

“Intention, Intellect, and Imagination: Stuart Hampshire’s Pluralism”  
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Stuart Hampshire was an English philosopher associated with the circle of Oxford philosophers in the post-World War II era who promoted linguistic analysis or, later on, ordinary language philosophy, though Hampshire distanced himself from the latter during his career. During his lifetime, he never achieved the influence of J.L. Austin or the fame of Isaiah Berlin, but his body of work constitutes a substantial contribution both to the tradition of Oxford philosophy and to the critique of scientism that is intimately connected with Enlightenment rationalism.

Early in his academic career, Hampshire was greatly influenced by the Vienna Circle and the doctrines associated with the logical positivism that was the official philosophy of the Circle.<sup>1</sup> Whether it was because of his experience of evil in World War II or because of his maturity as a philosopher, he became a critic of both of the strands of Enlightenment rationalism which contributed to logical positivism.<sup>2</sup> He rejected the mathematical rationalism of the Cartesian tradition and the Baconian empiricism connected with British philosophy, instead offering a muted epistemological pluralism which informed his more fully developed pluralist moral philosophy.

Hampshire is probably still most well-known for his work on Spinoza, which might be surprising in a thinker classified as a critic of Enlightenment rationalism, given that Spinoza,

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<sup>1</sup> For Hampshire’s comments on the influence of the Vienna Circle, see Stuart Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) 6.

<sup>2</sup> Hampshire’s experience interrogating leading figures of the Nazi Party led him to conclude that “unmitigated evil and nastiness are as natural...in educated human beings as generosity and sympathy...[and that] high culture and good education are not significantly correlated with elementary moral decency.” Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 8.

along with Descartes and Leibniz, were proto-Enlightenment rationalists par excellence.<sup>3</sup>

Hampshire's interest in Spinoza lies, in part, in the fact that Hampshire considers Spinoza to be the most compelling rationalist philosopher, and so takes his work to be the great challenge of any critic of such a philosophical position. Hampshire's work on the philosophy of mind, in which he offers a critique of deterministic accounts of human activity, is an important contribution to contemporary philosophical accounts of practical reason and epistemology.<sup>4</sup> Finally, he offers one of, if not the most detailed and elaborate conceptions of both the sources and importance of value or moral pluralism in contemporary moral philosophy, finding its sources in the inexhaustibly various possible descriptions of ourselves and the world we inhabit and in the inherent variety of the natural languages through which human beings describe that world. Thought, for Hampshire, cannot be reduced to mathematical calculation nor to empirical description, but instead is necessarily tied to an individual agent's particular perception, intellect, and imagination.

### **I. Hampshire's Spinoza**

As mentioned above, Hampshire's book on Spinoza remains his most well-known work, and it is a sympathetic and insightful, but also critical, account of Spinoza's complete philosophical system. Spinoza remained an interest and influence on Hampshire throughout his career, and his treatment of Spinoza became more sympathetic as the years passed.<sup>5</sup> However,

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<sup>3</sup> Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah Berlin called *Thought and Action*, Hampshire's work on the philosophy of mind, "his most important book." "Isaiah Berlin's Obituary of Stuart Hampshire," <https://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/bibliography/joint-text.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Hampshire's last publication was a posthumous reissue of *Spinoza: An Introduction to His Philosophical Thought* (which was originally published in 1951), which also included Hampshire's preface to the 1987 revised edition of that book, an article titled "Spinoza and the Idea of Freedom" which was published in 1960, and a long preface titled "Spinoza and Spinozism" which was written between 2001 and his death in 2004. Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*.

this change can be adequately accounted for by noticing that Hampshire's Spinoza looks increasingly like Hampshire himself as the years progress.<sup>6</sup> Since this is an essay on Hampshire's ideas, I will not be overly concerned with whether his account of Spinoza's thought is historically or philosophically accurate or adequate.<sup>7</sup> Hampshire admits that his interest in Spinoza is certainly not historical. He writes that "the interpretation of a great philosopher cannot be altogether independent of the philosophical interests of the interpreter," and, thus, Hampshire's Spinoza is as much a reflection of Hampshire's intentions and purposes as a philosopher as it of Spinoza's.<sup>8</sup> My focus here will be on what Hampshire takes from Spinoza and makes his own throughout his works on mind, epistemology, morality, and politics.

Hampshire's interest in Spinoza can be explained in several ways, and not all of them are theoretically compelling. Hampshire's work often manifests an extreme distaste for creedal religions, ideological politics, emotionalism, and extremism, and Spinoza's work exhibits all of these tendencies as well. Spinoza's metaphysical account of Nature and God as logically imminent in the world effectively rules out the possible truth of revealed creedal religions, and, for Hampshire, since modern ideological politics are secularized versions of such religions,

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<sup>6</sup> In his earliest work on Spinoza, Hampshire is critical of Spinoza's determinism and his dismissal of the concept of will or intention, while, in his essay on Spinoza's concept of freedom, Hampshire writes that there is "no clear answer" to the question of whether Spinoza was a determinist, and, in his final ruminations on Spinoza, Hampshire suggests that Spinoza is not at all a determinist. Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 88, 190, and xlvii. Like Hampshire's Spinoza, Hampshire's Freud looks a lot more like Hampshire than like traditional interpretations of Freud. See Stuart Hampshire, "Letters of Freud," *Modern Writers and Other Essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969) 78-87.

<sup>7</sup> Spinoza has been understood by some as a nominalist/materialist thinker like Hobbes and the neo-Epicureans, and by others as a proto-Idealist whose thought contains the seeds of the philosophy of Hegel and the British Idealists. For a contemporary example of the former interpretation, see Dimitris Vardoulakis, *Spinoza, the Epicurean: Authority and Utility in Materialism* (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh Press, 2020). For an older example of the latter, see H.H. Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901). See also, Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 6.

