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A READING OF SAMUEL BECKETT  
in the light of Hegel, Heidegger & Sartre

Ph.D. Thesis.

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- "B. - The situation is that of him who is helpless, cannot act, in the event cannot paint, since he is obliged to paint. The act is of him who, helpless, unable to act, acts, in the event paints, since he is obliged to paint.
- D. - Why is he obliged to paint?
- B. - I don't know.
- D. - Why is he helpless to paint,
- B. - Because there is nothing to paint and nothing to paint with."

(Beckett, Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit, No III, "Bram Van Velde." 1949.)

"Human reason, in one sphere of its cognition, is called upon to consider questions, which it cannot decline, as they are presented by its own nature, but which it cannot answer, as they transcend every faculty of the mind."

(Kant, Preface to the First Edition of the Critique of Pure Reason, 1781.)

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## NOTE

References are to the Bibliography. Thus, "(Cohn, 1, 174)" refers to page 174 of the work cited under "COHN, Ruby, 1."

Beckett's own works, and the three main philosophical works considered, are referred to by the following abbreviations (editions used appear in the Bibliography):

PM	<u>The Phenomenology of Mind</u> (Hegel, 1.)
BT	<u>Being and Time</u> (Heidegger, 1.)
BN	<u>Being and Nothing</u> (Sartre, 1.)
MPTK	<u>More Pricks Than Kicks</u> (Beckett, 1.)
M	<u>Murphy</u> (Id., 2.)
W	<u>Watt</u> (Id., 3.)
T	<u>Trilogy</u> ( <u>Molloy</u> , <u>Malone Dies</u> , <u>The Unnamable</u> ). (Id., 4.)
H	<u>How It Is</u> (Id., 5.)
NK	<u>No's Knife</u> (Id., 6.)
PTD	<u>Proust and Three Dialogues</u> (Id., 7.)
WFG	<u>Waiting for Godot</u> (Id., 8.)
MC	<u>Mercier et Camier</u> (Id., 9.)
E	<u>Endgame</u> (Id., 10.)
PA	<u>Premier Amour</u> (Id., 11.)
LO	<u>The Lost Ones</u> (Id., 12.)
LE	<u>Lessness</u> (Id., 13.)
PL	<u>Play</u> (including <u>Play</u> , <u>Words &amp; Music</u> and <u>Cascando</u> ). (Id., 14.)
ATF	<u>All That Fall</u> (Id., 15.)
IM	<u>Imagination Dead Imagine</u> (Id., 16.)
FTEYA	<u>For To End Yet Again</u> (Id., 17.)

## CHAPTER ONE Introduction

The thesis

"The easiest thing of all is to pass judgement on what has a solid substantial content; it is more difficult to grasp it and most of all difficult to do both together and produce the systematic exposition of it".  
(Hegel.)

Since at least 1960 there has been a considerable amount of critical attention paid to Beckett. Besides articles, reviews, chapters and paragraphs, by 1979 more than sixty books had been published devoted exclusively to him. A lot of this critical work has been of the highest standard and certainly it is hard to imagine how a serious appreciation of Beckett could survive without it. But it is my opinion that at the heart of his writing there is an inescapable mass of involvement with the fundamental issues of existence that has yet to be dealt with adequately. In this thesis I intend to attack this central core of Beckett's work by associating it with the discipline which, by definition, operates in the same area - philosophy. This will provide a new "reading" of Beckett and at the same time show how far philosophical analogy can illuminate a writer.

Beckett's own philosophical asides and hints are something like red herrings. Descartes and his followers appear, for example, for the purposes of joke and parody. When one has learnedly pointed out what they are doing in Murphy and Watt or what Democritus is doing in Malone Dies one has merely done dully for the worse-educated what Beckett has already done well for the better-educated, which is to point out that certain real, painful issues are not much helped by a Rationalist-Idealist dialogue or whatever. But if Beckett laughs at and plays with the answers of traditional philosophy it can only be because he is concerned with the same questions. In spite of all

protestations to the contrary, Beckett is working the same ground as the philosophers.

I think that we must recognize the red herrings for what they are and try to give a philosophical interpretation of Beckett without their dubious assistance. This is not entirely possible, of course, and it would be unproductive deliberately to exclude, say, Zeno just because he is mentioned by Beckett. But my main aim is to try to lighten the Beckettian gloom with those philosophical lamps that seem to work best. This has led me to choose Hegel, Heidegger and Sartre.

