

Randolph Hughes's Religion: Anti-Christianity and the Cult of Beauty

Gregory Melleuish

University of Wollongong

This paper deals with the religious beliefs of Randolph Hughes, an Australian literary figure of the first half of the twentieth century. A student of Christopher Brennan, Hughes violently rejected Christianity and adopted his own philosophical/aesthetic religion based on the primacy of creativity. His religious beliefs led him to support Nazism during the 1930s. This paper examines his religious ideals, his criticisms of Christianity and the connections between those ideas and his view of the nature of European civilisation. It concludes that his attempts to find a substitute for Christianity in a religion of beauty led Hughes to a narrow and intolerant dogmatism that could be described as fundamentalist in nature.

Randolph Hughes was a man who violently rejected Christianity and whose intellectual and spiritual orientation was defined by that rejection. He called himself a religious and spiritual man and he advocated a form of religion grounded in an aesthetic doctrine that saw the road to God through beauty. He was led to hail Hitler and Nazism as the vehicles of the spiritual renewal of a Europe that would embody Hughes's religious principles. Nevertheless Hughes found himself in a world of Christians and constantly sought to define himself in opposition to their beliefs and values. In 1933 he accepted a proposal from the Reverend Walter Matthews, theologian and future Dean of St Pauls, that together they produce a statement containing both the Christian and anti-Christian points of view, though the project never eventuated (Hughes to Walter Matthews, 30 April 1933, Papers, 10: 3). Hughes had many Christian correspondents with whom he both fought and insulted. Hughes's intellectual and spiritual life was a constant battle against a Christianity that continued to fascinate him even as he swore eternal enmity to it. This paper is a contribution towards understanding an individual who clearly saw himself as a religious man and who sought to define the meaning of religion in terms that were non-Christian and largely aesthetic and aristocratic in nature. This position led him to what might be termed the 'fascist temptation'. To understand this process it will examine firstly Hughes's life, as many of his ideas have their roots in his personal circumstances,

followed by a consideration of his opposition to Christianity and an examination of what he believed to be true religion.

Life History

Hughes is best remembered (Melleuish, 1996a: 513–4) as a literary figure who wrote the first major study of the poet Christopher Brennan, edited two works of Swinburne and wrote widely on nineteenth century French and English poetry (Hughes 1934, 1942, 1952). He was born and educated in Australia but left to fight in the Middle East in 1915 and never returned. His early years are difficult to reconstruct. He was apparently brought up as a Congregationalist and he maintained a correspondence with his childhood friend, the Reverend Bernard Cockett, for most of his life. He appears in A. R. Chisholm's memoirs as an excitable Romantic young man who looked upon Australia as 'place of exile' and who 'usually wore gloves and carried a cane' (Chisholm, 1958: 59). In a letter late in life he stated that he would have attended Winchester school in England had not the family fortune been destroyed in the Depression of the 1890s (Hughes to Guy Howarth, 9 August 1949, Papers, 34: 189). According to Chisholm, Hughes attached himself to the poet Christopher Brennan and he remained a lifelong disciple of Brennan (Chisholm, 1958: 60).

At the University of Sydney he was part of that extraordinary generation that emerged just prior to World War 1, a generation that was saturated in Romantic ideals that were both Christian and classical in origin, ideals which can be found expressed, for example, in the pages of the University of Sydney magazine *Hermes*. Consider the following specimen of Hughes' poetry (Hughes, 1912):

'Will any light be shed in any place
Upon me of thy amorous perfect face?
Will anywhere again my passion's drouth
Be Saturate with kisses of thy mouth?

