POUND VS. REDUCTIONIST
ORTHODOXIES

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I

“All systems of philosophy fail when they attempt to set down axioms of the *theos*
in terms of consciousness and logic” [SP, 50].

“I do not expect science...to lead us back to the unwarrantable assumptions of
theologians” [SP, 50].

“To replace the marble goddess on her pedestal at Terracina is worth more than
any metaphysical argument. And the mosaics in Santa Maria in Trastevere recall
a wisdom lost by scholasticism, an understanding denied to Aquinas.” [SP, 320].

“A bloated usury,...a disgusting financial system, and the sadistic curse of Christi-
anity work together,” to exploit the planet earth and turn mankind into “milkable
human cows” and sheerable sheep “lest the truth *should* shine out in art, which
ceases to be art and degenerates into religion and cant and superstition as soon as
it has taxgathering priests...” [SP, 430].

Following the fragmentation of the Roman church during the reformation, a number
of protestant sects were spawned. A few such as Lutheranism in Germany, Calvinism
in other places, and Episcopalianism in England became as highly dogmatized and
centralized as the Roman church itself. Others became evangelical and passionized:
they rejected ritual and sacrament and in their stead celebrated the feeling of being
saved. Nobody questioned the existence of God. But with the growth of astronomical
science, the earth came to be seen not as the center of the universe but only an unbright
cinder bombinating in the contiguous void of some random galaxy. After Sir Isaac
Newton, man became not just a little less than the angels but closer to the primordial
slime. And after Descartes and the growth of laboratory science, questions about the
nature of God and finally even the existence of God came into general discussion among
the literate.

Reacting to this new kind of science, Voltaire said: “If there were no God, it would
be necessary for man to create one.” In context, he meant to suggest man had done just that and had attached to the nature of this deity all the passions, weaknesses, and jealousies of man himself. Reacting to the hither-and-yon flurries evoked by Voltaire’s statement, Dostoevsky said: “If there were no God, it would be necessary for man to create himself.” Deliberately, he left the sentence hanging thus in order to imply the impossibility of such a thing and to add a fillip to Aquinian arguments about a first and efficient cause. During the last half of the 19th century, everybody who was anybody had much to say on the subject. Their arguments were founded on the orthodox dogma of various Christian sects on the one hand and on the other vague intuitive feelings called by Benjamin Jowett, “the tones given off by the heart.” In the 1880s, Nietzsche faced Dostoevsky head on and said, in effect: “Since there is no god, the time has come for man to create himself because he is still closer to the apes than to the truly brave and powerful human he should in the future become: the Übermensche.

But before we can get to the Nietzchian traumas, we must glance at a number of other causes for the orthodox religionists growing dismay. Throughout the 19th century, the situation for Christian orthodoxy got worse on all fronts. It seemed that some new science was invented every decade. Geology became the cross most difficult to bear. This one affronted personally most bishops of the literate Christian sects because it questioned the divine revelation of the Bible itself. But the illiterate ones went on singing hymns and, as the cliche has it, “couldn’t care less.” As for the historical moment of creation, all sects which used the king James Bible were quite happy with the dating of James Ussher, an Irish Protestant who became Chancellor of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin and after that Bishop of Meath, and finally Archbishop of Armagh [1625]. Having immense knowledge of languages, he used the begetting records in the Old Testament to date all events recorded therein back to the week of creation which occurred, so he said, in the year 4004 B.C. For almost two hundred years, everybody was happy with Ussher’s dates which were added along with pagination to all King James Bibles. Then came geology.

Geology was fathered by a Scot named James Hutton. In 1795, his two-volume work, *The Theory of the Earth*, spawned uniformitarianism and a lot of other isms which drove some biblical scholars into a state of frenzy and even prompted a few Anglican bishops to say, “Tut! Tut!” Hutton’s idea was simple: geological changes in the earth were brought about slowly by processes still going on. For a time his work was overshadowed by catastrophism. This one was more acceptable to the bishops because it didn’t so clearly defy the book of Genesis. Then came Sir Charles Lyell.

Lyell, working along with William Smith, concentrated on the earth’s crust and the plant and animal fossils to be found there. His monumental tomes, *The Principles of Geology* [1831—1833], discredited the orthodox “catastrophic” teaching about the age of the earth and documented the gradualism theses of Hutton. Fortuitously, Charles Darwin
took Lyell's book with him and studied it with enthusiasm during the voyage of the Beagle. Lyell converted Darwin but was in turn converted by him after he read the *Origin of Species by Natural Selection* [1859]. Lyell's second book, *The Antiquity of the Earth* [1863], went so far as to suggest that planet earth could be as old as 100,000 years. The two of them brought many an orthodox bishop, among them the great orator Samuel Wilberforce, close to apoplexy.

Samuel, the scion of William Wilberforce, carried on the tradition of a long line of Wilberforces which for generations had been a burden to the few people in England who actually indulged in thinking. Because he was a great orator in the days of great oratory, he was nick-named "Soapy Sam." Orators even vied for adulation with the great tragic actors of the age such as William Macready. At Drury Lane Theatre, Mac would put on such a five minute performance in dying that he'd receive standing ovations one wouldn't expect these days except at a hockey game. The audience would cheer and scream, "Do it again Macready! Do it again!" so that after a modest number of curtain calls, he'd die all over again. The record is not clear on the maximum number of times he died at one performance. What Macready was to Drury Lane, Soapy Sam was to many an English cathedral. So when he challenged that arch-cohort of Satan, Charles Darwin, to a public debate, public interest was tuned up high.