These three by no means exhaust the possible range of useful philosophical analogues for Beckett. No philosopher, anyway, is sui generis, and I think that every single major western philosopher has some light to shed both on every other philosopher and on Beckett. But Hegel, Heidegger and Sartre are closely related to one another and offer almost the full range of concepts that apply substantially to Beckett. All three take in, develop and sometimes reject the major work of their predecessors; all assume, for instance, the decisiveness of Descartes' work and Kant's. This puts them into a position rather like Beckett's own - he, too, has worked through philosophy up to the Eighteenth Century. He does not refer to any philosopher later than Berkeley. It is almost as if we can suggest two parallel developments - the development of philosophy since 1800 on the one hand and the development of Beckett's mind since he gave up reading philosophers on the other.

Other modern philosophers, according to this parallel, might also have claims to be included here. A parallel between Beckett and the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty would be valuable and that between Language Philosophy and Beckett has been suggested by several critics, for example in the proposal by Jacqueline Hofer that Watt may owe



something to Wittgenstein (in her essay in Esslin, 1). This could be the subject of a thesis by itself, but it is not broached here. My inclination is not to miss so instructive a parallel as the Tractatus offers, but a thorough and detailed examination of a few philosophers, and therefore the exclusion of everyone else, is just what no Beckett critic has yet undertaken and just what I am attempting.

Above all, the three philosophers chosen display some strikingly Beckettian insights. Notably, they try to escape from the impasse into which Descartes took philosophy and Beckett took Murphy. Descartes' cogito, however, is at least an admission that philosophy starts with me. Its results in the following century were, significantly, the Idealism of Berkeley, Hume, Kant and Hegel. To paint with a very broad brush for a moment, we can say that if Greek (and Medieval) philosophy presents a picture of the external universe and is concerned, typically, with the cosmos, with man in society and with logical categories, Descartes decisively reverses this concern. Since the Seventeenth Century it has not been possible to ignore the subjective, and philosophy has not again tried to discuss the world without discussing the perceivers of it. It is no coincidence that philosophy is no longer, the "Queen of the Sciences", that philosophers are no longer scientists. Indeed, there is a sense in which philosophy has been excluded from all objective disciplines, its provinces have been annexed by cosmology, biology, anthropology, sociology and psychology, the sciences of the universe, life, man, man in society and man's mind. This is a coin that has a reverse side however; when we turn it over we find that philosophy is more important than ever. No longer dealing with any specific area of knowledge and unable to escape the demands of the cogito it has become the moderator of the languages of knowledge and the study of the scientifically indefinable aspects of the world - being and self.

However close the parallels are we must remember that Beckett has disclaimed any philosophical achievement. He said to Tom Driver "I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that is simply a mess." (Driver, 1, 23) Recent critics, however, although none has attempted a systematic comparison, have found philosophy useful when dealing with Beckett. A glance at Hesla's bibliography in The Shape of Chaos will make the point (Hesla, 1, 245). Or we can quote Pierre Mélése on the influence of the Existentialists: "Parler d'influences serait, peut-être, exagéré; d'impregnation semblerait plus justifié." (Mélése, 1, 120) Mary O'Hara, in a thesis presented in 1974, is able to say, "So close is Heidegger's thinking to Beckett's that the latter's work could almost be seen as a literary exploration of Heideggerian metaphysics." (O'Hara, 1, 143) I hope to demonstrate how this "impregnation" and "exploration" works in detail (chapters 2, 3, and 4) and then attempt some sort of synthesis that will provide a new reading of Beckett (chapter 5). Before embarking on this I shall give an account of the extent to which Beckett criticism has come to grips with philosophy.

\* \* \*

### Beckett's Critics.

I have so far mentioned five critics (Hofer, Driver, Hesla, Mélése, O'Hara). To what extent does philosophy really appear in their work and the work of others on Beckett? In fact, surprisingly little. There is nearly always, in any work on Beckett, a mention of Descartes, Geulincx or Zeno, but not much more.