Spinoza's account undermines the validity of those as well. However, this is about the extent of Hampshire's interest in the more abstract aspects of Spinoza's metaphysical system. For Hampshire, Spinoza is the proto-Enlightenment rationalist who offers the most consistent logical account of a unified science (e.g. a metaphysics, a logic, an epistemology, and a moral theory which are connected with each other on strictly necessary logical terms), and, thus, a more important thinker to come to terms with than Descartes or Leibniz, or Bacon and the empiricists.

However, what Hampshire takes from Spinoza is not the entire system, especially since Hampshire is fundamentally skeptical of systematic philosophizing and generally eschews it in his own work. Instead, Hampshire focuses his attention on several aspects of Spinoza's work, specifically on Spinoza's naturalism and what Hampshire calls the 'double or dual aspect' of understanding human beings; on Spinoza's understanding the active intellect and the passive imagination; and on Spinoza's conception of the freedom of mind which comes from the human capacity for reflection. Finally, Hampshire is critical of Spinoza's determinism, which can have no place in a moral philosophy concerned with the centrality of will, desire, and intention, all of which will be central to Hampshire's work on the philosophy of mind and on moral philosophy.

For Hampshire, Spinoza addresses one of the fundamental tensions in epistemology that the emergence and success of modern natural science has made manifest to philosophy. For natural scientists, every event has a cause or, to put it differently, every event can be explained as being an instance of a natural/covering law. The tension is that such claims seem to exclude the possibility that human beings make their own choices. So, how can one reconcile the claim that everything that exists, including human actions and human thoughts, can be explained in terms of physical causation with the claim that human beings are actually free, to some extent, to choose their own actions? The Cartesian solution was a dualism in which the external world is a

world of causation, like the natural scientists tell us, but the internal world is a world of will and intellect. Spinoza rejects this dualism and replaces it with a wholly naturalistic theory which Hampshire calls the double or dual aspect version of the explanation of human thought and action. According to Hampshire, Spinoza claims that “thoughts are only adequately explained by thoughts, and physical forces and configurations by physical forces and configurations. There are two utterly distinct, but indispensable, schemes of explanation with a common subject matter, which is the total activities and reactions of human beings.”<sup>9</sup> Human action is caused by both its external and internal environments and is the cause of its external and internal environments.

So, on the one hand, it is perfectly reasonable for natural scientists to understand human actions as the result of natural causes. On the other, however, human beings have the natural capacity to reflect upon such external stimuli and are not merely passive receivers of such outside forces. According to Hampshire, Spinoza argues that primary perceptions do commonly arise from external forces, but human beings reflect on such forces and move from passive recipients to active thinkers. One of Hampshire’s examples of such a move from perception to reflection involves the common human perception of the sun rising and setting. The gathering of further information and reflection on that information usually convinces a reasonable person that his passive sensory perception is misleading, and that his reflection on the total situation has corrected it. According to Hampshire’s account, Spinoza argues that:

reflexivity is the primary characteristic of thought: in the first place reflections of changes in bodily states induced by impinging influences from outside, and secondly, reflections of reflections as thought takes its own thinking as its subject. Thought, once started, proceeds autonomously on its own paths, but its origins were in the bodily effects of physical causes.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Stuart Hampshire, “Two Theories of Morality,” *Morality and Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) 56.

<sup>10</sup> Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, x.

Thus, human beings are distinctive insofar as they can move from the passive acceptance of external perception, which Spinoza links to the imagination, to the active mental world of the intellect.

For Spinoza, this movement from passive perception to active thought constitutes freedom of mind, and activity here is understood as distance and independence from sensory perception. Thus, Spinoza's form of rationalism is highly critical of empiricism, and, instead, views the purity of mathematical and logical forms as the higher sort of reason. According to Hampshire, Spinoza argues that:

I am active in so far as I am thinking logically, that is, in so far as the succession of ideas constituting my mind is a self-contained and self-generating series; I am passive in so far as my succession of ideas can only be explained in terms of ideas which are not members of the series constituting my mind; for in this latter case, the ideas constituting my mind must be, at least in part, the effects of external causes.<sup>11</sup>

So, freedom for Spinoza consists of being actively intelligent and self-determining, and not passively reactive to external impressions or forces. This sort of freedom is of necessity always a matter of degree, and, since the actual experiences of human beings differ in many ways (e.g. the external forces acting upon them differ), the capacity for freedom of any individual will be in part related to his own personal experience. Nonetheless, as Hampshire notes, Spinoza's conception of freedom can be understood as the recognition of necessity, and, in that sense, his conception has no place for a concept of the human will independent of natural causation. Hampshire writes of Spinoza that "no other philosopher has ever insisted more uncompromisingly that all problems, whether metaphysical, moral or scientific, must be

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<sup>11</sup> Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 107.

formulated and solved as purely intellectual problems, as if they were theorems in geometry.”<sup>12</sup>

It is this deterministic aspect of Spinoza’s moral philosophy that Hampshire rejects, and, as will become clear in the next two sections, Hampshire also ultimately moves away from a strictly rationalist account of freedom, and embraces in his moral philosophy the importance of the imagination as the gateway into knowledge of the particular and the unique.