But in the meantime, the situation had gotten more and more complicated on all geological fronts and climaxed in the "Omphalos" debate. One side of the argument held that since Adam was created directly by God, he didn't have an omphalos [the belly-button from which everyone at birth is snipped] because he didn't need one. The other side held that God could well have created Adam with an omphalos because he created the universe and everything in it as if it were in process. This argument struck a blow against the geologists because it said God created the earth as a planet in process. For how long? As long as the geologists wanted it to be.

But these debates didn't get Soapy Sam riled. It was the monkey business in evolution seemingly espoused by Darwin that got him charged up. Of course Darwin didn't espouse any such thing. In effect, he said, "All life descended from a common ancestry." Perhaps he might have done better if he had said "ascended."

Finally on a hot June day in 1870, the long-awaited debate took place at Oxford. Since that was clearly Wilberforce territory, the audience of four-faced men and tittering women were there in force to cheer the home team. As Soapy Sam looked out over the congregation, he saw a sea of Japanese fans fluttering in the heat. Behind him on the dais sat several men including Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley one of the most respected scientists of the time. Since Darwin was a shy man and not a good speaker, he accepted the challenge to a public debate only if Huxley could present his case.

Pre-publicity for the affair awakened international interest so that with an army of reporters present Soapy Sam felt he was addressing the world. That idea really turned
him on. Thus he gave a performance that slowly and inexorably built to a climax that might have given even Macready pause. At a splendid oratorial peak, he turned from the podium and slowly swept his right hand in a great flourish until it was pointing directly at the culprit Darwin. Then, pausing until silence reigned and the audience held their breath, he said: “Tell me, sir. From which branch of your family do you trace your descent from the monkeys?” Since this was the clue for the climax, the audience seemed to forget they were Englishmen and applauded with only limited restraint. Darwin looked down and squirmed with embarrassment. But Thomas Henry Huxley smiled and said to the man sitting next to him, “The Lord hath delivered him into my hands.”

When his turn came, Huxley set forth simply and without oratorical flourish the major evidence Darwin and other scientists had gathered and explained the hypotheses about evolution the evidence demanded. Further, he said that as new evidence accumulated in the future both he and Darwin expected those hypotheses to be adjusted to accommodate it. Then he matter-of-factly took the opportunity the Lord had provided. Without flourish, he turned to Soapy Sam and said, “As for you sir, I’d much rather find common ancestry with the monkeys than use great talents in disservice to the truth.” At that one, the audience applauded Huxley even more than they had Soapy Sam: a result which proves nothing except the fickleness of an audience. In any event the debate was reported widely and because of the reputation of Huxley as a scientist became a turning point in the public’s interest in the ideas of evolution.

II

In the meantime on another front, the philosophers were also busy coming up with new attitudes and premises that started shaking the western world out of its complacency into various degrees of existential Angst. Soren Kierkegaard helped initiate this new sickness of soul, perhaps abetted by his father who aged twelve endured a trauma that changed his life and conditioned the atmosphere, Soren grew up in. His father had been brought up as a hell-fire-yawns Christian. On the fatal day, he was tending sheep and trembling with the cold. Suddenly in despair, he climbed a hill, shook his fist toward the sky, and cursed God roundly. Tears of fear and repentance followed and lasted the rest of his life. They say the guilt he felt when old about this act of blasphemy when young cast a spell over his family and made his son the prophet of anxiety. Whether it did or it didn’t, his son tussled with Chrisian dogma for the rest of his life and came to at least some conclusions Eliot, Pound, and Yeats (along with many others) would agree with. And one in particular with which Pound would concur: One’s chances of being a good follower of Christ are considerably diminished if he joins a church and indulges in the pride of righteousness and the pleasures of sectarian malice.
And with the most famous of all Kierkegaard’s conclusions, the one concerning the absurd, Pound would in part agree: that only one incarnation of the divine should have taken place and that at one particular moment in history, at that particular place, with all the attendant social, dynastic, economic, and cultural conflicts at a pitch, at an outpost of empire, and that the divine being should be subjected to neglect, humiliation, and finally torture and crucifixion is absurd. And still more that we should be required to believe such an absurdity by an act of faith, with the punishing of hell certain if we make a mistake, is even more absurd. But we must make such a leap of faith even though it is a leap in the dark. This requirement leaves all men in a state of Ankt: The Danish Ankt, is more or less the German Angst, the French angoisse, and the English anguish: One translator spells it out as “Fear and Trembling and the Sickness unto Death.” Pound would endorse the absurdity because on that and other grounds he had concluded that revelation of the divine essence did not take place only at one moment in history: rather it has been continuous from the beginning of creation in all societies at all times and places. Please note Pound’s statement: “Christ himself may very well be a hero, but he is hardly to be blamed for the religion that’s been foisted upon him.” Or “The adoption of Christianity as the Roman state religion had no more to do with the teaching of Christ or with a search for verity than the acquisition of a new well in Persia by the Standard Oil Co, has to do with Michaelson’s ideas on the mathematics of the electromagnetic field” [SP, 56—57].