The first book published about Beckett seems to have been Niklaus Gessner's Die Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache published in 1957 in Zurich. Its subtitle (Eine Untersuchung über Formzerfall und Beziehungslosigkeit bei Samuel Beckett) indicates clearly enough

that it is concerned with structural, aesthetic questions and not with philosophy much beyond a bow to Rationalism and a nod to Existentialism. Since then this has been the pattern. To give some representative examples:

Hugh Kenner's Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (1961) is a good general study, an indispensable trail-blazer really, but it does not employ philosophical tools or methods beyond a tracing of Beckett's sources. That is perhaps a little unfair to a book which contains the delightful essay on the "Cartesian Centaur", but the basic point holds, I think, that there is no attempt here to take the philosophical analysis beyond Beckett's own lines of demarcation.

Frederick Hoffman's Samuel Beckett, The Language of Self (1962) traces the literary, not the philosophical, ancestry of Beckett's quest for the Self. We learn a lot about Dostoevsky, Goncharov, Gogol, Dante, Kafka, Joyce and so on. Descartes, admittedly, appears, and there are bows to Sartre and Bergson. No real analysis of philosophical thinking about the Self is attempted.

Ruby Cohn's book, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (1962) is excellent but, as its title implies, not really interested in developing philosophical themes.

John Fletcher's The Novels of Samuel Beckett (1964) gives a critical account of each of the novels and indicates the presence in them of Descartes, his followers, Leibniz and Spinoza. Sartre is mentioned twice.

W. Y. Tindall's monograph Samuel Beckett (1964) covers much the same ground, includes the plays, and does it in forty-five pages.

Ronald Hayman's short book on the plays (Samuel Beckett, 1968) like Alec Reid's ditto (All That I Can Manage, More Than I Could, 1968) deals with the presentation and impact of the plays, their style and structure, rather than their "meaning".



N. A. Scott's Samuel Beckett (1965) has a brief final chapter that points out that "oddly enough" Beckett can be read profitably in the light of Heidegger's What is Metaphysics? These concluding pages of his essay are pregnant with possibilities.

Patrick Murray's The Tragic Comedian: A Study of Samuel Beckett (1970) is a "second generation" study of Beckett that relies quite heavily on Cohn, Esslin, Fletcher and Kenner and does not attempt any original philosophical exploration.

Francis Doherty's Samuel Beckett (1971) is also stuck in the now-familiar groove. It has far more about Geulincx than about Sartre and the chapter entitled, promisingly, "Mind and reality" is subtitled "Murphy and Watt" and is in fact the first chapter of the book. No attempt is made to provide a philosophical framework for the later fiction. The same applies to Brian Finney's monograph on Beckett's short texts (Since How It Is, 1972) and, perhaps surprisingly, to Kenner's Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett (1973) which has plenty about Eliot and Joyce but little enough time for the Seventeenth Century philosophers and none for the moderns. This may be a function of the book's status as a Guide.

A. Alvarez's book Beckett (1973) has a striking conclusion (in the original edition) yoking together Breath and a passage from Kierkegaard. The success of this comparison could perhaps have stimulated Alvarez to further flights, but it did not.

Ruby Cohn's more recent study, the elegant Back to Beckett (1973) says a lot of interesting things about all the work to date, none of it strictly philosophical. Her most recent excursion into this field has been to edit a volume of essays [Samuel Beckett, 1975] many of them sparkling pieces that throw light into the Beckettian murk, none of them interested to give an account of it in philosophical terms.

Another volume of essays that appeared in 1975, Beckett the Shape Changer<sup>1</sup>, edited by Katharine Worth, is of interest in that it deliberately eschews a philosophical approach to Beckett. The editor, in her introduction, explains that one of the things that her contributors have in common is "a feeling...that philosophical interpretation has loomed rather too large in Beckett criticism up to now" and she observes that "Philosophy is, after all, only one of the things that keep Beckett's people going, one of their dubious consolations..." (Worth, 1, 15) With this observation Katharine Worth reveals that what she and her contributors mean by "philosophical interpretation" is the picking up and explaining of the fragments of philosophy scattered through his work by Beckett. If this is what she means I think she is quite right to move on to pastures new. For example: John Fletcher in his second book on Beckett (Samuel Beckett's Art, 1967) has a definitive chapter on "Beckett and the Philosophers" which "considers...the philosophers who have influenced him in chronological order, from the Presocratics to Leibniz and Hume". (Fletcher, 1, 122) In every case Fletcher takes his cue from something in Beckett's own text; this is a job that had to be done and Katharine Worth is quite right to maintain that, Fletcher having done it and done it well, there is no need for us to keep on doing it.

