

**THIS PAGE CONTAINS SOME RECENT ARTICLES BY PROMINENT
AUSTRALIAN-BORN ETHICIST AND LAWYER MARGARET SOMERVILLE,
PRECEDED BY A SHORT BIOGRAPHY**

Biographical Note *(edited from Wikipedia)*

Margaret Anne Ganley Somerville AM, FRSC (born April 13, 1942) is an Australian/Canadian ethicist and academic. She is the Samuel Gale Professor of Law, Professor in the Faculty of Medicine and the Founding Director of the Faculty of Law's Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law at McGill University.



Picture: UniSA, The Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre

Margaret was born in Adelaide, South Australia, and received a A.u.A. (pharm.) from the University of Adelaide in 1963, a Bachelor of Law degree (Hons.I) from the University of Sydney in 1973, and a D.C.L. from McGill University in 1978.

From 1963 to 1969, she was a registered pharmacist in South Australia, Victoria, New Zealand, and New South Wales. After returning to University and receiving her law degree she became an attorney for a Sydney law firm.

In 1978, Dr Somerville was appointed an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Law at McGill University. She was appointed an Associate Professor in 1979 and an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Medicine in 1980. In 1984, she became a Full Professor of the Faculty of Medicine and in 1989 was appointed the Samuel Gale Professor of Law. From 1986 to 1996, she was the founding Director of the McGill Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law and was appointed acting Director in 1999. She currently teaches a seminar on Advanced Torts at McGill University.

In November 2006, she gave the annual Massey Lectures on CBC Radio in Canada. The five lectures were published in book form as *The Ethical Imagination: Journeys of the Human Spirit*.

In 1990, Margaret was made a Member of the Order of Australia "for service to the law and to bioethics". In 1991, she was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. In 2004, she was awarded UNESCO's Avicenna Prize for Ethics in Science.

Selected bibliography

- *Do We Care?* (May 26, 1999) ISBN 0773518789
- *The Ethical Canary: Science, Society, and the Human Spirit* (2000, ISBN 0-670-89302-1)
- *Death Talk: The Case Against Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide* (2001, ISBN 0-7735-2201-8)
- *The Ethical Imagination: Journeys of the Human Spirit* (2006, ISBN 0-88784-747-1)

Read Kerry O'Brien's 2007 interview with Margaret Somerville on the ABC's 7.30 Report at <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2007/s1935737.htm>

ARE ANIMALS PERSONS ? (Posted 28.01.10)

Peter Singer argues that “distinguishing humans from other animals and, as a result, treating them differently, is a form of wrongful discrimination he calls "speciesism." He rejects the stance that all human beings are persons and no animals are persons; rather, he argues some human beings are not persons and some animals are.” The consequence, of course, is that some human beings are not worthy of the respect we give to some animals.

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/are_animals_persons/

SUFFERING WITH DIGNITY (Posted 25.01.10)

“A central element of the essence of our humanness is that we are meaning-seeking beings. The challenge is to find meaning in dying – to make dying the last great act of living. A lethal injection is a simplistic, cheap, quick technological fix. Finding meaning in dying is none of these. But it's probably necessary if we're to find meaning in life and pass on ways we can do this to future generations.”

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/suffering_with_dignity/

EUTHANASIA AND THE PUZZLE OF HUMAN DIGNITY (Posted 30.11.09)

Both sides of the euthanasia debate claim to be advancing the cause of human dignity, so who should we believe? One side upholds our fundamental prohibition on all killing except in self defense, while the other side allows this prohibition to be breached on a number of grounds. So one side claiming to uphold 'human dignity' actually contradicts this basic ethical principle.

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/the_puzzle_of_human_dignity/

CHILDREN’S HUMAN RIGHTS AND ASSISTED REPRODUCTION (Posted 25.11.09)

‘Ethics requires us, as societies which are complicit in assisted human reproduction, to place children's best interests at the centre of the decision making about such assistance and not, as been largely true up to this point, to allow adults' wishes or preferences with respect to founding a family to override children's fundamental human rights with respect to their coming into being and family structure.’

http://www.bionews.org.uk/page_51369.asp?iruid=2442

THE ETHICS OF PAYING FOR TEST-TUBE BABIES (Posted 25.11.09)

“It's one matter not to stop people who want access to reproductive technology from paying for it themselves; it's another when society is complicit in making that possible.”

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/ethics_of_paying_for_test-tube_babies/

ETHICAL PITFALLS IN ACADEMIC PUBLISHING (Posted 25.11.09)

“In a medical world where ethical standards are constantly evolving as we face unprecedented issues, it is a matter of intense interest when someone is accused of acting unethically. What on earth could they have done to cross the line from ethical "dilemma" (a word that covers a multitude of risky propositions) to ethical transgression?”

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/ethical_pitfalls_in_academic_publishing/

WOULD EUTHANASIA DAMAGE DOCTORS? (Posted 25.11.09)

“The euthanasia debate has been focused, almost entirely, on the impact that legalizing euthanasia (a term I use in this article to include physician-assisted suicide) would have at the individual level. But we must also consider the impact legalizing it would have at institutional, governmental and societal levels. We need to explore not only the practical realities, such as the possibilities for abuse, that allowing euthanasia would open up, but also, the effect that doing so would have on important values and symbols that make up the intangible fabric that constitutes our society.”

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/would_euthanasia_damage_doctors/

THE EUTHANASIA DEBATE RE-SURFACES (Posted 25.11.09)

Why does the Western world keep coming back to debate euthanasia over and over again? Margaret Somerville suggests this reflects some deeply-held fears and misconceptions which have wide-spread effects on the ethics of our entire Western culture.