Both Kierkegaard and Pound came to react not only to the reductionist codifications of sectarian orthodoxy but also to the reductionist theories of the major philosophers of their times. Kierkegaard when young was a devotee of Hegel, but after thinking about it long enough he included both Hegel and Kant among thinkers he lived to expose. All the great philosophers accept some of the ideas of their predecessors. Kant defined the Platonic idea as “Das Ding an Sich”, a sort of unknowable something from which time, space and causality flow. Hegel said of Kant, “Something there.” Hegel thought Kant was a bright fellow but didn’t quite see how “Das Ding an Sich” works. Said Hegel: It’s from the eternal conflict between Being and Nothingness that existence flows. Then came young Schopenhauer who for personal reasons wanted to demolish Hegel with even more enthusiasm that did Kierkegaard. He said, in effect, “Yes, Kant was bright enough to understand a little Plato, Hegel wasn’t bright enough to understand anything, but neither of them really understood what “Das Ding an Sich” is. In reality it is the alldévouring, propulsive, destructive “will to live.” In Schopenhauer the will is the ultimate, irreducible, primeval principle of being, the source of phenomena, the impelling force producing the whole visible world. The will existed outside time, space, and causality, but ruthlessly demanded life and objectification. In its “in-itselfness” it created through evolution higher and higher forms of life until finally it created man and the intelligence of man. And man is a miserable helpless victim of this will. But it
made one mistake; it created finally the massive intelligence of Schopenhauer who caught it at its nasty business and could say, "No more!"

Thus do we come to a question: "What kind of men were these great thinkers and what kind of philosophical lives did they themselves live?" To find the answer we must look beyond the encyclopedias and college textbooks. If we do that, right away we begin to find some very queer people. Bluntly stated, the alleged major philosophers of the 19th century had bizarre personalities, were physical weaklings, and suffered from chronic illnesses. All were dyspeptic. These days dyspepsia is known as acid indigestion. Then there was no silver lining, but the silver lining now is commercial. A multibillion dollar industry flourishes by producing pills and potions to neutralize the acid. Unhappily, having no such aid, Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer suffered not in silence but screams of anguish against the world and almost everything in it. To make things worse, Kierkegaard suffered a melancholia that often became clinical. All of them looked upon people as a species of vermin and upon women in particular as a necessary curse to bear. The one bright spot is their attitude toward a few creatures in the animal kingdom. If he were in a good mood, Kant became ecstatic over birds and was fond of a particular bird that came to his window. Schopenhauer was fond of dogs.

Of course the major tenets or their thoughts are either valid or not independent of their personalities. But a reasonably informed person today would have to conclude all of them constructed their systems on inadequate scientific data, in almost complete ignorance of the cosmos, and upon inaccurate as well as incomplete historical knowledge. As for what they said or didn’t say only experts, and life-long dedicated scholars such as Beck or Kaufmann really knows. In the 60s, being puzzled over a Hegelian sentence, I consulted a professor of philosophy who specialized in Hegel. He told me in graduate school they’d cut a three page Hegelian sentence up into parts, toss them in a hat, and paste them together at random. They seemed to make as good sense that way as any other way. Another philosophy professor told me that Kant’s categorical imperative was really a restatement of the golden rule. By the time I got around to look into it myself, I found it to be no such thing: "Do only that which you can will to be a universal law" in Kant’s own elaborations turns out to be a credo for retributive justice close to the Old Testament’s "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Said Kant. "The law of punishments is a categorical imperative." That imperative, "requires that punishments must be equal to crimes. Therefore, a person who insults another must be shamed in punishment....Someone who steals makes all property insecure, so he must be condemned to convict labor, meaning, to temporary or permanent slavery. And if someone has murdered, 'he must die.'"

Cesare Beccaria (1738—1794) one of the few enlightened minds of the 18th century and the author of Essay on Crime and Punishment (1764) made a good case against the death sentence. This book prompted Kant to call the man’s ideas “sentimentality”
and "affected humanity." Behind this Judgment was a series of deduced premises on the basis of which Kant concluded that any program of tempering justice with mercy would weaken the state: "It is the people's duty to endure even the most intolerable abuse by supreme authority." Says BS: "In his view the formal condemnation to death of a monarch, such as Louis XVI, overturned all concepts of right." Said Kant: "Regicide is a crime that remains eternal and cannot be expiated, and appears to resemble the crimes the theologians consider as sins that cannot be forgiven in either this or the next world" (226). Some thinkers believe that the slow evolution of the human race toward freedom and democracy is a positive expression of the divine spirit at work in the world. Obviously Kant stood against such a process.

As for sex and "sexual crimes" he was just as rigid. Says BS: "He thought masturbation to be 'a violation of one's duty to oneself and... certainly in the highest degree opposed to morality.' The reluctance to name it, he said (without himself naming it), shows that it is... more degrading than suicide." This one is part and parcel of a well-deduced, a priori, sequence of conclusions: Kant was firmly opposed to any idea that pleasure involves good or evil. One must do what his brand of pure reason prescribes no matter how painful. Thus one should not be astonished to find that Kant found it, "astonishing how intelligent men have thought of proclaiming as a universal practical law the desire for happiness..." (227)

Consistently, Kant believed education should equip one to endure as well as to know. Thus for children, his credo seems to be a re-statement of "spare the rod spoil the child." Says BS: "Kant thought that working-class people, especially, spoil their children by playing with them 'like monkeys, singing to them, caressing, kissing, and dancing with them.'" (pp. 212). A few other tenets about education and the arts include these:

Novels are harmful to both children and adults.

"Unrhymed poetry is prose gone mad."

Love poetry is bad because it is "a mere play of sensations."