## II. The Philosophy of Mind and Practical Reason

Hampshire has written extensively on the philosophy of mind and epistemology, presenting a picture of human understanding as essentially traditional, and often emphasizing the importance of what other writers have called tacit knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Hampshire’s contributions to the philosophy of mind and epistemology are found in his books *Thought and Action* and *Freedom of the Individual*, and the collection of essays titled *Freedom of Mind*. These books are informed by a commitment to conceive of human action as free insofar as it is occasioned by the perceptions, desires, beliefs, and intentions of human agents, and, thus, he rejects any form of determinism or behaviorism. These, and his later works on moral philosophy, also exhibit an undeveloped, or at least not systematically maintained, epistemological pluralism of the sort

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<sup>12</sup> Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Examples of epistemological traditionalists include Michael Polanyi, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Michael Oakeshott, Gilbert Ryle, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Hampshire never mentions the work of Polanyi, Gadamer, or Oakeshott, and his discussion of Ryle’s work is quite critical. Hampshire accuses Ryle of being a naïve behaviorist, an accusation which Ryle rejects. Hampshire also mentions Wittgenstein on occasion, but does not offer any detailed examination of his work. See Stuart Hampshire, “Ryle’s *The Concept of Mind*,” *Freedom of Mind and Other Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) 87-113. For an examination of Ryle’s philosophy of mind as non-behaviorist, see Kenneth B. McIntyre, “The Critique of Rationalism: Ryle and Oakeshott on Tacit Knowledge,” *Tradition v. Rationalism: Voegelin, Oakeshott, MacIntyre, Polanyi, and Other Critics*, Eugene Callahan, Lee Trepanier, eds. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Book, 2018) 133-149.

which is often associated with moral or value pluralism in which Hampshire makes explicit distinctions between the nature of theoretical reason, practical reason, and aesthetic experience.<sup>14</sup>

Hampshire's epistemological pluralism is often inchoate, and he never offers a fully elaborated explanation. His distinction between theoretical and practical reason is directly connected to his commitment to a revised form of Spinoza's dual aspect conception of understanding the world, but his understanding of practical reason owes more to Aristotle's account, in spite of his rejection of Aristotle's notion that there is a single telos for human beings. He largely accepts the primary assertion of modern natural science, which is a modification of Spinoza's theory, that the explanation of the world in scientific terms entails an explanation of material or physical causes and material or physical effects. As Hampshire notes, scientific "explanation exhibits a universal correlation between more or less exactly stated initial conditions and more or less exactly stated outcomes, with the assumed background conditions also storable: a law-like formulation which is also part of a theory."<sup>15</sup> In Aristotle's terms, scientific or theoretical reason deals with things that are not changeable, or, in other words, that must be the way they are.

Conversely, practical reason concerns itself with things amenable to alteration, and, thus, does not allow for the precision and certainty associated with scientific and mathematical reason. Hampshire's neo-Aristotelian approach to practical reason denies that such reason can produce

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<sup>14</sup> Hampshire sometimes suggests that there is a distinctively historical conception of the past that is different from the normal practical conception of the past in which the past is viewed in terms of its usefulness in the present. However, Hampshire is inconsistent about this claim, sometimes discussing 'history' without mentioning the academic/historical past at all. See, e.g., the chapter titled "Justice and History" in which he neglects to address the distinction between the practical past and the historical past at all, while, later in the same book, he writes that "the full recovery of some piece of past experience...provides a moment of transcendence..., an escape from time." Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 51-78, 148.

<sup>15</sup> Stuart Hampshire, *Freedom of the Individual, Expanded Edition* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975) 139.



rule-like formulations which cover all possible situations. Instead of developing deductive proofs in answer to moral and other practical questions, practical reason involves the development of connoisseurship, in which agents are habituated and initiated into various moral and non-moral practices which condition and constitute the self-understood situations within which they make their intelligent or not-so-intelligent choices. Hampshire avers that “theoretical reasoning...is directed towards a true description of external things and events,...practical reasoning [is] directed towards right choices in conduct: two different kinds of correctness, each in principle open to reasonable argument and counter-argument, and neither to be subordinated to the other.”<sup>16</sup>

These two types of thinking about the world reflect Hampshire’s debt to Spinoza, but Hampshire insists that there is at least one additional way to view the world which is neither scientific nor practical. He notes that, while:

a practical question might be defined, widely, as a question about what action is, was, or would be the right action in certain specified circumstances...we are [also] capable of a type of experience, aesthetic experience, in which thought of the possibility of action is for a time partly suspended. The recognized value of aesthetic experience is partly a sense of rest from intention, of not needing to look through this particular object to its possible uses.<sup>17</sup>

Aesthetic experience is like theoretical reason in that it is not solely or primarily focused on the alteration of the world. Art is, according to Hampshire, “an experience in which practical interests, and the ordinary classifications that reflect them are for a time suspended in an

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<sup>16</sup> Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 18. He also maintains that “arguments may be, in the ordinary and wider sense, rational without being included among the types of argument which are ordinarily studied by logicians since logicians are generally concerned exclusively with the types of argument that are characteristic of the a priori and empirical sciences.” Hampshire, “Fallacies in Moral Philosophy,” *Freedom of Mind*, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Stuart Hampshire, *Thought and Action* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960) 118, 119.

unpractical enjoyment of the arrangement of something perceived.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, contrary to the common Enlightenment notion that all forms of reasoning should properly maintain the form and substance of the reasoning connected with mathematics, formal logic, and the natural sciences, Hampshire posits that there are at least three distinct sorts of reasoning relevant to human experience.

Nonetheless, the practical world is the common world of experience for human beings. Indeed, Hampshire insists that “the forms of our languages are largely determined by our practical interests as social beings; and our practical interests, the goals of action, are limited by our powers of communication and description.”<sup>19</sup> Human beings are born into a world of language, or more appropriately, various languages of which their native language is central to the formation of their perceptions, beliefs, desires, and intentions. These languages are the medium through which individuals classify or individuate the things in the world around them and their various thoughts and reflections about those classifications and individuations. One of Hampshire’s more insightful and provocative observations is that “any element in reality identified as a so-and-so may always be classified in an indefinite number of alternative ways.”<sup>20</sup> For example, the same so-and-so could be described as a father, a husband, a son, a grandson, a cousin, a lawyer, a shyster, a partner, Jim from next door, a short man, a bald man, a man of rigid

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<sup>18</sup> Hampshire, *Thought and Action*, 244. For a fuller account of Hampshire’s aesthetic theory, see his review of Paul Hindemith’s *A Composer’s World* in Hampshire, *Modern Writers and Other Essays*, 174-183.

