

*Book World**The Disarming Memoirist*

GENTLEMAN REBEL
The Memoirs of H. Stuart Hughes

By H. Stuart Hughes
 Ticknor & Fields. 326 pp. \$24.95

By Robert K. Landers

Historian H. Stuart Hughes has come to think of himself as a latter-day Edwardian, and certainly his gentlemanly virtues have been responsible for much of the considerable charm of his past writings. Even when, in an essay published in *Commentary* nearly three decades ago, he urged upon the United States a course that many thought might well spell the ruin of Western civilization, it still was hard not to be taken by him.

As he made a case then for unilateral renunciation of the nuclear deterrent as an instrument of national strategy, Hughes not only acknowledged the "appalling" risks that such a course would entail, but lauded the very strategists of deterrence against whom he was arguing. "Faced with the frightful dilemmas of peace and war today," he wrote, "the best any man can do is to make his personal choice in the agony of his own conscience, convinced that whatever he does will be in some sense wrong."

To his editor, the redoubtable Norman Podhoretz, the tone of Hughes's words—"the civility of it, the humility of it, the humanity of it—added immeasurably to the force of [his] argument," even if it didn't make that argument right. And it wasn't right, as philosopher Sidney Hook abrasively demonstrated in a subsequent round-table discussion *Commentary* sponsored.

The next year, Hughes ran as an independent "peace" candidate for the U.S. Senate from Massachusetts. He was, of course, hardly the first politician whose charm served to make his arguments seem more plausible than they otherwise would have. But Hughes had not the slightest chance of winning the election and almost as little of denying victory to the Democratic candidate, young Edward M. Kennedy.

When the Cuban missile crisis intruded, Hughes was prevented from making even a decent showing. He got just 2 percent of the votes cast.

Hughes devotes a chapter in his memoirs to what he calls the "great, if bizarre, adventure" of his 1962 campaign. But he is not as candid as he might have been about the trimming he did during the campaign with respect to the issue that supposedly mattered most. He does note that his platform "hardly spoke of real disarmament at all, concentrating on the preparatory 'tension-reducing and confidence-building initiatives' that we had cribbed from 'gradualist' experts on the subject. . . . People had only to read my recently published 'An Approach to Peace' to see that I was actually closer to unilateral disarmament in nuclear policy."

But it wasn't just his platform that was at significant variance with his published views—it was the candidate himself. Appearing on "Meet the Press" on Aug. 12, 1962, he was asked if he was in favor of unilateral disarmament, and he replied: "No. I think that is, as the term is usually used, definitely not what I am for. I am for gradualism. . . ." Why, in his campaign of lofty purpose, had he abandoned his unilateral stance? The answer remains a mystery. So, in his memoirs, does much else.

The first half of the book, which takes Hughes (a grandson of Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes) from his privileged childhood to service in World War II, is quite good, except for the presence, usually just offstage, of Hughes's psychoanalyst. There are times when one wishes that the middleman had been eliminated and that the analyst himself had been commissioned to write a chapter about Hughes and his putatively excessive attachment to his mother. Still, there's no denying that Hughes is an unfailingly graceful writer, with an engagingly self-deprecating manner and an extraordinary memory for vivid detail. Had he simply halted around Page 165 with his loss of virginity, or,

perhaps more fittingly, on Page 179 with his return from the war on a troopship filled with combat veterans who "had lurched their way through agonies I had been spared," his memoirs, although slighter, would have been far better.

This is mainly because in the subsequent chapters Hughes does not sustain the same level of intimacy. He does not tell us, for example, how he met his first wife or what about her enchanted him or why their marriage ended in divorce.

And so we are left to focus, as perhaps we really should, on Hughes's persistent inclination during the Cold War to favor appeasement of the Soviet Union. In fairness, one should say that he seems to have tried to chart a course between "total suspicion" (as he once put it) and appeasement. In truth, however, one has to add that he failed.

In his 1962 book, "An Approach to Peace," Hughes wrote that he had "never been a strenuous anti-Communist; even in the periods when I saw the rulers of the Soviet Union pursuing a particularly brutal policy—in the late 1930s and again in the last years of Stalin's tyranny—I have found it difficult to concentrate my energies against them. I think this is because I have never felt that opposition to Communism was the main matter at hand." (Confronted on "Meet the Press" with what he had written, candidate Hughes insisted that he'd meant that he was "a quiet, determined, but not noisy anti-communist.")

George Kennan's famous "Long Telegram" of 1946, in which he expressed the essence of what became known as the policy of "containment" of the Soviet Union, seemed to Hughes, then just become a middle-level State Department official, no more than "an intemperate . . . outburst of frustration." And yet when that very U.S. policy, pursued for more than four decades, finally led to triumph, Hughes, by then a professor emeritus of history at the University of California, San Diego, still managed to find cause for self-congratulation. "During the glorious year 1989," he writes, "the United States played no part in the liberation of the countries with which I had been most concerned—Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia. With a sense of vindication, I applauded from the sidelines." Comment, I think, would be superfluous.

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