However, as I pointed out at the start of this section, philosophical interpretation is not really a matter of spotting references in Beckett's works to individual philosophers. It is revealing that Fletcher's list finishes at Hume. Surely it is fair to enquire whether later, and perhaps more relevant, philosophers have any light to shed on Beckett. The point is that we are talking about two quite distinct operations; there is the elucidation of learned jokes about Hippasos the Akousmatic and there is the attempt to use philosophy to explain

largely by analogy, what Beckett means. I have listed a number of books that sometimes undertake the former operation and almost never the latter. To this list may be added the great bulk of articles about aspects of Beckett. The question now is whether there are any critics who have attempted philosophical interpretation in the second of our senses, that is, who have tried to do what this thesis tries to do.

Some of the more conventional books about Beckett have tantalizing philosophical moments such as Alvarez's use of Kierkegaard. Eugene Webb, in Samuel Beckett, A Study of His Novels (1970) has one excellent paragraph which associates Beckett with Existentialism. (Webb, 1, 18) But is it not enough. A sentence like the following, from the paragraph in question, cries out for expansion: "The comfort Moran and Gaber take in the fact that, since they are members of a vast organization, their troubles are shared sounds like what Heidegger, in Sein und Zeit, would have called a flight into das Man." But that is where Heidegger is left.

Ruby Cohn, in her article "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett" (in Criticism, Winter, 1964) goes again over the ground covered by Fletcher and adds three pages on Logical Positivism and Existentialism which get us a bit further and show clearly how valuable these philosophies can be in interpreting Beckett.

The Logical Positivist side was developed, in relation to Watt, by Jacqueline Hofer in the special Beckett issue of Perspective (Autumn, 1959). Her article is, again, promising but not fulfilling; there is a sense that she is skating round her philosophers rather than going through them to Beckett. The Existentialist side was developed by Milton Rickels (in Criticism, Spring, 1962) in an article entitled "Existential Themes in Beckett's Unnamable". This is the



most promising work we have so far mentioned. It takes a late, difficult work from the Beckett canon and scans it for Existentialist elements in a way that is quite different from digging Descartes, or even Wittgenstein, out of Watt. But it is a brief article and alludes to philosophers rather than examining them in any detail.

Besides all the above, it is necessary to take into account the work done on Beckett to elucidate the religious elements in his novels, plays and poems. There are plenty of asides on this subject in most studies and, ever since the Christian interpretation of Godot was first put forward in 1957, there have been essays on Beckett's religious imagery (for instance Hersh Zeifman's essay discussed in the final chapter, below). Most significant among these religious views is Richard Coe's article "God and Samuel Beckett" (Meanjin Quarterly, March, 1965) which I shall also consider in the final chapter of this thesis. This is an appropriate place at which to mention Richard Coe's book Samuel Beckett (1964) which, although it is short, must be put beside Michael Robinson's much longer The Long Sonata of the Dead (1969). These two books show authors prepared to bring their philosophical reading to bear on Beckett. Neither fights shy of making enlightening associations between Beckett and philosophers or between Beckett and religious thinkers. Robinson, in particular, shows the right sort of open-mindedness, going to the extent of adding an extra section to his bibliography to list works which he has "found useful" while writing on Beckett. These include: Camus, Descartes and followers, Marjorie Greene's book on Heidegger, two of Heidegger's own works, Iris Murdoch's book on Sartre, L'Etre et le Néant, Pascal's Pensées, St. Augustine, Schopenhauer, Unamuno and Wittgenstein. Robinson does not carry through an analysis based on any one of these or on any one of their concepts but he reveals their interpretative value better

than anyone so far mentioned. Coe's study is particularly good on Sartre and appears here in the Sartre section of Chapter Five, below.