<sup>19</sup> Hampshire, *Thought and Action*, 67.

<sup>20</sup> Hampshire, *Thought and Action*, 19. He maintains that “any situation which confronts me...has an inexhaustible set of discriminable features over and above those which I explicitly notice at the time... [and] the situation has features over and above those which are mentionable within the vocabulary I possess and use.” Stuart Hampshire, “Public and Private Morality,” *Public and Private Morality*, Stuart Hampshire, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) 30

morals, a failed athlete, a mediocre flautist, *ad infinitum*.<sup>21</sup> Most of the time, the context or circumstances in which a description is used will limit what counts as relevant descriptions, but Hampshire insists that, in any context, the appropriate description of a situation will be underdetermined.

Further, this inexhaustibility of description characterizes not only one's description of external events, but also typifies a person's account of his own actions. For example, if someone were to ask me what I am doing now, I could variously respond: I'm writing an article on Stuart Hampshire; I'm exorcising some demons; I'm getting rid of some phlegm; I'm clarifying my thinking about the connection between belief and intention; I'm paying the bills; I'm fulfilling an obligation; I'm setting an example of what academics are supposed to do for my junior colleagues; I'm exacting revenge on another academic; I'm pleasing my wife//children/parents/et al.; I'm entertaining myself during the summer vacation; I'm keeping my mind sharp as I age; I'm avoiding other unpleasant responsibilities; I'm staying away from the bar; I'm attempting to cure myself of depression/melancholy; I'm entertaining myself; I'm trying to impress my colleagues, etc. So, if this radical underdetermination of description is ubiquitous, how does Hampshire suggest that we address it? He resorts to an altered version of Spinoza's double aspect theory in observing that, when human beings think about the practical world, they think about it from two perspectives. Sometimes we think about the world in terms of our own agency or capacity to change it in ways which we desire, and sometimes we act as observers of other agents and of natural events, observing both the regularities of the natural world (though, not

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<sup>21</sup> Disagreements about descriptions are often at the heart of political conflicts. Was it a mostly peaceful protest or a riot? Was it a case of people exercising their right of assembly and their right to petition the government or was it an insurrection? Was it a Civil War, a War of Secession, or a War of Rebellion?

often as scientists) and the regularities of our fellow human beings, realizing, however, that the regularities of our fellow human beings are not predictable in the same way as the regularities of the natural world.<sup>22</sup> For Hampshire, this dual aspect of human thought is of central importance in understanding the connection between desire, belief, and intention.

According to Hampshire, human beings, like other animals, perceive the world through their senses, but, unlike animals, humans are never completely passive recipients of stimuli, since we have the capacity through thought and language to classify and individuate both perceptions of the external world and our own reflections on such perceptions. He writes that “in any natural language the objects of reference primitively chosen will be persisting things, differentiated into kinds, at least in part, by their usefulness in serving different, but constant, human needs.”<sup>23</sup> Human beings also have inchoate and unconscious desires, but, unlike other animals, we can bring these desires to consciousness, reflect upon them, criticize them according to some set of criteria, and adjust them. And, it is the same with the beliefs that human beings have about themselves and about what goes on around them. Human beings then are aware or self-conscious of their perceptions, desires, beliefs, and circumstances, and they are capable of reflection upon, and criticism and adjustment of those desires, beliefs, and circumstances through intentional action. Hampshire notes that “a thoughtful activity is any activity in which the agent is to some degree controlled by a standard of correctness and of mistake.”<sup>24</sup> This capacity to

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<sup>22</sup> Hampshire writes that “every man is a student, and potentially a scientific student, of the beliefs, desires, and attitudes of people in general...and is naturally interested in their regular causes and effects. Every man is also a moralist, in so far as he thinks of himself as continually assessing, and changing, his own beliefs, desires, or standards, which he chooses to apply to them, or which he happens to apply to them.” Hampshire, *Freedom of Mind*, vii.

<sup>23</sup> Hampshire, *Thought and Action*, 21

<sup>24</sup> Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 39.

bring desires and beliefs to consciousness and reflect on them is due, in large part, to the human capacity for language, though, according to Hampshire, we can never bring all of our desires or beliefs to full consciousness, and, thus, certain human desires, beliefs, and capacities are dependent upon a kind of tacit knowledge, which is not completely amenable to full or explicit expression.<sup>25</sup>

One of the central features of the human condition, according to Hampshire, is the awareness of our capacity to change our own situation. He writes that “the most unavoidable feature of our consciousness is the initiation of change at will, the changing of position and therefore of our relation to other things.”<sup>26</sup> The human will, manifested as intentional action, is for Hampshire, unlike Spinoza, one of the defining characteristics of humanness. As mentioned, human beings have desires, both thoughtful (e.g. the desire for knowledge about one’s world) and less-than-thoughtful (e.g. the desire for drink when thirsty), and they have beliefs, both thoughtful (e.g. the astronomer’s belief that the earth revolves around the sun) and non-thoughtful (e.g. the adolescent’s belief that the sun rises and sets). Both desires and beliefs contribute to the formation of intentions and intentional actions. However, desires are not same as beliefs, since one can reasonably have a desire for something which one regrets or believes to be inappropriate (e.g. coveting thy neighbor’s wife, or preferring the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger), but one cannot logically believe something that one knows to be false. Hampshire maintains that “he who believes cannot at the same time suppose his

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<sup>25</sup> Hampshire writes that “any one man inevitably carries with him an enormous load of settled beliefs about the world, which he never has had occasion to question and many of which never has had the occasion to state. They constitute the generally unchanging background of his active thought and observation, and they constitute also his knowledge of his own position in the world in relation to other things.” Hampshire, *Thought and Action*, 150.