"Poets and musicians have no character because they reduce everything to feeling"

Kant deplored friendship and brotherhoods because they tended to gather up power: "Whoever has friends and power is very harmful" (216). But he pretended himself to have friends. In a letter to a mathematician named Kastner, he avowed his "unlimited respect." But in his own notes, published posthumously, he said Kastner was "invidious, envious, hostile" and "even immoral" (215).

Kant's major concern in life was his health. He read avidly all medical reports and studies he could obtain. From a curious chain of events he decided his own health depended much on the weather. After that, one of his major concerns was to keep close tabs on the climate. He believed "sweating" was bad, and endured all inconvenience to keep from a drop of perspiration: "For the sake of his health, Kant took great pains
never to sweat. During the heat of summer, he dressed lightly, and when . . . [he seemed] on the verge of sweating, he would stand still in a shadow . . . until the danger had passed. His thermometer, barometer and hygrometer were as important as the weather vanes he kept in view outside his study window." But over time he was honest about his state of mind and confessed to being a hypochondriac, paranoid, suicidal, psychotic and at times insane [217]. Still at other times he called all these characteristics psychosomatic. Considering his physical presence, perhaps he was a hero to do as well as he did: "He was barely five feet tall, his head was very large in relation to his body, and his chest was very flat, verging on concavity. He was so thin he had to use special springs, which I refrain from describing, to keep his stockings up" [218].

Perhaps he had good cause to believe profoundly in evil and to hold out little hope for the human race. Said he, "If a man were to say and write all he thinks, there would be nothing more horrible on God's earth than man" [221]. He even felt that evil power flourished at the heart of "Das Ding an Sich." In the unknowableness of this thing-in-itself lurked incarnate evil. Says BS: "Kant wanted to know more of himself than he did, but he was afraid to. This thing-in-itself was not simply unknown, it was forbidden" [223].

Young or old Kant could not bear fools lightly. Although he preached against dogmatism, he was himself dogmatic in practice, as a number of his oft-time visitors have reported. One admirer wrote: "He cannot bear to hear others talk much, becomes impatient . . . if anyone professes to know anything better than he does, monopolizes the conversation, and professes to know everything about all countries and places . . . . Direct contradiction insulted and . . . embittered him." Says BS, "His dogmatism was not merely the response of a man made inflexible by age and fame. In earlier years Kant was not used to contradiction" [224].

When young, Kant had at least a restrained appreciation of women. In a book written when he was 40, "he distinguishes between agreeable and charming women, he speaks of the laughing looks that can disturb a man . . . . [and says] that the image of the mother 'remains the pattern all feminine figures in the future must more or less follow so as to be able to stir the fanciful ardour.'" But in his notes he wrote, "Female beauty is only relative, the male absolute. This is why all male animals are beautiful in our eyes, because they have relatively little charm for our senses" [229]. From his posthumous notes we might conclude that Kant became increasingly hostile to women over the years. But that would be an error. He got increasingly hostile to men, too. BS says, "I run a number of his notes together without comment," and then give us these:

It is laughable that a man wants to make himself loved by a young woman by means of understanding and great merits . . . Woman does not betray herself easily and therefore does not get drunk. Because she is weak she is sly . . . Woman is
vengeful... They say that the desire for honour is the last weakness of the wise. I think that unless the wisdom is of the kind that presupposes old age, the love of women is the last weakness... Woman makes of man what she wishes. Formerly she made heroes and now she makes apes... The weakness of the man as against the woman is no shame... Everything depends primarily on the satisfaction of the woman, but the man fixes the means for that... The female sex has more feeling and heart than character... Men love the soul greatly, women the body. They believe that the soul is good enough if only they can get it into their power.

These words only say that Kant was less an independent thinker than a product of his age. After all some hundred years later Tennyson could write of woman as the lesser man, as the "moon to the sun" or as "water is to wine."

Well, clearly, Kant was a long-suffering, sad-sack whose physical, emotional and mental pains increased with age. But as he approached eighty and death, he still had one springtime joy: the return of the warbler (Grasmucke) who sang before his window and in his garden. Says BS: "If his friend remained away too long, he said, 'It must still be very cold on the Apennines.'" He didn't quite make eighty. Counting the days with his friend Wasienski he grew unconscious and uttered his last words, "Das is gut."

If any of the giants among thinkers had it worse than Kant it must have been Hegel. From birth he seems to have been a mass of warring contradictions. But he did have his moments. Their rhythm suggests that his famous triad "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" was a self analysis that directed his perception of world disorder. Certainly he didn't like philosophy. Said he: "Philosophy is a formalized, hungry, and omnivorous ambivalence" [240]. Again: "To be a philosopher is to be condemned by God" [236]. Sadly, Hegel's fight to survive when young made him physically inept. His sister Christiana who was closer to him and knew him better than anyone said, "He lacked all bodily agility." No wonder. At age six he nearly died of smallpox which blinded him for several days. At age eleven, he almost died of a disease that killed his mother. Says BS, "During his student years he had tertian fever and spent a few months at home where on his good days he read Greek tragedies" [230].

It seems that having little ability to deal with people, young or old, he came as did Kant to spend most of his time dealing with his health and books. Says Christiana: "As a boy of 3 he was sent to the German school, and in his 5th year to the Latin school. At that age he already knew the first declension and the Latin words that go with it; for our blessed mother had taught him" [231]. Later in life he called childhood the time of "natural harmony when the individual is at peace with himself and the world." But as for the treatment of children, he seems to have taken a cue from Kant. To spare the child from rigorous discipline is the root of all evil. Said Hegel: "To allow children to do as they please, to be so foolish as to provide them into the bargain with
reasons for their whims, is to fall into the worst of all educational practices, such children develop the deplorable habit of fixing their attention on their own inclinations, their own peculiar cleverness, their own selfish interests, and this is the root of all evil" [233, my emphasis].