After World War 1 Hughes took a first class honours degree at Oxford. He taught at French universities, including the famous Ecole Normale Supérieure, before taking up a lectureship at Kings College, the University of London. At some point during these years, probably when he was studying at Oxford, he underwent some sort of nervous breakdown (Hughes to Netterville Barron, 16 February 1930, Papers, 7: 325–339). After an acrimonious dispute Hughes left his academic position in the mid 1930s, railing against the Jewish Principal of King's College William Halliday (see Hughes to Guy Hamilton, 12 February 1941, Papers 7: 373). He hoped to become a free-lance writer; he survived by marking examinations. He was swept up in the maelstrom of the 1930s, attending the 1936 Nuremberg Rally, writing in support of Nazi Germany while condemning democracy and the Third French Republic and extending his intellectual networks to include major figures in the Action Française. All the time he continued his literary work on Mallarmé, Baudelaire and Swinburne, publishing in both English and French journals. Nevertheless he wanted to be considered a creative writer and spent much of the early 1940s at work on an

unpublished novel 'Lost Eurydice' that is perhaps most remarkable for its concern with both sex and violence (Hughes Papers, vol. 43). He felt frustrated and believed that he had not fulfilled his creative potential.

The above sketch indicates that Hughes was a complex character. From an early age he felt at odds with the society around him, pursued Romantic ideals and was disillusioned when the world evaded those ideals. He clearly felt that he was destined for better things than had been granted to him and this led to a bitterness and a tendency to fight with those around him. Emotionally unstable and increasingly physically unwell, his main objective in life seemed to be to justify himself and his work. He needed to see himself as an aristocratic figure superior to the democratic Australia in which he had grown up and to define himself as both a 'High Tory' and the heir to a great tradition of spiritual insight (Hughes to Delebecque, 8 December, 1935, Papers, 19: 29). Hughes instinctively came to view himself as a genuinely spiritual and religious man seeking to defend civilisation, civilised values and an aristocratic ideal of creativity and spiritual achievement against those forces that threatened to destroy them.

Central Influences

The major intellectual influences on Hughes emphasised the importance of European high culture and the need for an aristocratic outlook on life. In part this came from Brennan and Brennan's views on Romanticism and Symbolist poetry, but this is, as John Docker (1974) has pointed out, very much a Sydney intellectual tradition. Roslyn Pesman Cooper (1989) has correctly traced the source of much intellectual sympathy for Fascism in Australia to the circle that formed around Brennan in the early 1920s. Although Hughes was not a member of that circle his good friend Alan Chisholm was. In his vision of the creative artist, Hughes also resembles the Norman Lindsay of *Creative Effort* who wrote that 'one thing alone in existence is manifest, permanent, indestructible, and that is the individual effort to create thought and beauty' (1924: 16). Hughes had strong links with both Lionel Lindsay and Norman's communist son, Jack (Hawke, 2000). It is clear that Hughes's aristocratic vision was born in an Australia dedicated to 'democracy' and unsure of how to respond to those who claimed the privilege of creativity. In Hughes's case this was no doubt intensified by the fear that he perhaps did not really possess creative gifts.

This passionate desire to destroy Christianity as the antithesis of the traditions of European civilisation can in part be seen as the desire of an 'aristocrat', unsure of his genuine superiority, to have his revenge on democracy. It led Hughes to look upon Nazi Germany as the great hope that would restore Europe to its true pre-Christian ideals. It is the starting point for an understanding of Hughes's religious outlook.

What I should like to do now is to examine Hughes's criticisms of Christianity, and then consider Hughes's view of the nature of true spiritual religion. To do this it is necessary to make extensive use of Hughes's unpublished correspondence. Here can be found letters that are often mini-essays on a range of political, aesthetic and religious topics.