<sup>26</sup>Hampshire, *Thought and Action*, 69.

belief to be misplaced and misguided. He cannot regard it as something he happens to have [like a disease], or as a fact about himself which he may deplore [like a desire or phobia], but must accept.”<sup>27</sup>

In terms of practical knowledge, an individual agent is in a special situation concerning the knowledge of his own desires, beliefs, and intentions, since this sort of knowledge is not the result of inductive reasoning, like that of an observer, but the knowledge of one who has formed the desires, beliefs, and intentions. As Hampshire writes, “in respect of knowledge of one’s desires, [beliefs, and intentions], the subject is the normal authoritative source.”<sup>28</sup> That is to say, the agent has special knowledge of his own intentions, and this sort of knowledge is non-propositional insofar as he not merely reporting his intentions to others after examining them himself. This sort of personal practical knowledge is a kind of knowledge of the future, and Hampshire contrasts this personal knowledge of future events with knowledge of future events which is inferred from past experiences and knowledge of natural regularities and human regularities. In actuality, both of these sorts of knowledge are necessary to any agent composing his own set of intentions. For example, if Jim says that he is going to the shooting range on Saturday, his statement of intention includes not only his desires (e.g. he wants to shoot his new Kimber K6S .357 magnum revolver), but also his beliefs/knowledge about the opening hours of the shooting range, the reliability of his automobile, the availability of his weapon, knowledge of the weather, etc. In this personal aspect, Jim’s statement of an intention is different than a statement of prediction or expectation. So, if Bill predicts that Jim will not go to the shooting

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<sup>27</sup> Hampshire, *Freedom of the Individual*, 86-87.

<sup>28</sup> Hampshire, *Freedom of the Individual*, 44.

range, his prediction might be based upon knowledge of Jim's past behavior (e.g. Jim always says he's going to the range but never goes), or upon any of the factors necessary for the successful completion of Jim's intention (e.g. Bill might know that Jim's car doesn't work, or Bill might have stolen Jim's gun, or Bill might be a better weather forecaster than Jim). As Hampshire avers, "the wrongness of [an individual's] expectation consists in its non-corresponding with reality: the wrongness of [an individual's] intention does not consist in its not being executed."<sup>29</sup> Bill's prediction concerning Jim's gun-show adventure will be correct or incorrect, but in neither case does that prove that Jim did not intend to do as he said.

For Hampshire, the more a person reflects and understands his own desires, beliefs, and capacities, the more likely it is that he can and will form reasonable intentions, or, in other words, intentions which can be successfully carried into effect as actions. Capacities are abilities or skills, and, unlike intentions, an agent's expressions of his capacities are not considered as especially authoritative statements. For example, if Jim says, "I intend to get something to eat today," it makes little sense for Bill to ask, "how do you know that you intend that?", but if Jim says, "I'm the strongest man in the bar," it is perfectly reasonable for Bill to dispute his claim or to ask for proof of its validity. So, again, the success or failure of human intentions as actions is directly related to the situational awareness of a particular individual, which includes knowledge of his own desires and beliefs, knowledge of his abilities, and knowledge of the circumstance in which he is acting. As Hampshire notes, "it is through the various degrees of self-consciousness in action, through more and more clear and explicit knowledge of what I am doing, that in the first place I become comparatively free, free in the sense that my achievements either directly

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<sup>29</sup> Hampshire, *Freedom of the Individual*, 75

correspond to my intentions, or are attributable to my incompetence or powerlessness in execution.”<sup>30</sup> So, Hampshire’s account of the nature of desire, belief, and intention is ultimately an account of human freedom and responsibility. There are limitations on human freedom related to an agent’s lack of knowledge of his capacities, a lack of self-understanding of his own desires and beliefs, the necessary indeterminacy of a person’s situational awareness, the problem of the inexhaustive nature of description, and even to an agent’s knowledge that many of his desires and beliefs are not fully present to his consciousness. Nevertheless, Hampshire insists that a human being is free insofar as “he generally knows clearly what he is doing;...he knows his own situation in the world and generally recognizes the relevant features of the situation confronting him.”<sup>31</sup> Human beings are free in the practical or moral sense if we are actively or carefully or thoughtfully engaged in knowing what we are doing and are usually successful at doing it, and being active, careful, or thoughtful cannot be explained by reference to physical or material causal laws.

### **III. Moral and Political Theories**

#### *A. Moral Theory*

Hampshire’s later essays, collected in *Morality and Conflict*, and his monographs *Innocence and Experience* and *Justice is Conflict* explore the implications of his philosophy of mind for the world of moral and political activity, while also revising the rationalism of his treatment of action in the works treated in the previous section. These later works also comprise one of the most intelligent and intelligible defenses of moral pluralism in contemporary moral

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<sup>30</sup> Hampshire, *Thought and Action*, 177.