In describing Hegel's personality, he himself and those who knew him longest and best use words such as hypochondria, severe anxiety, depression, withdrawn, anxious, nerve-wracked and melancholic. One biographer “raises the possibility that Hegel's depression was psychotic, while a psychopathographer concludes that Hegel was clearly schizoid” [235n]. Says BS, “When Hegel wrote to his intended bride, whom he married when he was fortyone, he found it necessary to excuse his 'perhaps only hypochondriac pedantry’” [235]. But any sadness or rage Hegel directed against himself was minor compared to the outrage he could vent against others. The philosopher of contradictions could bear, even less than Kant, contradictions. Says B. S.: “Nor could he usually bear even to remain in the company of those who had contradicted him. His rages were massive, his rebukes formidable, and his hate, once he thought it justified, was notably thorough. His criticism easily lapsed into sneering and invective.”

During the years of his greatest fame, scholars world-wide gathered to attend Hegel's lectures at the University of Berlin. Sadly, Hegel was one of the world's worst speakers. Said one, “His speech organ was not favorable to speaking.” The minister who approved the appointment, “inquired anxiously if his lecturing was still 'obscure, muddled, nervous, and confused’.” Hegel gesticulated, waved his arms, and changed his voice a lot but, said another: “his gesticulations and the changes in his voice did not seem in harmony with what he was saying.” Thus his speaking came ever closer to his writing: “a draft of a letter would assume a complex, crossed-out, fragmented, written around appearance.”

Heine, who listened to him and read him more than most said: “To be honest, I rarely understood him, and it was only through subsequent reflection that I attained an understanding of his words. I believe he really did not want to be understood: hence his delivery so full of clauses.... [His] conversation was always a kind of monologue, sighed forth by fits and starts in a toneless voice” [238]. BS says the best account of Hegel lecturing is given by his follower H. G. Hotho and he regrets he can give us only part of it. In turn, I regret I can give only a part of what BS gives.

“Exhausted, morose, he sat there as if collapsed into himself, his head bent down, and while speaking kept turning pages and searching in his long folio notebooks, forward and back, high and low. His constant clearing of his throat and coughing interrupted any flow of speech. Every word, every syllable detached itself to receive thorough emphasis from the metallic-empty voice....”

It would almost seem as if he were trying to mimic the “seeds of destruction” working his mind into a new synthesis. Or as if his manner were an exemplum of his matter. Of his matter BS says in part:
The idea of destruction arises in it everywhere, but is everywhere constructive, for it always culminates in construction; this construction, it is true, yields again to destruction; but the whole process, which is constructive, contains destruction as no more than one of its necessities. Negative is positive."

And so we go. The voices drone on and on and on.

As someone has said, beauty or the contrary probably exists in the eye of the beholder. Most people look upon alpine vistas as breathtaking, dramatic, and sublime, but Hegel returned from visits there and reported “bleak mountains and monotonous, eternally dead masses” (234). He seems to have looked upon the rest of the world and everything in it with the same jaundiced eyes. Still, he is known as a philosopher of hope and promise. Although I can’t locate such a sentence, a priest once told me Hegel viewed history as a process through which the divine spirit realized itself. Hegel died during a cholera epidemic at the age of 61. Perhaps he found something along the way about which he could say with Kant, “Das ist gut,” but it would be hard to find lest it were hedged in with a hundred conditions and provisos. At least, he has never been known as the “philosopher of pessimism.” That was left to Artur Schopenhauer, one of whose avowed objects was the destruction of Hegel and all his works.

Artur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) expressed his ideas about the works of Hegel, which he called “Hegelry” in clear-cut words. It was “devoid of truth, clearness, intelligence, and even of common sense.” He denied Hegel “the title of thinker, philosopher or even sophist.” But he did concede that to German pedants, Hegel “was a kind of artist, though of so low a grade that only his disciple, Rosenkranz, could sink below it” (256). But, then, compared to his opinion of other philosophers that only makes Hegel the worst of a worthless gang. A.S called Fichte “a charlatan” and his philosophy “nonsensical.” He said Schelling “reasoned extravagantly and absurdly” and Rosenkranz was not only stupid, but “no more than a miserable scoundrel.” From A. S.’s point of view only three thinkers besides himself deserved the title of philosopher: “Buddha, Plato, and Kant.” In fact his encounter with a [Non-Zen] variety of Buddhism and the Hindu Upanishads melded with his ideas of Plato and Kant to spark Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (1818), an extraordinary book produced in white heat and black hate. Although he allowed some merit to these thinkers, it is minor compared to the divine merit he accords himself. Said A. S.: “Within the limits of human knowledge in general, my philosophy is the real solution of the riddle of the world. In this sense it can be called a revelation. As such, it is inspired by the spirit of truth—in the fourth book there are even some paragraphs that one might consider inspired by the Holy Ghost” (256). R.S says about this, “For doubters, I repeat the last sentence in the language of the writ itself.” I give only the last phrase: “die man als vom heilgens [the emphasis here and above is AS's] Geiste eingeben konte.”