Hughes' Anti-Christianity

In a letter to Nesta Webster Hughes claimed that his objections to Christianity were ethical and metaphysical, but he also had another set of objections that may best be described as the impact of Christian values on European civilisation. The basis of his ethical objections to Christianity was his view that the doctrine of atonement and the idea of vicarious redemption, which he described as the 'central and essential doctrine' of Christianity, 'cuts away at the very foundation of the truly moral life' (Hughes to Nesta Webster, 12 September, 1938, Papers, 24: 53). Against this Christian doctrine Hughes held to an essentially classical set of virtues with courage, independence and the capacity of not needing to rely on external support as the primary values. 'For me', claimed Hughes 'the only true moral progress lies in accepting fully the consequences of one's actions, in making one's own way towards what one recognises as Perfection'. Hughes believed that Christianity undermined this imperative that individuals take full responsibility for their actions and was therefore ethically pernicious. For him the 'only salvation worth having ... is that which one wins for oneself' (Hughes to Jacques Delebecque, 29 April, 1936, Papers, 19: 67). If the primary values are courage and independence then the Christian values of 'meekness and humility' are to be despised rather than admired. Hughes invoked the idea of Nietzsche that Christianity leads to the creation of a 'slave morality'.

Hughes also found the figure of Christ unattractive. His friend Alan Chisholm, a non-believer sympathetic to Christianity, wrote to him in 1946 claiming that 'in the actual teaching of Christ there was something of enduring value', invoking 'real Christian values' and expressing a sympathy for the writings of Kirkegaard (Chisholm to Hughes, 12 February, 1946, Papers, 4: 526- 527). Hughes's response was contemptuous. He declared that the figure of Christ was 'alien and antipathetic' and continued that he could not respect Christ. Stating that his two tests for greatness were intellectual power and the spiritual power able to create beauty he proclaimed that Christ was 'noteless to the point of being a nullity' and 'mindless' (Hughes to Chisholm, 1 May 1946, Papers, 4: 541).

Creativity, power and a positive outlook were the primary values for Hughes, and these stood in stark contrast to the Christian emphasis on humility and self-denial. He saw the Sermon on the Mount as an abdication of virility and the creative faculties. In particular he savagely attacked the Christian condemnation of pride. Writing to Edwyn Bevan, committed Christian and historian of the Hellenistic age, he argued that pride was the basis of all that was worthwhile in life, including courage, higher morality, passionate love, enrichment of the imagination and the supreme things in music, literature and artistic activity (Hughes to Bevan, 20 October, 1937, Papers, 7: 177, 179). Hughes's specific targets were Paul and Augustine because they condemned pride. In a review of Rebecca West's book on Augustine, he characterised Augustine as morbid and pathological, 'almost insane' in his fear of beauty, and continued by saying that the same feeling is strong in St. Paul. This aversion to beauty had, Hughes contended, made 'its appearance frequently as a

poisoning force in European thought'. Hughes used this opportunity to express his view of the relationship between beauty and religion. He claimed that 'in the artistic beauty of the singing there is far more religion than in the mere meaning of the words; that all true art is ultimately religion, and religion in the highest'. Augustine, he concluded, was 'one of the sorriest figures in history' (Hughes, 1933: 617). In its pernicious effects on true religion and European civilisation, Christianity for Hughes, as we shall see, was not a force for good.

Hughes considered that Christianity's negative moral values had had other baneful consequences. He believed that Christianity had led men to develop an obsession with self, to deny life in the practice of chastity and neglect their family, social and political duties, their duties as citizens. 'A Christian', claimed Hughes 'cannot be a good citizen' (Hughes to Bevan, 20 October 1937, Papers, 7:179). This argument, so reminiscent of Machiavelli (1970:278) and Rousseau (1968: 108–115), derives from classical republicanism and is again essentially an attack on Christian universalism in the name of the virtues of classical paganism. In summary, Hughes opposed Christianity on ethical grounds because what he saw as its central values of humility and meekness stood in stark opposition to those classical values of courage, creativity and individual responsibility that he held dear. One can see a Nietzschean element in this opposition, as in Hughes's affirmation of the value of pride as something world-affirming, but as in the arguments regarding citizenship it is possible to see a much longer tradition of classical opposition to Christian values. Unlike Norman Lindsay, Hughes did not invoke Nietzsche as a primary weapon against Christianity. He did not believe either that God was dead or that the modern age had killed Him (Girard, 1984). Rather he considered that men like himself were helping to give birth to God through their creative efforts. Hughes was reverting to a much older tension within European civilisation between Christianity and Graeco-Roman classicism, between magnanimity and humility. As Pierre Manent has put it, 'Magnanimity despises humility and humility humiliates magnanimity, as it did at Canossa' (Manent, 1998: 25).

