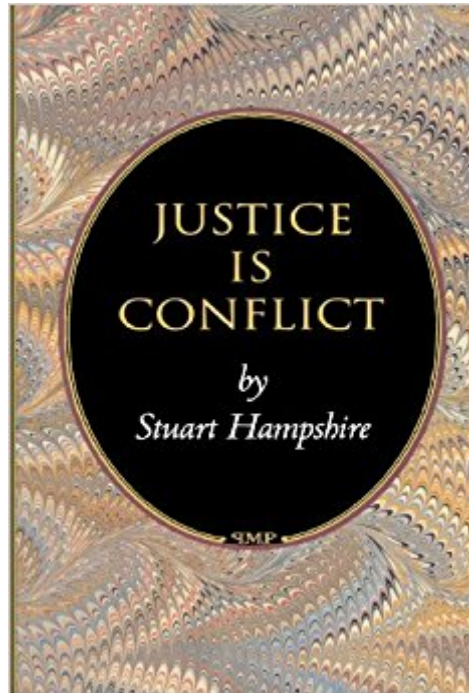




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Justice Is Conflict.



Synopsis

This book, which inaugurates the Princeton Monographs in Philosophy series, starts from Plato's analogy in the Republic between conflict in the soul and conflict in the city. Plato's solution required reason to impose agreement and harmony on the warring passions, and this search for harmony and agreement constitutes the main tradition in political philosophy up to and including contemporary liberal theory. Hampshire undermines this tradition by developing a distinction between justice in procedures, which demands that both sides in a conflict should be heard, and justice in matters of substance, which will always be disputed. Rationality in private thinking consists in adversary reasoning, and so it does in public affairs. Moral conflict is eternal, and institutionalized argument is its only universally acceptable restraint and the only alternative to tyranny. In the chapter "Against Monotheism," Hampshire argues that monotheistic beliefs are only with difficulty made compatible with pluralism in ethics. In "Conflict and Conflict Resolution," he argues that socialism, seen as the proposal of extended political solutions for natural human ills, is still a relevant, yet strongly contested, ideal.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Like the superb book "A Darwinian Left" by Peter Singer, this is a marvelous discourse on one of the fundamental principles of our society -- for anyone who wonders about the meaning of life, both are fascinating excursions into the realm of new thought. This book is founded on an image out of the Middle Ages -- when two men, wrapped from head to toe in gleaming steel, carrying wicked lances,

mounted on massive horses, charged full speed at each other to settle disputes about truth and justice in the confrontational medieval way. That, in essence, is the basis of 'Justice is Conflict.' It's been the basis of Anglo-Saxon justice for at least a millennia, and for unknown hundreds of years before that. It's far from the idea that "might is right," instead it embodies that God is on the side of the just. Movies always depict it in that manner. From the meekest knight to the American fictional cowboy with a six-gun on his hip, justice always triumphs. It's a confrontational system of justice based on combat, as explained by Thomas Jefferson when he said he was not afraid to tolerate error "so long as reason is left free to combat it." The key word is "combat." Today, when lawyers challenge each other in court battles, they are staging a ritual re-enactment of those old jousts. In contrast, the Navajo spirit of K'e emphasizes a consensus system of justice. The goal is not that God can be counted on to favor the just; instead, it is a search to find truth and thus assess blame properly. There's usually no clear "Guilty" and "Innocent" verdict; instead, blame is assessed on a proportional basis. In other words, even if you are guilty, perhaps you are only 90 percent guilty. Perhaps the other person did contribute somewhat to the problem.

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