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/the_euthanasia_debate_resurfaces/

MANIPULATING PAIN (Posted 25.11.09)

“The pro-euthanasia lobby has deliberately confused pain relief treatment and euthanasia in order to promote their cause. Their argument is that necessary pain relief treatment that could shorten life is euthanasia . . . [But] We need to distinguish treatment that is necessary to relieve pain, even if it could shorten life (which is a very rare occurrence if pain relief is competently prescribed), from the use of pain relief treatment as covert euthanasia. The former is not euthanasia, the latter is.”

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/manipulating_pain/

ARE YOU ‘PAST YOUR USE-BY DATE’? (Posted 25.11.09)

“Legalizing euthanasia and assisted suicide causes death to lose its moral context and us to lose our proper emotional response to it, a loss which recent research shows detrimentally affects our ethical judgment. . . . People who oppose euthanasia and assisted-suicide believe these interventions are inherently wrong -- they can't be morally justified, and that even compassionate motives do not make them ethically acceptable -- the ends do not justify the means.”

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/past_your_use_by_date_whats_next/

THE LAST GREAT ACT OF LIVING (Posted 25.11.09)

“Euthanasia allows people to feel that although they can't avoid death, they can control its manner, time and place. It's a terror reduction or terror control mechanism that operates at both the individual and societal level. So if we believe legalizing euthanasia would be a very bad idea, we need to develop and communicate other ways to deal with our fear of death.”

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/the_last_great_act_of_living/

SOCIETY AND ARTIFICIAL REPRODUCTION (Posted 19.02.09)

In the face of two extraordinary developments in the use of IVF in Canada, Margaret Somerville asks some difficult questions: is using IVF more or less the same as natural reproduction, or are there real differences? What role should the State play in regulating IVF? When IVF replaces rather than repairs nature, where should we place the ethical boundaries? Can we ever say ‘This far and no further’?

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/society_and_artificial_reproduction/

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST GOD (Posted 09.02.09)

“Secularism, the most encompassing "secular religion", functions as a basket holding all the other [-isms] and we also need to understand that it is not neutral, as atheists and humanists claim. It too is a belief system used to bind people together. Consequently, it is inconsistent and unjust to exclude religious voices from the democratic public square on the basis that views based on belief systems have no place.”

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/the_campaign_against_god/

APING THEIR BETTERS

While the recent push to recognize animal rights as equal to human rights has its origins in one Australian ethicist (Peter Singer), here another Australian ethicist and lawyer Margaret Somerville questions the bases of these claims. Read her account and reflections on a ‘round-table’ held at McGill University in 2008.

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/aping_their_bettters/

DILEMMAS IN PRENATAL TESTING

Prenatal screening is often presented as 'routine', so most women simply accept the first trimester ultrasound and related tests as 'usual practice'. But there are a number of important ethical issues involved here, not least of which is: are these tests as innocent as they seem? Read Margaret Somerville's reflections and her searching questions here:

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/the_dilemmas_of_pre_natal_testing/

DEATH TALK IN A SECULAR AGE

Arguments against euthanasia often stumble over the religious block: many supporters of euthanasia do not share our sense of the sacredness of life or death. As pressure for euthanasia mounts in many countries, Margaret Somerville challenges us to develop more universal and secular arguments to defend human dignity to the point of natural death.

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/death_talk_in_a_secular_age/

RESPECT FOR CONSCIENCE AS A SOCIAL VALUE

Would you respect a doctor who is obliged to 'park his ethics and values outside the surgery'? We all want a doctor with a sense of personal judgment and integrity that inspires trust and confidence, not one who simply has to act according to the rule book. Margaret Somerville points to the intrinsic contradictions driving the push to deny doctors the right to follow their consciences.

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/respect_for_conscience_must_be_a_social_value/

BRAVE NEW BABIES

Do children have a right to a father and mother? To be conceived naturally? To know their genetic parents, and be protected from genetic engineering? The science of IVF has created the possibility of all this and more. Margaret Somerville here tackles the hard questions from a logical point of view.

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/brave_new_babies/

AFFIRMING LIFE

How does a mother respond when she learns she is carrying a baby who will not survive beyond birth? How difficult is it for her to resist subtle pressures to terminate her pregnancy, and decide instead to 'carry this baby as long as he will let me'? Margaret Somerville shares a moving letter from one brave mother.

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/affirming_life/

SPEAKING TO A SECULAR AGE

As western society drifts further from its Christian roots, it becomes increasingly counterproductive to employ faith-based arguments when talking about 'the big issues'. Somehow we need to be able to dialogue on these issues from solidly rational bases - which shouldn't be too hard, given the Christian natural law tradition. Margaret Somerville has some important suggestions.

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/speaking_to_a_secular_age/

CORRECTLY SQUELCHED

What has happened to intelligent, respectful debate in public life? Too often today the game is 'win at all costs', which often means 'set your own rules'. But both our western tradition of universities and modern scientific research operate on different, more balanced logic. Margaret Somerville here analyses some of the challenges of life in the public forum.

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/correctly_squelched/

WHO DARE CALL IT FUTILE?

Withdrawing life-sustaining treatment can be a difficult decision at the best of times, but it is doubly so when the patients family and the hospital staff disagree over what ought to happen. While there are ethical principles to help steer a way through these minefields, the interpersonal conflicts can remain. Margaret Somerville analyses such situations and suggests some general rules.

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/who_dare_call_it_futile/

THE ETHICAL IMAGINATION

Michael Cook, editor of internet site MercatorNet, reviews Margaret Somerville's latest book outlining a rational, reasonable and consistent approach to the sometimes difficult field of ethics in the modern world.

http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/the_ethical_imagination/