In terms of his metaphysical critique of Christianity, Hughes was quite blunt. He accepted that there is a deity and a world of the spirit, and claimed to 'care supremely for this spiritual world' (Hughes to Bevan, 9 August 1929, Papers, 7:13). He simply believed that the addition of Christ adds nothing to that world. The dogmas of Christianity are neither true nor necessary; there was no need for Christ's intervention in the world. He claimed that 'To introduce Christ is completely unnecessary and gratuitous' (Hughes to Jacques Delebecque, 29 April 1936, Papers, 19:69). Writing to Bevan he said that 'if the dogma and ritual of Christianity were held to be simply symbolical of certain facts of our inner and deepest life, they would not be unacceptable' (Hughes to Bevan, 9 August 1929, Papers, 7:15). At a more fundamental level Hughes could not accept the idea of an omnipotent perfect deity. For Hughes, God was not complete or perfect but 'precariously' on His way 'towards perfection and fullness of power' (Hughes to Walter Matthews, Hughes Papers, 10:53).

God was moving towards the goal of omnipotence but needed to be helped on His way, and man had a role to play in this process of completing God. Commenting on Bousset's philosophy of history, Hughes claimed that the idea of an omnipotent God acting through history led to fatalism and determinism and was difficult to reconcile with the moral imperative of human responsibility (Hughes to Jacques Delebecque, 9 October 1938, Papers, 19:283). Only a God proceeding towards perfection could resolve that problem for Hughes and his position on this question will be considered later in the paper.

Christianity and European civilisation

In general, however, Hughes's real objections to Christianity focused on the damaging impact that he believed it had had on European civilisation. For Hughes, Christianity was opposed to the development of the true European Spirit; what was best in European civilisation was pre-Christian in origin (Hughes to Chisholm, 1 May 1946, Papers, 4:539). Hence he could speak of 'that Graeco-Roman and later European culture whence England derives the most precious elements of her spiritual life' (Hughes to Lindfield, 6 December 1936, Papers, 14:415). Hughes set up a dichotomy between Graeco-Roman civilisation and its positive values of creativity and spirituality and the enemies of those values which included Democracy, Jewry, Christianity and America. Opposing Christianity meant opposing democracy because 'democracy is indeed the Christian polity par excellence' (Hughes to Jacques Delebecque, 5 February 1940, Papers, 19:439). And in his later years it meant a violent anti-Americanism, including the hope that the Russians would bomb America - 'this Caliban among nations' - out of existence (Hughes to Chisholm, 10 December 1945, Papers, 4:509).

In the 1930s, however, Hughes's defence of what he saw as the virtues of European civilisation meant anti-semitism, anti-Christianity and support for Hitler and the Nazi regime in Germany. Hughes argued that both Christianity and Judaism were alien to European civilisation and had invaded Graeco-Roman civilisation, corrupting and weakening it (Hughes to Bernard Cockett, 13 June 1945, Papers, 10:389). He followed the argument developed by the French thinker, and founder of the Action Française, Charles Maurras, that the Jews were essentially 'Oriental' and 'alien' to Europeans, that they were 'parasitic' and 'not creative'. In a letter to Maurras in 1937 he wrote that '*le génie juif, par exemple, lequel, étant de sa vraie nature orientale ... n'est pas assimilable par une civilisation telle que la nôtre*' (the Jewish genius, being in its true nature oriental, cannot be assimilated by our civilisation) (Hughes to Maurras, 26 March 1937, Papers, 25:7). Christianity, for Hughes, was no more than a continuation of Judaism, an 'extension of this Oriental creed which is repugnant to my instincts as well as to my thinking self' (Hughes to Nesta Webster, 12 September 1938, Papers, 24:53). Hughes believed that Christianity was 'the greatest evil against which what is best in civilization has to contend' (Hughes to Carl Kaepfel, 17 November 1937, Papers, 9:293). European civilisation for him could only be