<sup>31</sup> Hampshire, *Thought and Action*, 181.



and political philosophy.<sup>32</sup> They also include a third dualism, which addresses the rationalistic elements of his philosophy of mind. The first dualism, taken from Spinoza, concerns the dual aspects of thought and extension (i.e. the material/natural world) as alternative ways of understanding the world as a whole. The second, which informs Hampshire's philosophy of mind, is that of the knowledge of one's own states of consciousness (i.e. desires, beliefs, and intentions) and the knowledge of the regularities of nature and of other human beings (which are not the same sort of regularities). The final dualism is that between intellect, which Hampshire associates with universalizable thought (i.e. science, math, logic, and justice) and imagination, which Hampshire associates with particularity, individuality, and uniqueness (i.e. natural language, history, art, customary morality).<sup>33</sup>

Hampshire's moral theory is similar to that of many other moral pluralists, but, unlike many of the pluralists, he offers a unique explanation of the origins of pluralism, and his pluralism is not a reluctant or an embarrassed one, but instead celebrates pluralism as central to human identity.<sup>34</sup> Hampshire maintains that moral theories (and moral practices) can be defined,

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<sup>32</sup> For other moral pluralists, see Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Michael Stocker, *Plural and Conflicting Values* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); David L. Norton, *Personal Destinies: A Philosophy of Ethical Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Edmund L. Pincoffs, *Quandaries and Virtues: Against Reductivism in Ethics* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 1986); Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," *Liberty*, Henry Hardy, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 166-217; John Kekes, *The Morality of Pluralism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985)

<sup>33</sup> Iris Murdoch had been sharply critical of Hampshire's work on the philosophy of mind because she claimed that Hampshire dismissed or, at least, denigrated the centrality of imagination to human thought. It is possible that Hampshire's elevation of imagination in his works on moral theory to its position as one of the two primary ways of thinking about morality is, in part, a revision due to Murdoch's critique. See Iris Murdoch, "The Darkness of Practical Reason," *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, Peter Conradi, ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1997) 193-202

<sup>34</sup> For an example of an 'embarrassed' pluralist, see Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

or, at least, understood best by what they proscribe instead of what they prescribe,<sup>35</sup> and, like other moral pluralists, Hampshire's primary targets are traditional moral theories which consider the object of any adequate moral theory to be the construction of a unified, hierarchical system of values or rules in which a single decision procedure defines what is correct moral action. In such a monistic theory, all values or rules cohere, and, therefore, moral conflict is understood as a sign of something amiss that needs to be fixed. Hampshire proclaims that his moral theory is "throughout directed against [the] Enlightenment conception of a single substantial morality, including a conception of the good and of human virtue, as being the bond that unites humanity in universal sentiments or in universal moral beliefs."<sup>36</sup>

Hampshire makes two different but connected arguments against monistic moral theories of the sort commonly referred to as deontology and utilitarianism. He claims that values are both incompatible (i.e. there are multiple things that humans value and that are valuable, and these things do not form a coherent whole, but conflict with each other) and incommensurable (i.e. that such values are not completely comparable according to a single metric). The first critique is directed specifically at deontological theories, and the second at utilitarian theories. So, why do values and duties inevitably conflict, and why can't all values be reduced to some common measure? Hampshire offers an explanation which places the sources of conflict at the very heart of what makes human beings capable of communicating with each other. It is the natural fact that human beings have developed a great variety of languages and that the use of those various

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<sup>35</sup> Hampshire is fond of referring to Hegel's line about Spinoza, "*omnis determinatio est negatio*" (all determination is negation). Hampshire, "Morality and Conflict," *Morality and Conflict*, 146.

<sup>36</sup> Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 107.

languages necessarily involves inexhaustively multiple descriptions of circumstances and states of mind which make conflict inevitable. As he writes:

the diversity and divisiveness of languages and cultures and local loyalties is not a superficial but an essential and deep feature of human nature... That there should be conflicting moral claims, which are not to be settled by appeal to a criterion that is always overriding and final, may be represented as a consequence of the nature of practical choice for a language-using, and vocabulary-choosing and vocabulary-creating, creature.<sup>37</sup>

It is our immersion in our native language and its various idiomatic usages along with our moral and intellectual education within a particular culture which make us unique individuals.

Of course, each human being also has the capacity to reflect upon his given language and culture in a critical way. Indeed, Hampshire insists that “the inheritance from past speculation has established the vocabulary which one uses even while one tries to revise it. The attempt to correct past conceptions does not imply a belief in the finality of the suggested new version; it implies only a belief that the new version, in some sense, better represents the so far known features of human nature.”<sup>38</sup> In this, according to Hampshire, the imagination of human beings is connected with their particular situations, languages, culture, and, ultimately, with what Hampshire calls their ways of life, while the human intellect is connected with certain sorts of abstractions (e.g. mathematics, logic, natural science) that can overcome such particularities.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Stuart Hampshire, *Justice is Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) 37, and Hampshire, “Two Theories of Morality,” *Morality and Conflict*, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 32.

<sup>39</sup> Hampshire writes that “the term ‘way of life’ has to be vague if only because it represents not only explicit ideals of conduct, deliberately chosen, but also ideals which have not been made explicit, or formulated, and which may be expressions of not fully conscious preferences, feelings, and ambitions.” Hampshire, “Two Theories of Morality,” *Morality and Conflict*, 19.

He suggests that “all humanity is, or can be, united in responding to Euclid’s demonstrations; humanity is irreparably and forever divided in responding to Racine and to Jane Austen.”<sup>40</sup>

Thus, Hampshire’s moral pluralism does not deny the relevance of universal considerations, such as duty or utility, when thinking about moral problems. Instead, he argues that humans are capable of understanding certain sorts of moral considerations in universal terms, but those universal terms are not the totality of morality. Morality, for Hampshire, consists both of universal and impartial duties and responsibilities (like impartial justice/fairness and impartial consequentialism) and particular or individual duties and responsibilities which are dependent upon specific circumstances often unique to individual agents. For example, a teacher who does not grade his students’ papers impartially is rightly considered immoral, and a person who acts without any regards to the consequences of his actions ought to be considered morally obtuse. However, a husband who acts impartially regarding sexual activities with women will not only be considered immoral, but will almost certainly not remain a husband for long, and parents who are impartial concerning the feeding of their own children versus the feeding of the children of other will not only be morally condemned but soon find themselves talking to child welfare services. Further, because of each individual’s own desires, beliefs, and commitments (i.e. his way of life), there also exist non-moral values which can sometimes trump both universal and particular moral values.