Cleaply A. S. was either enthusiastically for or enthusiastically against other thinkers.
In another place he writes: “I will not mention the numberless monstrous and mad compositions, which were called forth by Kant's works.” They so much degenerated “our German philosophy that we now see a mere swaggerer and charlatan. I mean Hegel, with a compound of bombastical nonsense and positions bordering on madness, humbug about a part of the German public, though but the more silly and untaught part, to be sure,...” and so on [257]. This kind of thing A. S. published for the edification of the public and thus wrote with some restraint. At the same “he kept a secret notebook” in which he kept a record of his real opinions which, he said, were “too sharp and bitter to be published during his lifetime.” He told a few friends he wanted it published after his death. But his biographer and executor, Gwinner, destroyed it. Probably, that was a good idea [257].

With all this, one might be surprised how often A. S.’s opinions jibbed with those of Hegel. For instance his opinions of women whom he called “the unfair sex”. For Schopenhauer, women were “childish, silly, and shortsighted—a kind of intermediate stage between the child and the man.” They were “mentally myopic and able to see clearly only what was very close to them.” They were the “unaesthetic sex” whose main business was to befuddle males. Only when their minds were clouded by the sexual impulse could a male “call the undersized, narrow-shouldered, broad-hipped, and short-legged sex the fair sex” [257]. Says BS: “Considering women’s natural weapons to be dissimulation and lying, he accused them of influencing men to conceal natural reactions, to sham beliefs, to disavow ideas, to ‘blush not to be vile enough’....” And all this in order to bring forth “still another child destined to be taught to lie.” All of this came out when A. S. was fairly young. His misogyny increased or intensified with age.

Perhaps his real recriminations should have been against himself, for no matter how much he raged and roared, he ended up in the toils of one woman after another. Over the years he had a dozen or so mistresses or friends, a few he helped support and he even provided for one in his will.

No matter how much he hated Hegel, he shared with him as well as Kant many personal idiosyncracies. A. S. suffered from isolation, loneliness, intense neurotic fears, hypochondria, as well as a misanthropy that intensified with age: “In his maturity he held almost any contact with people to be a contamination, a defilement.” Gwinner wrote: “[A. S.] was inwardly lonely and pathologically anxious.” When young A. S. looked forward to the time when he would meet one decent human being. But as the years went on the hope turned out to be vain: Said he, “I found nothing but miserable wretches, narrow minds, base hearts, and dull wits;... therefore my indignation at individuals gradually gave way to a quiet contempt for the whole of mankind” [249].

Most of the labels in the psychiatrists handbook could be applied to Schopenhauer. At times and in various degrees of intensity he suffered from paranoia, manic-depression,
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hypochondria as well as numerous manias. From the age of six his fears were intensified by a powerful imagination. Says Gwinner: "As a youngster, he was troubled by imaginary illnesses and quarrels..." For a while he thought himself consumptive. At the outbreak of the war, he became convinced that he would be impressed into war service" [249]. Wherever he was he feared some local infection, so he was running from one disease headlong into another: "The dread of smallpox drove him from Naples, of cholera, from Berlin. In Verona he was seized by the idee fixe that he had taken poison snuff. When, in 1833, he was about to leave Mannheim, an inexpressible feeling of dread overcame him without any external cause."

If it weren't his health, it was plots of everybody and everything out to get him: "For years he was persecuted by fear of criminal proceedings, fear of the loss of his property... If any noise was heard at night, he got out of bed and reached for sword and pistol, which he kept permanently loaded." He employed a series of clever devices such as the use of Latin, Greek, and English and the mislabelling of files and possessions to mislead thieves. He called his securities files *Arcana Medica*: "To avoid drinking infected water, he always carried a leather water-flask...." [Also] he would lock away the stem and bowl of his pipe after each time he smoked it. He would never entrust himself to a barber's razor." His fears extended not only into the immediate future but into death: "Troubled by the danger of premature burial, he gave instructions that if he appeared to die, his presumed corpse should be kept in an open coffin until his death was beyond all doubt" [250].

For good reasons, A. S. often feared that he was either insane or likely to become insane. Thus like a good student, he visited many insane asylums and tried to account for it. Finally he came to a conclusion and said that "insanity was a kind of lapsing of memory." Those who know a lot about such things [and that doesn't include me] say A. S.'s work on the causes of insanity is "insightful." In fact same credit him with being "the father of depth psychology." Here's a bit more A. S. on violent mental suffering which becomes insufferably great only in so far as it is a lasting pain, but as such it is only a thought, and therefore resides in the memory. Now if such a sorrow, such painful knowledge or reflection, is so harrowing that it becomes positively unbearable, and the individual is in danger of succumbing to it, then nature, alarmed in this way, seizes on *madness* as the last means of saving life. The mind, tormented so greatly, destroys as it were, the thread of its memory, fills up the gap with fictions, and thus seeks refuge in madness from the mental suffering that exceeds its strength, just as a limb affected by mortification is cut off and replaced by a wooden one.

In such a world the only thing a wise man could do is defeat the onerous will-to-live by committing suicide. Either that or not get into life in the first place. He praised any man who refused to conceive children. At one place he praised the intelligence of
a child that decided to be born dead. As for A. S. himself, he explained that he “had avoided marriage out of pity for the son he might have had.” The suicide issue put A. S. in a sort of double-bind. If any one of sense would do it, why didn’t he? Many a romantic young man did. At the end of the century we had a repeat of the reaction to Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. A number of dead bodies were found with that popular book open on the bed. At the end of the last century, the scene was often repeated, this time with A. S.’s book at hand.