defined in classical Graeco-Roman terms; Judaism and Christianity were its oriental antithesis. This was an extension of the Maurassian critique of Judaism (Sutton, 1982), although Maurras limited the Semitic influence in Christianity to Protestantism; for him Catholicism had a strong classical core. Hughes happily included Catholics as part of what he saw as a harmful oriental infection.

If Christianity, for Hughes was 'an alien, disturbing and deteriorative force irruptive into the true elements of this civilization', then it was necessary to expel these parasitic, oriental values in favour of true life-affirming religious values (Hughes to Chisholm, 1 May 1946, Papers, 4:539). This meant support for Hitler. Hughes expressed the view that Hitler was getting rid of Christian and Jewish values from the German state (Hughes to Gilbert Murray, 1 September 1937, Papers, 3:3). Nazi Germany was, for Hughes, an affirmation of the true spiritual values of European civilisation. Having completed a quick tour of Germany and attended the 1936 Nuremberg rally, Hughes returned to England full of admiration for the new Nazi order. In a pamphlet he wrote entitled *The New Germany* (1936: 1–2, 18), he described Germany as a country that 'in the truest sense of the word was a nation; a living whole of concordant wills; a people regenerate and restored, physically and morally sound, and set firmly and resolutely on the way towards grandiose masteries and achievements'. He spoke rapturously of the rally he had attended and reacted to the experience aesthetically, 'the whole effect was faery, and seemed to be not of things of this earth'. Hughes was disappointed by the fact that many of the anti-Christians in England were on the Left. Pro-Nazis, he lamented, tended to be Christians (Hughes to Jacques Delebecque, 15 March 1938, Papers, 19:243).

For Hughes, however, Nazi Germany was important because it was anti-semitic and anti-Christian. Hughes also believed that the Nazi regime had much in common with the ancient Greeks, for Hughes the source of European civilisation. Writing to Edwyn Bevan he claimed that 'Aristotle's view of the individual to the state was singularly like that which has been enforced in Germany; and Plato took in a large degree the Greek counterpart of Nazi Germany as the model for his ideal Republic' (Hughes to Bevan, 15 June 1940, Papers, 7:333). Regimentation and order were not alien to the Greeks, and Hughes argued that the famous Melian oration in Thucydides was Hitlerism raised to the ninth power. For Hughes the Nazis were the true modern heirs of the Greek heritage, even down to the cruelty and harshness of the Nazi regime. There was much, contended Hughes, that was dark and troubled in the Greek temper (Hughes to Chisholm, 15 June 1940, Papers, 4: 419).

Again, Hughes's cultural critique of Christianity owed most to his idealised vision of the Graeco-Roman tradition which he viewed as the true European tradition and expressing true European values. He believed that there was an essential core to European civilisation and that the issue at hand was to restore that core. His aristocratic vision did not require an elite that would create new values in the face of nihilism. Unlike his friend Alan Chisholm, Hughes was not fixated on Spengler, modern nihilism and the need for a new 'art myth' (Chisholm 1933, 1934, Papers, Box 2, Exercise

Book: 47). In this sense he was closer to Maurras than Nietzsche; it was a matter of purifying European civilisation based on Graeco-Roman values by 'expelling' the alien 'oriental' influence of Christianity. Part of the reason for Hughes's simple and clear view on this matter is that intellectually he never left the nineteenth century. Truth was unproblematical for him and he saw it as a jewel hidden in the rubbish of the modern world.

