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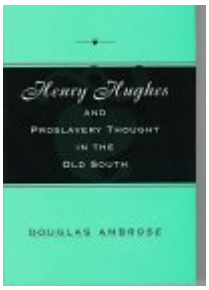

Douglas Ambrose. *Henry Hughes and Proslavery Thought in the Old South.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996. xiv + 226. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2080-4.

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Henry Hughes (1829-62), Douglas Ambrose shows in this study, is at the very least a reminder that there was intellectual life in the antebellum South beyond Charleston and piedmont Virginia. Of the intellectuals who mounted a defense of the "peculiar institution," Henry Hughes is notable for his attempt to utilize social science to justify slavery as an ideal condition of society in the broadest possible terms, going so far as to invent new terms, "warrantor and warrantee," for slaveholder and slave respectively. In this study of Hughes's contribution to southern social theory, Douglas Ambrose is intent on highlighting Hughes's proslavery thought as the leading voice of a subsidiary inclination among southern intellectuals toward the modern authoritarian state. Hughes, Ambrose concludes, was not only the "most forceful and comprehensive expression" (p. 7) of the antebellum South's alternative to a social vision based on freedom and equality, but one rooted in an authoritarian state that regulated and controlled all aspects of social activity, including the appropriation of the labor of some human beings by others. Ambrose, confirming Bertram Wyatt-Brown's judgment, finds Hughes to be the "foremost proponent of statism in the antebellum South" (p. 5), one who fundamentally rejected the hegemony of the market and the liberal individualism that undergirded it.

The son of a factor in Port Gibson, Mississippi, Hughes graduated from Oakland College in 1847 and studied law through which, he was convinced, he was destined to become "the greatest mortal man that can be" (p. 50). His weekly diary (1848-53) reveals his persistent sophomoric messianism: "I am by God set apart ... for my fellow being's happiness. I am to be the Greatest Mortal Man that can be ... I am God's implement to reveal the philosophy of the human Mind ... to reform legislation; to reveal perfect politics ... to be the leader, and beloved of the World" (p. 50). Unfortunately for Hughes, legal practice brought no quick occasions for glory or the demonstration of his God-marked genius. Hughes looked for other avenues. Journalism proved unavailing. Technology fascinated him and led to several inventions (a type-setter, a cotton-press) but failed to quench his thirst for glory. A voracious reader, he proposed "to make the whole circuit of human knowledge" and transform that into an intellectual power that could reform society (p. 53). Francis Bacon, Auguste Comte, Comte de Saint Simon, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Charles Fourier, and Thomas Carlyle were all vital sources of the social vision he began to develop for his society. Carlyle inspired his conviction of the self as political savior; Comte provided the format for achieving social perfection; Fourier showed him that human perfectibility could be realized only through a reorganization of society that replaced the atomistic individualism of contemporary civilization with an organic, interdependently structured order.

In 1854, Hughes embarked on a European tour. Ambrose speculates that that experience perhaps provided the exposure to ideas on social organization that provided him with an intellectual framework for a social blueprint for modern society and, more specifically, the South. Actually Hughes had done his reading before reaching Europe; it is likely that the writing of his *Treatise on Sociology: Theoretical and Practical* was done there or at least begun. It appeared in print just months after his return. In it, he explicated a unique social order that had emerged in the South that represented the extant high point of social progress and set the mark toward which all societies should aspire. At the heart of any just society is one that is fundamentally ordered: "The essence of power is orderliness" (p. 75). This meant, for Hughes, that individual freedom must be subordinated to social duty. It also meant that inequality and hierarchy are essential characteristics of a proper society. And it meant that the sovereign power rests in the state to ensure order. Among the seven systems (economic, political, hygienic, philosophic [i.e. educational] aesthetical, ethical, and religious) that Hughes saw encompassing society, the first five needed to be controlled by the state to ensure that progress would follow.