There have, of course, been a number of general studies in the field of "Literature as Philosophy" which have touched on Beckett or have adopted a method something like my own. Most of these have concentrated on Sartre and other French authors of romans à cléf. E. W. Knight's excellent Literature Considered as Philosophy (1962) takes great trouble to set out the relevant phenomenological and existentialist concepts before embarking on a study of Gide, Camus, Sartre, Malraux, Saint-Exupéry and others. Some of his methods are applicable to the slightly different task of seeing as philosophy the literature of an anti-philosophical writer. Works which undertake examinations of Beckett in this field include Enrico Garzilli's Circles Without Center<sup>2</sup> (1972) which has little of value for the student of Beckett, John Cruickshank's The Novelist as Philosopher (1962) which has an essay on Beckett by Martin Esslin, and Charles Glicksberg's Modern Literature and the Death of God (1966).

Esslin's essay comes close to my purpose. It discusses the philosophical elements in Beckett and moves to a conclusion in which his relationship to Sartre is briefly but pregnantly summarized. The Unnamable is taken as "the culminating point of a progressive exploration of the self; it reveals, in the end, that very centre of nothingness, that state of pure potentiality by which Sartre defines Being-for-itself" - i.e. le Néant. (Cruickshank, 1, 142) Esslin says that Beckett is probably not consciously influenced by Sartre and that thus it is all the more remarkable that he has put this aspect of existentialist philosophy (Nothingness) into the "concretum" of a work of art. "It is as though, by some mysterious osmosis, the currents of abstract thought and creative vision in our time had inter-penetrated each other". (Cruickshank, 1, 143)



This thesis analyses that proposition.

Glicksberg's book considers a variety of writers, but Beckett is central among them. This is not surprising when we consider that the contention of the first chapter is that, since the "death of God", the modern writer has been able to "discover no unitary, enduring self". (Glicksberg, 1, 17) This connexion between God and the self is emphasised very thoroughly: "Relinquishment of faith in the absolute called for a transvaluation of values in the psychology of the self". (ibid.18) "What is modern man to do when he is confronted by the vision of Nothingness? He has no self that he can call his own." (ibid.29) This leads Glicksberg into a discussion of Beckett in terms of modern theology. It is interesting to see here how theological considerations cannot be separated from philosophical ones in this context. It is Heidegger's view of death, for instance, that makes possible Tillich's new Christian vision. Both have something to add to our understanding of Beckett.

Besides the work mentioned so far, there have been, of course, scores of articles on the subject of Beckett. Most, I have said, are irrelevant to our line of enquiry; some I have mentioned. There are some others which are partially-relevant but none that even get as far as Robinson or Glicksberg in applying philosophy to Beckett. It is perhaps in the nature of this subject that, at one extreme, brief allusions to philosophers are of use to a critic discussing Beckett, and, at the other, extended discussion of concepts can be very illuminating. The article-length piece is not really well-adapted to deal with these complexities.

In giving a selection of Beckett criticism I have stuck to English and American critics. They are by far the most numerous and they represent a reasonable sample. There is some French work,

however, which needs to be mentioned, notably Olga Bernal's Langage et fiction dans le roman de Samuel Beckett (1969). Her opening points to the basic problem of both Language Philosophy and Existentialism, namely, language. For Being to be, we must fall silent; Beckett's work is "une oeuvre qui cherche une autre lumière que celle du Verbe, la lumière de l'indit." (Bernal, 1, 15) This critic, who quotes Heidegger and Sartre quite freely, is clearly at home among her philosophers and she puts the ideas she applies to Beckett into their philosophico-historical perspective. Kant is sited between Descartes and Hegel in a summary that gives a certain amount of the background to both Existentialist and Beckettian thought.

Besides Bernal I should mention Ludovic Janvier's book Pour Samuel Beckett (1966) as illuminating and Jean Onimus' Beckett (1968) as suggestive. Onimus' book is in the series Les Ecrivains devant Dieu and as such goes some way in suggesting Existentialist theological parallels. He stresses, without fully exploring it, the intimate relationship between Beckett and Heidegger. Interestingly he ponders the possibility of Beckett's having read Was ist Metaphysik? on its appearance in French in 1937 and concludes: "Beckett...avait peut-être alors déjà lu Sein und Zeit. En tout cas les thèmes principaux de Heidegger recourent souvent ceux de Beckett."