Nor was Hughes's attitude altered by the outcome of the war. In 1945 he continued to speak of the 'spirit of disinterested service in Nazism... moral discipline... a vast amount of idealism' (Hughes to Cockett, 2 January 1945, Papers, 10:347). He continued 'there is something tragic in the fact that all this idealism and its good practical human results have been shattered out of existence'. Hughes did not regret the Holocaust; his only regret was that America had triumphed over civilisation. Hughes's support for the Nazis had rested on their radical opposition to Christianity. He detested authoritarian Christian regimes. He denounced the Vichy regime established in France in 1940 because he saw it as reactionary and clerical in nature: 'the whole force of Roman Catholic Obscurantism', he claimed, 'is being laid like a curse on the whole of French life' (Hughes to Bevan, 6 August 1940, Papers, 7:343). Nor was Hughes's attitude to Christianity softened by the events of World War II. Writing to Bernard Cockett in 1945 he contended that the sooner Christianity was swept away 'the better it will be for Mind and Morality in the Highest and the progress of the true life of the Spirit' (Hughes to Cockett, 2 January 1945, Papers, 10:339).

Hughes's Theology

Hughes's religion was not just defined by his reaction to Christianity. At the level of civilisation Hughes considered himself as belonging to an aristocratic tradition that embodied the true creativity and spirituality of European civilisation. According to Hughes the members of this 'intellectual and spiritual elect' included Lucretius, Bruno, Goethe, Shelley, Swinburne and Nietzsche (Hughes to Carl Kaeppel, 17 November 1937, Papers, 9:293). Describing the Casuals Club of pre-World War I Sydney, he wrote of Christopher Brennan presiding at its meetings and 'looking like a pontiff of what Novalis called the Invisible Church' (Hughes to Chisholm, 9 December 1946, Papers, 4:551). Hughes liked to think of himself as an honoured member of this 'invisible church': he liked to think that his work would contribute not only to its continuation but also to its spiritual progress through creative acts that brought beauty into the world. This idea of an almost secret Brotherhood passing true spirituality from one generation to the next appealed to both his vanity and to his aristocratic elitism. He wanted that such illumination be restricted to the sacred few while the democratic masses were left to their own devices.

Hughes combined the belief that artistic creation is the central spiritual and religious act with a faith in spiritual progress. These two elements define what may be termed his 'theology'. Again this belief in progress indicates the essentially nineteenth century cast of Hughes's mind. As mentioned earlier Hughes believed

that God is not yet complete 'but that it is on the way to becoming such' (Hughes to Jack Lindsay, 15 May 1936, Papers, 15:15). Writing of the poet Algernon Swinburne, Hughes identified Swinburne as an adherent of the doctrine of theanthropy: 'Man, or rather the Soul of Man, is God' (Hughes, 1937:742). There is a process of 'becoming' so that through culture and the perfection of humanity 'man makes himself God'. It is not clear the extent to which Hughes himself advocated theanthropy, but he appears to have adhered to something close to it. He believed that the Deity, or spirit, was striving towards totality but was still a long way from its goal and might not reach it. The success of this endeavour 'depends largely on us; for we are part of the deity, it is working thro' us as well as in us'. This human success was, according to Hughes, 'seen at its highest in the productions of the mind of man, and especially in art' (Hughes to Jack Lindsay, 15 May 1936, Papers, 15:15). This view of progress or development as the triumph of the universal and the creation of perfection is not really all that far away from the position put forward by (the atheist) Gordon Childe in his later work on epistemology *Society and Knowledge* (1956). Which is not all that surprising given that they were both products of a similar milieu - the University of Sydney before 1914 - and shared at least one friend in common, Jack Lindsay.