Toward the end of the century we come to Nietzsche who brooded upon the theories of his predecessors, particularly the defenders of Christian orthodoxy, and condemned them all categorically: “I will write this eternal endictment of Christianity upon every wall...I will use letters which even the blind can see. I denounce Christianity as the one great curse, as the one corruption, as the one great instinct for which no means are too poisonous, treacherous, and small. I denounce it as the one dying disgrace of humanity.” Again: “The Christian concept of God—God as the deity of the sick, God as spider, God as spirit—is one of the most corrupt concepts of God that has ever been attained on earth. Perhaps it represents the low-water mark in the evolutionary ebb of the Godlike type. God degenerated into the contradiction of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal yea.”

Pound would agree with this statement except for one proviso. Since Saint Augustus in the 5th century theologians had reduced not God (as the divine essence) but Christian orthodoxy to this dark state. With a nod toward Kierkegaard, Nietzsche endorses the notion of the absurd, and takes a leap, not of faith, but of total rejection:

“An omniscient and omnipotent God who does not even take care that his intentions shall be understood by his creatures—could he be a God of Goodness? A God who for thousands of years has permitted innumerable doubts and scruples to continue unchecked as if they were of no importance in the salvation of mankind, and who, nevertheless, announces the most dreadful consequences for anyone who mistakes his truth,—would he not be a cruel God if, being himself in possession of the truth, he could calmly contemplate mankind, in a state of miserable torment, worrying its mind as to what was truth?”

And again:

“He was a hidden god, full of secrecy. Verily he did not come by his son otherwise than by secret ways. At the door of his faith standeth adultery. When he was young, that God of the Orient, then he was harsh and revengeful and built himself a hell for the delight of his favorites. At last, however, he became old, and soft, and mellow and pitiful, more like a grandfather than a father, but most like a tottering old grandmother. There did he sit shriveled in his chimney-corner fretting on account of his weak legs, world-weary, will-weary, and one day he suffocated of his all-too-great pity.”
To these summary reflections, a few more should be added. Pound believed.

1. The divine spirit seeking expression through creation has existed and still exists in all matter and energy including what he called “the living rock.” “The living rock” vibrates with the divine.

2. In the fullness of time the miracle of life appeared. After his own experience of the divine spirit, Whitman wrote, “A mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.”

3. Different from the pantheists, Pound believed the divine expresses itself in hierarchies. (1) A tree is alive but not conscious; (2) a mouse is conscious, but not self-conscious; (3) man at a certain moment in evolution became self-conscious, and finally god conscious. God uses man to express the divine nature.

4. But man could neither understand the divine nor express it without words. The impulse to create language continued for millions of years, still continues, and will continue forever. The most recent 5000-year movement of the process shows the divine spirit has already achieved some minor success: “In the beginning was the word.” Yes. But more important, then, now, and always.

5. One more which can be hinted at only obliquely. Since the second law of thermodynamics was stated in the 1840s, much concern used to be expressed because the universe is running down. In the end all heat and matter will be evenly and at random distributed in space and all motion stop. Whither then, the divine purpose or mankind? Is the dance of matter coming to a halt? But against this process of entropy, another process can be detected. Robert Frost notes it in “West-Running Brook”: “the universal cataract of death/that spends to nothingness—and unresisted, save by some strange resistance in itself.”

And later:

Our life runs down in sending up the clock.
The brook runs down in sending up our life.
The sun runs down in sending up the brook.
And there is something sending up the sun.
It is this backward motion toward the source,
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,
The tribute of the current to the source.
It is from this in nature we are from.
It is most us.”

The later Schopenhauer had a pertinent perception to add to the 5 centuries of cause-
and-effect arguments he inherited: true all effects must be caused. But in the mind of man a goal-oriented idea about the future can be a powerful pull to action and alter events.

Imagine what might happen to one who has had a perception of light from behind the veil. Moses was not spoken to in words. Those words had to be chosen from the few available to a tribal society which would be understood by that tribal society. It was the same with Mohammed: he could feel his attacks, visions, or experiences coming on and usually lay down somewhere and went into a trance-like state of physical anguish during which he sweated a great deal. He spoke of the experiences as coming from messengers of Allah but not in words. Still, afterwards he could express the sense of the experience only in words. Again, they had to be words available in his tribal vocabulary which would mean something to his tribal culture. As Rodinson put it, the final effect was the same as with all great religious revelations: “It was not only Islam that transformed the cultures of Moslem societies; their cultures also transformed Islam” [MR, XXXX]. Pound would add: “And in the fullness of time reduced the original visions to destructive rigid orthodoxies which demand burning, pillaging, and killing in the name of Allah, a divinity we can assume is innocent of any such intent.”

In the Age of Faith, Will Durant says: “[The pre-Islamic] Arab felt no duty or loyalty to any group larger than his tribe, but the intensity of his devotion varied inversely as its extent; for his tribe he would do with a clear conscience what civilized people do only for their country, religion or ‘race’—i.e. lie, steal, kill, and die” [157]. The post-Islamic Arab demonstrates its advanced civilization by lying, stealing, killing, and dying with even greater enthusiasm. Whatever the nation or race or religion, these evils, done in the name of the love of God and/or country, are noted with increasing frequency toward the end of The Cantos:

That love be the cause of hate
    something is twisted, [110/780]
And 600 more dead at Quemoy—
    they call it political, [110/781]
“When one’s friends hate each other
    how can there be peace in the world” [115/794]
    “And of man seeking good,
    doing evil.” [115/794]

As always, the high councils send youth out to die:
    “the young for the old
    that is tragedy” [117/801]

But he has been saying the same thing over and over from the beginning. Canto 89 opens with an appeal to look again at human history and learn not to do evil in the
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name of good.