This leaves me with three works for which I must account. I have been moving from the less-relevant critics to the more-relevant; these three are the most relevant. They are David Hesla in his study of Beckett The Shape of Chaos (Hesla, 1), Edith Kern in the Beckett section of her Existential Thought and Fictional Technique (Kern, 1) and H-J. Schulz in This Hell of Stories: a Hegelian approach to the novels of Samuel Beckett. (Schulz, 1)



I shall give an account of the Schulz book at the beginning of Chapter Two, the Hegel chapter, below and meanwhile I shall deal with Kern and Hesla in that order.

Edith Kern presents us with three essays on the fictional technique of Kierkegaard, Sartre and Beckett respectively. The object is to relate their thinking to this technique. In the case of Kierkegaard and Sartre this works quite well, but the Beckett section presents Kern with difficulties in that Beckett himself has offered no "thought", Existentialist or otherwise, which can be related to his fiction. As a consequence of this, Beckett is related, nominally, to the "thought" of the Existentialists. What this amounts to is an interesting essay on Beckett studded here and there with gems of comparison.

Some of these comparisons are with non-Existentialist thinkers (Wittgenstein, Mauthner), many of them with Sartre's fiction, a few with Goethe, Cervantes, Beckett's own Proust. A handful are actually with Existentialist philosophy. Heidegger's concept of Geworfenheit appears once, his Dasein twice, and "Being-in-the-world" is once alluded to. Sartre's Transcendence of the Ego figures and there are one or two points from Being and Nothingness such as a comparison between the Unnamable's view of Others and the Sartrean "Look". A small number of Kierkegaardian points appears, and there are some references to Nietzsche.

Altogether the essay is quite a success, but for anyone expecting a philosophical reading of Beckett it can only act as an apéritif. David Hesla provides a more substantial offering. The first sentence of the Preface to The Shape of Chaos, runs. "This book is an interpretation of the art of Samuel Beckett mainly from the perspective offered by the history of ideas." (Hesla, 1. v) Hesla eschews the task of relating Beckett to a literary tradition; instead, moving

with enviable freedom among them, he employs a mass of thinkers, from the Presocratics to Sartre, to illuminate Beckett where they can. He deals with Beckett's work chronologically up to How It Is. The result is, in my opinion, the most satisfactory book to have appeared on this subject so far. My evaluation of it having already appeared elsewhere<sup>3</sup> I shall limit myself here to considering those areas of Hesla's book that might be said to impinge on this thesis.

Hegel appears in several places, at first on account of his centrality<sup>4</sup> in the western philosophical tradition as an Essentialist. Then twice in extensive epigraphs to chapters. Finally there are two sections that discuss Hegel in some detail.

The first of these (pp.193-205) deals with the famous Master and Slave thesis in the Phenomenology of Mind and relates it to Godot and Endgame, pointing out that the Marxist view of Godot is not enough and that Marx's reduction of Hegel's thesis, when applied to Beckett, is a reduced interpretation of him too. Hesla follows Hegel through Stoicism and Scepticism to the Unhappy Consciousness. The inherent contradictoriness of Scepticism is compared to the "let's contradict each other" of Vladimir and Estragon and the Unhappy Consciousness ("das unglückliche Bewusstsein") is retranslated as "unlucky" consciousness which enables Hesla to propose that it is the origin of Lucky's name. Certainly a case is made for Lucky's being stuck in the free-floating stage of Scepticism - he is not yet "unlucky". In this discussion of the dialectical triad arising from the Master-and-Slave phenomenon a lot of weight is given to clear explication of Hegel and rather less weight to Beckett. The interpretations offered seem sound but rather marginal. This first Hegelian section continues (pp.199-205) by pointing out that all "existentialist" thinkers parallel Hegel in their "fear and contempt"



for the "Other". Hesla instances Kierkegaard's view of the universal, Nietzsche's view of the herd and Heidegger's approach to "das Man". Hegel's "dreadful discovery" was that the Other is not "cut there", or not only "out there", in the world. The Other is also "in here", in me. (p.200) Even man's Self is dialectical - it oscillates between "I" and "Me" - all man's introspection is not just consciousness, it is consciousness "of". So "I" is always conscious "of Me". This splitting of the Self is clearly of great significance to Beckett. Hesla quotes a most apt passage from Jung to show how this split Self, in Beckett, parallels the psychologist's term schizophrenia. He compares this philosophical and psychological material with the whole range of Beckett's work, from Murphy to How It Is, points out that Hegel took Descartes' solution (at least I am me) as the statement of a new problem, and concludes

