somerville, "Could 'The Wonder Equation' Help Us," 231–232.

23 Somerville, "Could 'The Wonder Equation' Help Us," 232–234, 236–237.

I predict that as we act as though respect for the natural is of no importance, we will come to realise the opposite. We are part of Nature and, to maintain respect for ourselves, we must respect the natural and Nature. The daunting challenge now is to determine what respect for the natural and Nature requires that we not do.

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