Hughes, ironically, identified his position with that of the Jewish philosopher Samuel Alexander. He emphasised the fact that the deity was a long way from having achieved perfection and that the achievement of that perfection was far from guaranteed. He wanted to underline the need for individuals to be active 'in the service of that Spirit' (Hughes to Bevan, 10 May 1935, Papers, 7:73, 77). His primary objection to Christianity was that the doctrines of an omnipotent God and the atonement encouraged passivity and fatalism, a 'slave morality'. As an advocate of a 'producer mentality' Hughes here resembles John Anderson as well as Gordon Childe (Maddock, 1995:117). It was crucial for him that the deity be made 'active in this life', God must be considered as an active principle who helps to propel individuals along the path to spiritual perfection. 'The transcendental', claimed Hughes, 'must be operant and accessible in experience as we know it here and now ... felt and realizable in this life' (Hughes to Lindfield, 6 December 1936, Papers, 14:415).

If God was both active in this world and incomplete then, for Hughes, the work of the artist and the creator was crucial if God was ever to attain perfection. The progress of the Spirit rested heavily on the artistic endeavours of the spiritual elite of the Invisible Church. Art makes the transcendental present, hence his view that religion is found more in the music than in the meaning of the words being sung (Hughes, 1933:617). I think that this also explains his susceptibility to the theatre of Nazi Nuremburg and its fairyland. In particular Hughes was an advocate of the special role of poetry as that form of creative endeavour that would bring man and spirit together. Writing of Mallarmé, Hughes described Symbolist poetry as both an act of genuine creation and a revelation of transcendental forces. Symbolist aesthetics both reconciles man to the world 'as he experiences it' and leads him to a country 'which he will recognise as his true home, and wherein his spirit may find repose'. Symbolist

æsthetics is a religion; it possesses both a spiritual and a mystical dimension but has the advantage of not making 'impossible demands upon the reason'. Its appeal is to the 'highest part of man', and to 'what is highest in the transcendental world'. Hughes concluded by claiming that 'it offers him sure salvation, and salvation of the only acceptable sort' (Hughes, 1934:122–3). Hughes's advocacy of Symbolism as a sort of gnostic aristocratic religion is remarkably unproblematic. There is no angst as one might expect in dealing with negative theology and the absence of God. Instead Symbolism becomes in Hughes's hands a source of comfort that reconciles him to the world. For Hughes there is progress in the world but its agents are not liberals or socialists but the creative few of which he believed himself to be one. This is not so much a rejection of nineteenth theories of progress as an adaptation of them.

One issue remains to be addressed regarding Hughes's theology and that is the relationship between religion and politics. Writing to Bevan in 1940, he argued that politics and the spiritual realm are distinct and separate provinces (Hughes to Bevan, 13 August 1940, Papers, 7:359). The spiritual is primary and the role of the state is to create those conditions under which spiritual and artistic creation is possible. The state must be efficient and it must provide that measure of material security without which artistic creation is not possible. Democracy does not provide the necessary conditions for spiritual achievement, it is inefficient and wasteful. In the final analysis Hughes's vision of Nazi Germany as the ideal form of polity rested on his belief that it was a place where genuine creative artistic endeavour could flourish. Again it was an issue of restoration: the Nazis were, for Hughes, returning the European order to its true roots.

Conclusion

Hughes's religion is best described as a cult of the beautiful in which the creative artist has a special role as one who advances the spirit, or deity, towards perfection. It embodied an aristocratic ethos that emphasised the classical virtues of independence and courage as those virtues that would encourage individuals to be active and work for the cause of the advancement of spirit. Along with spiritual progress Hughes also sought a restoration of what he believed to be the true values of European civilisation which he saw as embodied in its Graeco-Roman roots. Hughes's faith in spiritual progress and his desire to restore the true Europe perhaps seem at odds. They can only be combined if one accepts that there is some sort of metaphysical order in the universe that manifests itself not as something fixed and eternal but as a process that manifests itself progressively in time. According to this view good and true progress is defined by its *telos*, which for Hughes is the creation of beauty through creative endeavour. Whatever prevents the 'creative elect' from engaging in acts of artistic creation, in his eyes Christianity and democracy, are destructive of spiritual progress and therefore evil. His ideas on these matters were fixed and certain; like Maurras he was narrow-minded and obsessive on these key issues that mattered to him. His devotion to art as the highest form of religious and spiritual activity was

absolute. He was, in many ways, a fundamentalist.