Consciousness alienates me from myself, sets me at the mercy of the Other, negates every statement of my being, and isolates me from every other consciousness.  
That is how it is. (p.205)

Hesla's second discussion of Hegel (pp.208-213) extends these considerations to the Absolute. The dialectic of Being-Nothing-Becoming is considered, and the possibilities of God and knowledge about God. A comparison is made between Hegel, Kierkegaard and Sartre on this subject and neat resumé's offered of their different answers to the question of whether man's poor bifurcated Self will ever be able to come to rest in itself. No mention of Beckett is made in all this, but he is treated separately in the pages that follow (pp.213-230) that is, in the concluding pages of this work.

This Beckett-orientated conclusion opens with "And what of Samuel Beckett? Is not all this talk of Fursichsein and Ansichsein, of pour-soi and en-soi, of finite and infinite -- is it not all far

above his head." (p.213-4) And to justify his substantial philosophical commentary Hesla employs a metaphor. "I have bought and sold in drachmas, marks, francs, and kroner because I am convinced that these are convertible into the currency of Beckett's economy" (p.214) This seems to me to sum the matter up very well - Beckett is not a philosopher in the normal meaning of the term, some sort of "conversion" must take place between philosophical concepts and Beckett's themes, ideas and images. But it is not a question of trying to translate chalk into cheese; both sides of the conversion belong to the same kind.

Hesla then denies an important and widely-held assumption. He quotes Beckett's remark about the "shape" of a sentence - "It is the shape that matters" - and goes on, "By now it should be perfectly clear that the shape of Beckett's art is the shape of dialectic." (p.215) This attacks the assumption that form and content are separable entities. In Beckett, as perhaps is all serious literature, form and content merge, a point that Beckett himself makes in his essay on Joyce<sup>4</sup>. So we cannot say that we are not interested in Beckett's "shapes" when we are drawing philosophical parallels; it may be, as Hesla suggests, that the shape is the key to the meaning. So this last chapter of Hesla's book is entitled "Dialectic and Absolute Absence"; the only way towards a statement of Absence is a dialectical one, there is only one way of shaping thought if it is to reach truth.

Hesla demonstrates how this can work in a practical example. He offers an excellent piece of comparative criticism in which Hegel is employed to illuminate Beckett in the manner I propose to adopt in this thesis. Hesla sees that Beckett's trilogy may be patterned according to Hegel's dialectic - Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis. It



can be read "as the moments in the dialectic of a single "transcendental" self" (p.219) Molloy is the thesis and Moran the antithesis, for Molloy is character and Moran is author. The synthesis is Malone. Malone, in his turn, is a thesis in his "characterial" being, and his own antithesis is his "authorial" being. "Finally, Malone himself is negated by the Unnamable, who comprehends in himself all the preceding moments of the dialectic." (p.219) In addition the three books of the trilogy can be seen as Master, Slave and Unhappy Consciousness respectively. Once this is established, Hesla can take Hegel further:

Hegel did not intend the Phenomenology to be the description of some numinous, non-real "Spirit". He intended it as an accurate account of the development of freedom and self-consciousness through its several concrete stages in the history of Western man.

If we take the same perspective on the trilogy, behold! What vistas on interpretation are opened to us! For Molloy is now revealed not only as a fictional character and as standing in dialectical opposition to Moran in the primordial state of self-consciousness, but as the Spirit in its manifestation as the Greek world... (and so on.) (p.220)

So we can say that Hesla uses Hegel first as a proponent of certain sorts of ideas that have been important in the intellectual tradition of which Beckett forms part and second as a direct comparison with Beckett, a comparison that is at first illuminating but that can degenerate, as the example quoted above shows, into the merely interesting, the amusing, and even far-fetched.

What of Heidegger as a tool in Hesla's hands? There is an assumption underlying The Shape of Chaos that Heidegger is closer to Beckett than Hegel, which I think is fair enough, but it remains a fact that he appears rather less often than Hegel. Apart from two passing references, Heidegger supplies two epigraphs to chapters and

is discussed in two places, though not at such length as Hegel. The first of these (pp.126-128) points out that Heidegger's answer to the question "Who?" ("Who is Dasein?" Answer - "an existence") is appropriate as an answer to the Unnamable's "Who now?" (p.126) We also have a brief explanation of "Others" and "das Man" in Heidegger and an association of these with the Unnamable's slavery to "them" - "I have no language but theirs" and so on.