Hughes had once written, "The relations of land-lord & tenant is as sinful as that [of] master & slave. Both relations shall be abolished; but not to the hurt of the South" (p. 67). In the *Treatise* he attempted, as Ambrose observes, "to defend the basic principles of the southern social order while simultaneously advocating major reform that would place it on a … theoretically sound foundation" (p. 81). Of course in doing so, as Ambrose notes, he was articulating a social order that in many ways was radically different from the one in which southerners lived. Hughes basically replaced the essence of slavery, one person's ownership of another, with a new relation based on state mandate. The primary prerequisite in society is universal subsistence. The state needs to do whatever will provide that, including the disposition of some individuals to the service of others. Indeed, this social inequality is the only way in which universal subsistence can be assured. In Hughes's view, free labor is a recipe for the inevitable starvation of some. Only state-enforced labor relations could guarantee subsistence. These relations he labeled warranteeism; those who hold others in service are warrantors. Both warrantors and warrantees hold their positions by virtue of the power of the state; property rights have nothing to do with the arrangement. If slavery is a system in which the slave has no rights and the master has total control over his property, warranteeism preserves the limited rights of both. So Hughes could write, "The warranted economic system of the United States South, is not slavery … the simple-laborer in that system is not a slave.… He has essentially all his rights" (p. 86). Under warranteeism, unlike slavery, the state regulated the relations between warrantor and warrantee in which each had mutual obligations and benefits. As Ambrose notes, the picture of the "warrantor" that the *Treatise* depicts is a contradictory one in which he is both dutiful state agent and benevolent paternalist. Nonetheless, in Hughes's scheme, warranteeism not only made impossible the outrages of slavery Harriet Beecher Stowe was trumpeting in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but it also "provided for a rational, efficient, and orderly system of social relations based on and guided by a responsible state" (p. 116).

In comparing the plantation-centered household of the South with its free labor counterpart of the North, Hughes argued (as did George Fitzhugh even more rigorously in his *Sociology for the South* that appeared in the same year) that the southern one was inherently superior precisely because of its ability, due to its integration within the warrantee system, to provide for all, something which the free labor household could not match, dependent as it was on a capitalism not integrally committed to the household. The free laborer's wage was not determined by the needs of the family but by the impersonal market. Conveniently, Hughes ignored the extent to which the plantation economy was thoroughly involved in the market.

By Hughes's logic, all those who labor should be warrantees or charges of others. This was a logic that Hughes's racism did not allow him to pursue. Because of the peculiar racial composition of southern society, warranteeism there had an "ethnical qualification" (p. 108). Elsewhere, pure warranteeism could obtain, but not in the biracial South. To have allowed whites as well as blacks as warrantees would have been to promote miscegenation and violate natural law as well as assure the mutual decline of the races.

The *Treatise*, although welcomed in Southern circles as another forthright defense of slavery, had little impact. Few read it; even fewer considered it on its own terms. Nonetheless, Hughes became active in Democratic politics as well as the movement to revitalize the South that the southern commercial conventions of the late 1850s represented. Among the reforms that Hughes championed was the reopening of the slave trade. Convinced that northern economic inequity would in the near fu-

ture provoke class conflict, Hughes in a series of newspaper articles urged that the South needed to protect itself through an expansion of slavery (warranteeism) by obtaining new slaves from abroad. Otherwise, the South would be vulnerable to a growing political power of a North desperate to exploit the South to stave off its own internal social discontents. In other words, more slaves would mean more representation in the federal government, which would mean more national power to counteract the North's dark designs.

In his post-*Treatise* articles, Hughes filled in his conception of a social order in which individuals would act "as they ought" according to that which the state, through science, determined to be proper (p. 180). He underscored the need to apply scientific methods to the study and solution of social problems. This would involve a greatly enlarged bureaucracy, but only thus would efficiently informed state agencies be able to perform their roles responsibly. The state would thus oversee society and administer it according to the dictates of science.

When the war came, Hughes enlisted, formed his own Mississippi battalion, went to Virginia, and died of war-related illness in 1862. Ambrose sees the war providing the environment for the fulfillment, or at least partial realization, of his vision that had seemed irrelevant in the antebellum South. Ambrose is referring to the vast expansion of state authority in the Confederate republic, which "constructed one of if not the largest nationally operated economies in the world" to that time. "Hughes's ideas," Ambrose concludes, "might well have found a more receptive audience in such a society that, although unaware of him, had adopted many of his fundamental notions of social organization and development" (p. 187). But that republic, of course, oversaw the destruction of the heart of Hughes's society, the slave/warrantee system that by the time of Hughes's death was already not "progressing" to a higher form but withering away under the pressures of war.

A primary difficulty in studying Hughes is the paucity of sources. All his papers, with the exception of the five year diary and some newspaper clippings, were destroyed. His publications, *The Treatise* and newspaper/journal articles, were all written within a six year period. Indeed, more than a third of this book is a commentary on the *Treatise*. There is consequently much repetition and a certain amount of speculation, but Ambrose has made a noteworthy contribution to our understanding of southern antebellum social thought by examining Hughes's distinctive theory within its broad intellectual and social contours.

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