

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION STUARYT HAMPSHIRE

(1915-2004)

Stuart Hampshire, Professor of Philosophy, emeritus, died June 13, 2004 at his home in Oxford, at the age of 89.

Stuart Hampshire was one of the last members of the generation of Oxford philosophers whose philosophies were shaped by the Depression, the Second World War, and the experiences of fascism, war and revolution. Growing up in the 1930's, he was acutely aware of the poverty experienced by so many in Britain. Working in British intelligence, he interrogated Nazi officers at the end of the war and wrestled with questions of ethics in war. He frequently used his encounters with these high ranking Nazi officers as a source of insights into the reality and nature of evil and the moral importance of rendering some actions literally unthinkable. In particular, Hampshire was horrified by the ease with which governments have been able to induce ordinary people to torture and murder.

His wartime experiences shaped his thinking not only in ethics and political philosophy, but also in metaphysics and the philosophy of mind. He was an "analytical philosopher" who broke the mold, showing in his writings a keen appreciation of history as well as psychology, literature and public policy. He combined rigorous philosophical analysis with passionate and humane political commitments. His philosophical work, infused by a literary flair and sensitivity, addresses itself to moral problems as they present themselves to us in our lives, as practical agents who must decide what we are to do.

According to Stuart Hampshire, one of the deepest assumptions of Western political and moral thought is the conviction that there exists a true, immutable, timeless morality that holds everywhere and forms a coherent and harmonious system of values. Hampshire believed that this assumption was mistaken, and his criticism of it is expressed in many of his works including *Morality and Conflict*, *Justice and Conflict*, and *Two Theories of Morality*. He believed that anything asserted about morality as a whole will be true only with many qualifications and exceptions. Hampshire was especially sensitive to the possibility of conflicts between obligations that arise from an impersonal moral standpoint and those that arise on the basis of our local attachments and peculiar histories. It is best to think about our moral beliefs and attitudes as occupying a middle ground between universal laws and local isolated judgments of value. There is a reason to our moral thinking, but there is also sentiment, history and loyalty. Moreover, some of our most sacred values are incompatible and we may be forced to choose between equally compelling yet conflicting claims.

Recognition of the problem of value pluralism, and inevitable conflict, however, did not make Hampshire a relativist who denied a role for reason in morality. His experiences of Nazi Germany, of the horrors of Stalinism, and of the pre-war contrasts between ostentatious luxury and extreme deprivation led him to condemn cruelty everywhere. "Alongside the balancing of conflicting moral claims," he wrote, "thinking about morality also includes thinking how barriers against evil are most reliably maintained; that is, about how a bare standard of decency in social arrangements is to be maintained; for this standard is always under threat."

Hampshire graduated from Oxford University in 1936 and, having studied “greats” at Balliol College, was elected to a prestigious Prize Fellowship at All Souls College. He was also a lecturer in philosophy from 1936 to 1940. There he was part of a group of brilliant and innovative philosophers including J.L. Austin, A.J Ayer, Isaiah Berlin, and A.D. Woozley. Berlin described their conversations as the high point of his life. After service during the war, Hampshire returned to Oxford in 1950, following a brief sojourn at University College, London. He was a fellow of New College from 1950 to 1955 and then a resident fellow of All Souls until 1960. In 1961 he married Renee Lees Ayer, who died in 1980.

In addition to the books mentioned above, Hampshire was the author of an important book on Spinoza; a key work in the philosophy of action and mind, *Thought and Action*; as well as *Freedom of the Individual, Public and Private Morality, Innocence and Experience*, and *Justice is Conflict*.

In 1963, Hampshire took up a chair of Philosophy at Princeton University, where he played an important role in opposing the Viet Nam war. He returned to Oxford as Warden of Wadham College in 1970 where he worked until 1984. In 1986, Hampshire became Professor of Philosophy at Stanford University and stayed until 1991. He played an important role in shaping the character of the philosophy department. Encounters with Stuart Hampshire were always pivotal: he opened up new ways of thinking, redrew conventional assumptions and caused many of us to rethink our fundamental beliefs and commitments. He also lived his philosophy, most notably at Princeton where he played a mediating role between anti-war students and the University administration. In politics, he was a man of the Left, and yet, in the English style, lived at the heart of the Establishment. He was both highly erudite and sophisticated and deeply troubled by moral questions. We were very fortunate that he should have spent the last part of his professional career at Stanford. In 1985 he married Nancy Cartwright, a Stanford colleague and eminent philosopher of science. They had two daughters, Sophie and Emma who, along with Nancy, and a daughter Brenda from his first marriage, survive him.

He was elected a fellow of the British Academy in 1960 and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1968. He served as president of the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, 1969-1970 and Pacific division 1990-1991. Queen Elizabeth knighted him in 1979.

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