It can be argued that Hughes did not resemble the typical British Nazi sympathiser of the 1930s, who, as Hughes points out, could, like Nesta Webster, be a good Christian (Rubinstein, 1996:149–151). He was not upset either by Nazi policy towards the Church or the regime's increasingly violent anti-semitism. The ebbing of the Nazi tide in Britain in 1938 did not affect Hughes who continued to seek contact with Nazi officials (Melleuish, 2000:379). Although opposed to Communism it was not anti-communism that fuelled his enthusiasm for the Nazis (Griffiths, 1980). Nor was Hughes ever a true Maurrasian intellectually; he did not believe in the Catholic, Latin and Classical vision of Europe. Hughes's significant classical past was Greek rather than Roman. In this he remained close to the Romantic vision of Brennan who preferred Homer to Virgil, and who possessed no enthusiasm for the French Monarchists (Brennan, 1962: 429–31). Indeed one looks in vain to France for influences on Hughes; he was hostile to the 'spiritualistic' fascism of Thierry Maulnier who he called 'superficially clever', and despised Robert Brasillach (Hughes, 1935:691). In the final analysis Hughes's religious and spiritual beliefs have more in common with Julius Evola who derived his inspiration from the German 'Conservative Revolution', and the French New Right of the 1970s whose chief theorist Alain de Benoist advocated a return to a pre-Christian paganism (Ferraresi, 1987; Eatwell 1995:248–9).

It can also be argued that Hughes's religious vision can be explained in terms of the relationship between his personal history and his intellectual development. As a young man he developed a Romantic disposition in reaction to what he perceived as an alien and hostile 'democratic' society around him. As a student he imbibed an aristocratic ethos that convinced him that he was one of the creative elect who had access to special knowledge in the shape of literature and art that the ordinary people, sunk in democracy and Christianity, did not. At the same time he absorbed both a devotion to the values of antiquity, in particular Greece, and an underlying belief in progress as a spiritual process. Insecure in his own capacities he turned this devotion into a set of fixed dogmas to which he held passionately. It was this insecurity that pushed him to confront Christians, to assert the truth of his own beliefs and to support the Nazis. Hughes appropriated the idea of the artistic elite creating God because it justified his own creative endeavours; he saw the Nazis creating the type of society in which he would be respected. Needless to say, his vision of National Socialist Germany as a haven for the creative few was a fabrication of his own imagination.

The problem with Hughes's religion was that it was meant to be the religion of a small cultivated artistic elite and he took pride in its elitist qualities. As such it could only ever be attractive to the gnostic few. In this way it could be considered a somewhat harmless eccentricity for an educated few. But unfortunately Hughes wanted more; he wanted this elite to be respected and honoured by those who were unable to be members of the 'Brotherhood'. In a democratic society this is not possible because democratic pluralism does not recognise such claims of superiority. Hence Hughes

was drawn to authoritarian regimes such as National Socialist Germany in the hope of creating a social order in which his superiority would be recognised. And that is where the danger of religious beliefs such as his lies. It was no accident that Hughes was drawn to fascism which has exerted an attraction for many intellectuals in search of spiritual renewal or restoration (Sternell 1996: Chapter 7)

There is a peculiar pathos surrounding Randolph Hughes. His ego was greater than his talents and his life was one of passion, instability, quarrels and attempts to assert himself over others. He forged himself a set of religious beliefs as a means of justifying himself to the world as an important creative individual defending true religion against what he saw as the forces of darkness ranging from Christianity to democracy. Whatever his psychological insecurities may have been, he held to these religious ideals in a dogmatic and absolute fashion such that it would not be inappropriate to call him a fundamentalist. He can be seen as having become the victim of his passions and his dogmatism. The saddest thing of all is that as he became older he became more bitter and twisted. And that is how he died.

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