So, these two different aspects of morality, the universal and the particular, along with the importance of non-moral commitments, mean that conflict is inherent in human life and, in fact, is productive of much that is definitive of what is meaningful in human life. As Hampshire

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<sup>40</sup> Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 44.

writes, “morality and conflict are inseparable: conflict between different admirable ways of life and between different defensible moral ideals, conflict of obligations, [and] conflict between essential, but incompatible, interests.”<sup>41</sup> However, Hampshire also insists that this agonistic situation need not lead to a relativistic understanding of moral life. There is what Hampshire sometimes calls a ‘common core’ of morality, consisting of both prohibitions and virtues, though Hampshire generally regards the prohibitions as primary. Hampshire maintains that “there is a basic level of morality, a bare minimum, which is entirely negative, and without this bare minimum as a foundation no morality directed towards the greater goods can be applicable and can survive in practice.”<sup>42</sup> Prohibitions, or, at least, limitations on murder, destruction of life, imprisonment, enslavement, starvation, poverty, physical pain, torture, and homelessness are necessary to any version of a morally good life, while virtues like courage, justice, friendship, and intelligence are generic virtues common to most morally decent ways of life. Within these limits, however, Hampshire argues that human potentialities for creating morally valid or authentic ways of life are vast, if not infinite. He writes that:

diversity in conceptions of the good is an irreducible diversity, not only because no sufficient reasons have been given, and could ever be given, for taking one end, such as the general happiness or the exercise of reason, as the single supreme end; but also because the capacity to develop idiosyncrasies of style and of imagination, and to form specific conceptions of the good, is the salient and peculiar capacity of human beings among other animals.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hampshire, *Morality and Conflict*, 1

<sup>42</sup> Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 72.

<sup>43</sup> Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 118.

That is to say, it is this specific kind of pluralism, which develops from the use of imagination connected with the diversity of natural languages and the underdetermined nature of our use of such languages, that is the *differentia* between human beings and other natural things.<sup>44</sup>

### B. Political Theory

Hampshire's political theory is directly related to his moral theory, though it is not overly elaborate or complex.<sup>45</sup> On the one hand, Hampshire's moral pluralism leads him to offer a modus vivendi theory of political life, which stresses the centrality of impartial and fair procedures of justice as central to the morality of any political community, while, on the other, his pluralism leads him to make a sharp distinction between the morality appropriate for private citizens and the public morality appropriate to those in positions of authority who are responsible for the well-being of others.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hampshire writes that "the essence of humanity, in the sense of the principal salient distinguishing characteristic, is precisely a perpetual openness to new ways of life, to new forms of thought, to innovations in language and in social arrangements." Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 30

<sup>45</sup> Hampshire's particular political commitments (he is, or was, a socialist) are naïve and uninteresting, except for the fact that they seem to be in direct conflict with his moral pluralism. At least, however, he admits that they have no rational connection to his moral theorizing. He writes that "since 1970, I had been convinced that it was a mistake to look for a moral theory or a set of propositions that could serve as a justification, or foundation, of my political loyalties and opinions, which were, and which remain, the opinions of a democratic socialist." Hampshire, *Justice is Conflict*, ix.

<sup>46</sup> Modus vivendi pluralists generally claim that there is no single political theory that can be deduced from a theory of moral pluralism. The most that can be expected is that citizens consider the political community as a means to peaceful coexistence. Whatever beliefs, values, commitments, or institutions lead to (relatively) peaceful coexistence constitute the modus vivendi of any particular political community. Liberal values and institutions (e.g. negative liberty manifested in freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of conscience, private property rights, etc.) are not a necessary part of every version of a good human life, and, thus, are not a necessary part of any political modus vivendi. Other modus vivendi pluralists include John Gray, George Crowder, Glen Newey, and John Kekes, though both Crowder and Kekes seem to have changed their position in recent publications. See John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism* (New York: The New Press, 2000), George Crowder, "Pluralism and Liberalism," *Political Studies* 42 (1994) 293-305; Glen Newey, "Value-Pluralism in Contemporary Liberalism," *Dialogue* 37 (1998) 493-522; and John Kekes, *The Morality of Pluralism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). For a more extended discussion and critique of modus vivendi pluralism, see Kenneth B. McIntyre, *Nomocratic Pluralism: Plural Values, Negative Liberty, and the Rule of Law* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) 99-130.

Since, according to Hampshire, there are multiple, various, and inevitably plural conceptions of the good (i.e. diverse ways of life for groups and individuals), there will necessarily be conflict between these diverse ways of conceiving of the good life for human beings. He notes that “neither in a social order, nor in the experience of an individual, is a state of conflict the sign of a vice, or a defect, or a malfunctioning.”<sup>47</sup> So, how do we deal with such conflicts in the public realm (individuals can deal with internal conflicts themselves, we hope)? Hampshire argues that the lack of agreement on any single telos or purpose or substantial conception of good (including substantial conceptions of justice) means that the only shared sense that can be expected of people is an abstract and universal conception of justice as procedural fairness. He maintains that “fairness in procedures for resolving conflicts is the fundamental kind of fairness...: fairness in procedure is an invariable value, a constant in human nature.”<sup>48</sup> So, the ‘purpose’ of political community is to provide an arena of relatively peaceful coexistence, not cooperation, in which conflicts between the various desires, beliefs, intentions, actions, and ways of life of the individuals and groups that constitute the community can be settled without resorting to force, violence, or domination.

The public virtue that holds the community together is a commitment to justice, which is understood in purely procedural terms. Hampshire claims that justice “refers to a regular and reasonable procedure of weighing claims and counter-claims.”<sup>49</sup> Hampshire connects justice with the universal or intellectual sort of human thinking, and insists that it is limited to the commitment to have fair hearings to discuss and decide conflicts, which are connected to the

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<sup>47</sup> Hampshire, *Justice is Conflict*, 34.