To know the histories

To know good from evil

And know whom to trust

Ching Hao

Chi crescera [Ecco chi crescera li nostri amori]

[Look, here is one who will increase our loves]: A line from the Paradiso said by all the souls who approach Dante in the sphere of Mercury. Pound’s statement is simple: If you want to know good from evil, you must know the histories: not all the meaningless details of history, but just the luminous details: the gists and piths of history. Where will you find such a history? Silly question: The Cantos. The Cantos is an epic poem which contains those gists and piths.

In a word, the fields of legitimate inquiry must be extended to include, first, all science and mathematics, and second, the whole history of mysticism. The creative universe is the primary document to study if one wants to know more about the unfolding of the divine purpose. There may be a conflict between science and some religious sects, but there can be no conflict between science and divine wisdom at work. One must accept Pound’s premise that the final mystery, the arcana, will be a state man will finally enter. Not enter, but express. See what traps words can be? We have had gleans and intimations about the light behind the veil. The history of mysticism contains massive records of those who experienced brief glimmers and visions, but their contacts with the ineffable could only be recorded in words which crack under the burden, decay with imprecision, and will not stay still. To the man who has spent a lifetime in Lapland, Yeats line on sunsets, “The dropping of the daylight in the west” may suggest a cold yellow glow. He will never know what Yeats had in his mind when he wrote it. Anyone who has not lived at the edge of a tropical sea will never know what Pound meant by “sunset grand couturier,” even though alerted by earlier lines on the same page, “Tudor indeed has gone and every rose, /Blood-red, blanch white that in the sunset glows.”

For the divine light behind the veil Pound uses a recurrent image:

“Lux Einem, diafana.

Some light shines through the diafanous veil, but from our side we cannot see through it to the source.

Where memory liveth,

it takes its state

Formed like a diafan from light on shade 36/177

The image occurs later in R. -D. and Thrones.

Lux in diafana

Creatrix
Oro 93/628

diafana

e monna Vanna... tu mi fai rimembrar. 93/632
Queen of Heaven bring her repose

bringing light per diafana 95/644
Aestheticism comme politique d'eglise, hardly
religion.
that should bear him through these diafana 96/651
as light into water compenetrans......
per plura diafana 100/722

In a note for his Collected Poems, Dylan Thomas wrote, “I read somewhere of a
shepherd who, when asked why he made, from within fairy rings, ritual observances
to the moon to protect his flocks, replied: ‘I’d be a damn’ fool if I didn’t!’ These
poem, with all their crudities, doubts, and confusions, are written for the love of
man and in praise of God, and I’d be a damn’ fool if they weren’t.”

These lines would not be out of place somewhere in Drafts and Fragments.

Beginning in Canto 74, Pound paraphrases Micah 4—5: “For all people will walk
every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our
GOD forever and ever.”

On page 441: “each in the name of his god.”
On page 443: “in the name of its god spiritus veni.”
On page 454: “each one in the name of his god.”
On page 487: “each one in the name of his god.”

This cadence goes through several ritual transmutations until toward the end of the
poem every man’s god is perceived to be, under whatever name, the same entity with
the same “intimate essence.”

On page 700, we read:
“Though he still thought: God of all men.”
On page 788,
“For the little light and more harmany
Oh God of all men, none excluded

On page 772, the light behind the diafana is evoked by the key word in the moment
of catharsis of the Trachinniae:

which Pound renders.

What SPLENDOUR, IT ALL COHERES.
The most baffling condition of the human species (why men who intend good do evil) is stated simply and finally once more at the end of the poem:

And as to why they go wrong
Thinking rightness.

These lines are in the context of others:

it coheres all right
even if my notes do not cohere

and a final small hope:

A little light, like a rushlight
to lead back to splendour!

In summary, my comments here have been intended to document the title, "Ezra Pound vs. Reductionist Orthodoxies." In a word Pound avers that no orthodoxy, whether scientific, philosophical or religious can catch the cosmos or the divine essence in a net of words. Any orthodoxy, particularly a religious one, has always become the banner for war and destruction. This statement is as true today as it was in tribal times. The thirty year war [1618–1648] between Protestant and Catholics climaxed five centuries of religious wars in the west. Pound notes most of them including the crusades here and there in The Cantos. A similar pattern has developed with Islam. In the beginning when Islam conquered all lands bordering the Mediterranean, it tolerated other religions. Jews flourished after centuries of persecution and mass murder by the Church of Rome. But in time there came the wars of succession between Shiite and Suni that go on today. Today, wars in the name of orthodoxies flourish in Northern Ireland, and in the mid-east, Jews, Shiites, Sunis, and Christians have almost destroyed Lebanon. In both places no end is in sight.

Well as some wise man said, "There is nothing new under the sun." Fifty years before Christ, Lucretius said in De Rerum Natura: “Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum” (BK. 1, 1. 105): “So many are the crimes to which religion leads.” Of this line, Voltaire said: “It will last as long as the world itself lasts.”

ENDNOTES
1) Ben-Ami Scharfstein, The Philosophers (New York: Oxford, 1980). Most of the data used in this piece is taken from this book, hereinafter referred to as BS. Professor Scharfstein is the most level-headed scholar I’ve encountered.

This is a version of a paper delivered at Kansai University on 31 October 1989.

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