<sup>48</sup> Hampshire, *Justice is Conflict*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 63.

various particular ways of life created by the human imagination, which deals with the specific and unique. The state or political community, for Hampshire, is understood as an area in which individuals can pursue their own particular and specific ends for their own particular and specific reasons. The state will not be asked to make conflicts between rival ways of life disappear, since, as we have seen, conflicts among values are an inherent part of the human condition. Instead, the state or government will necessarily involve a permanent institutional means of resolving particular conflicts, i.e. an adjudication function. Hampshire states that “any organized society requires an institution and also a procedure for adjudicating between conflicting moral claims advanced by individuals and groups within a society.”<sup>50</sup> This adjudication function will also involve a permanent institutional means of considering and authorizing rules which condition individuals’ and groups’ pursuit of their values, i.e. a legislative function. As Hampshire notes, “there needs to be a council or cabinet...who discuss the various policy options among which a choice has to be made.”<sup>51</sup> And it might, though not necessarily, involve a permanent institutional means of enforcing the various laws that have been authorized by the legislative institution, i.e. an executive function. Hampshire doesn’t discuss the institutional shape or shapes in which these functions might manifest themselves, but does insist that the justice as fairness, which is embodied in these functions, must have some sort of institutional manifestation and that its manifestation will necessarily depend on the particular history of any particular political community. Hampshire also does not insist that the institutions of justice

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<sup>50</sup> Hampshire, *Justice is Conflict*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Hampshire, *Justice is Conflict*, 8.



need to be authorized in any particular way (i.e. the institutions of justice do not require democratic authorization or any other specific authorization procedure).

Hampshire's political theory is quite modest and deflationary, especially when compared to the grand systems of Hegel or Marx, or, more recently, of Hayek or Rawls. However, his modus vivendi pluralism is not Hampshire's only contribution to political theory. Drawing on his distinction between universal and particular moral duties and responsibilities, Hampshire also makes a sharp distinction between the private morality of citizens and public morality of officials in positions of authority. Hampshire's position has been called by some 'Heraclitean Realism',<sup>52</sup> and Hampshire does defend it in terms of its realist account of what human beings normally expect out of their governments or rulers. Hampshire also attributes the originality of this idea to Machiavelli, and claims that Machiavelli was the first thinker to confront seriously the conflict between the virtues of statesmen and political leaders (e.g. "courage, decisiveness, clear-headedness, energy, the capacity to inspire respect and also fear, single-mindedness in the pursuit of power"), and the virtues of normal people (e.g. "gentleness, and disposition to foster friendships, and the habit of always being just and fair").<sup>53</sup> These are, for Hampshire, two distinct and incompatible ways of life that contain very different conceptions of the good and just.

However, since governments are necessary in order to prevent the destruction of the very possibility of good or flourishing human lives, some human beings will necessarily be engaged

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<sup>52</sup> Demetris Tillyris defines 'Heraclitean Realism' as the notion that "public virtue and integrity are incompatible with moral integrity; a virtuous public life is intertwined with the occasional practice of certain moral vices." Demetris Tillyris, "Political Realism and Dirty Hands: Value Pluralism, Moral Conflict, and Public Ethics," *Philosophia* 47 (2019) 1582, 1599.

<sup>53</sup> Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 166.

in a morality different than that of private citizens. Heads of state have duties to be impartial to their own citizens in framing policies that affect those citizens and resolving conflicts between those citizens, but the citizens themselves do not have such duties. For Hampshire, the procedural justice that the government owes its citizens is defined, in part, in terms of its impartiality. On the other hand, since heads of state are in some ways responsible for the welfare of their citizens, they have duties to be partial in favor of their own citizens, and these duties of protection often involve acting in ways that would be considered immoral if engaged in by private citizens. As Hampshire observes, “public policies are rightly judged by their consequences, not by the intrinsic quality of the acts involved in their execution, which, when considered separately, are often unacceptable in the light of the moral standards of private life.”<sup>54</sup> It is perfectly reasonable for a head of state to consider the interests of the citizens of his state as overriding the interests or even ‘rights’ of aliens, legal or illegal, resident or non-resident. For example, it is commonly accepted that Truman decided to drop the atomic bomb on the Japanese because he wanted to save American lives (I won’t deal with the notion that he also wanted to frighten the Soviets, though it is likely true). It is eminently reasonable for an American president to think about such situations in consequentialist terms and to reject impartial consideration of the consequences, and thus to act as if saving American lives is more important than saving Japanese lives.<sup>55</sup> Of course, the distinction between private and public morality does not justify those in positions of authority doing anything that they wish, but it does involve a different set of standards by which to judge them. Hampshire is not completely clear about these

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<sup>54</sup> Hampshire, “Public and Private Morality,” 50.

<sup>55</sup> Of course, Truman could have withdrawn the demand for unconditional surrender and negotiated a peace treaty with the Japanese, and that might have saved the lives of both Americans and Japanese. It is unlikely that that would have been a satisfactory political solution, but that raises questions of a different sort.

standards, but his reluctance to offer a set of them certainly coheres with his rejection of systematic, Enlightenment-style, monistic moral theories of any sort.

### **Conclusion**

For Hampshire, human beings think in a particular language, which conditions the categories of a particular person's thoughts without determining them. In that language, we perceive the world; we reflect on our perceptions; we form beliefs about the world, though not all are completely conscious beliefs; and we form desires and intentions based on those beliefs sometimes. Insofar as our intentions and capacities to act match the world then we are mentally or intellectually free. However, because of our distinctive particular languages and experiences, we also live in a world in which conflict between desires, beliefs, and ways of life is ineluctable. For Hampshire, this means not that we should repine over a lost harmony that never was and can never be, but, instead accept our situation as "the best condition of mankind from the moral point of view."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 189.