The second of Hesla's Heideggerian discussions is more extensive and it opens with a point about the comparison that is being made which could serve as a description of this thesis. Hesla is offering an interpretation of a scene in Godot.

I am not imputing a knowledge of Heidegger to Beckett (though I would not deny it either), and am not supposing that Beckett's works are puzzles or allegories explicable only by reference to Sein und Zeit. I am, rather, trying to get at the "meaning" of the scene, and am using Heidegger as one of several possible ways of doing so. (p.140)

Hesla uses Heidegger to probe the meaning of the scene in Godot where, the blinded Pozzo having fallen over, the tramps talk about whether they should help him up or not, and about what they are doing there. He brings in Dasein, guilt, inauthentic existence, "das Man", the "they-Self", conscience and Dasein's "own-most-potentiality-for-Being-its-Self". (p.144) The application of these concepts is convincing. Used cautiously they throw a light on the scene that is otherwise unavailable. They indicate the desirability of a thorough consideration of all of the concepts of Being and Time as possible illumination for Beckett.

Sartre appears in Hesla more extensively than either Hegel or Heidegger. There is a large number of passing references to his work, an epigraph to a chapter, and his development of Hegelian ideas figures in the discussions of Hegel mentioned above. There is one section of The Shape of Chaos, however, that is devoted to a detailed analysis of



Sartre's Transcendence of the Ego and Being and Nothingness (pp.184-192). This is preceded (pp.169-183) by a consideration of Husserl's phenomenology, particularly as it relates to the Ego. The result is most of a chapter (chapter VI, "Reduction, Reflection, Negation: Some Versions of Consciousness") in which some of the most important modern thinking on consciousness is summarized and applied to Beckett. Hesla does his job well and quite thoroughly - so much so that I propose to leave a consideration of his technique and the points he raises to the last two chapters of this thesis. Hesla's use of Hegel and Heidegger seems to be like an arrow, pointing towards the sort of philosophical interpretation of Beckett that I attempt in the relevant chapters, below. But the Sartre section comes a little closer to actually carrying out the interpretation and must therefore be incorporated into my chapter on Sartre. I mention my final chapter ("The Wellhead") because it was my intention, even before Hesla published The Shape of Chaos, to use Husserl and Sartre on the transcendence of the Ego to help with the discussion that will, it is hoped, lead to a new philosophical reading of Beckett. This is still my intention but it is not possible to dismiss Hesla on Sartre here, his reading being similar to my own.

Thus, with the possible exception of Hesla, and of Schulz whom we shall look at in the next chapter, none of Beckett's critics has really brought philosophy to bear on him in any detail or for any extended analysis. In what follows philosophy is brought as close to Beckett as I believe is possible without twisting things. In the final chapter we shall be able to see whether it is worthwhile to criticize literature in this way.



Notes to Chapter One

1. Reviewed by the present writer for Notes and Queries, New Series, Vol 23, No 7, July 1976, pp.322-324.
2. Reviewed by the present writer for The Modern Language Review, January 1976, pp.185-186.
3. Cf. the review of The Shape of Chaos, by the present writer, in Notes and Queries, New Series, Vol.22, No.5, May 1975, pp.230-231.
4. "Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce" in Our Exagmination by Beckett and others, 1929. Re-issued, Faber, paper, 1972.

CHAPTER TWO Hegel's Phenomenology and The Unnamable

H-J. Schulz: This Hell of Stories .

The only critic to undertake a substantial Hegelian study of Beckett is Hans-Joachim Schulz. His short work is entitled This Hell of Stories: A Hegelian approach to the novels of Samuel Beckett. It opens with an explanation of its purpose, which is to draw an illuminating parallel between Beckett's way of writing and Hegel's way of thinking. Schulz pursues a theme that I shall recur to again and again:

Why do the Beckett artist-bums want silence, why do they not achieve it, why do they not die? To show the importance of these questions to the Beckett novels, to show that they enter us (sic) into a dialogue with Hegel which will expose their timeless nature, this is the purpose of the following chapters.  
(Schulz, 1, 30)

This German critic has seen that anything like an explanation of Beckett's unwillingness to fall silent, and of similar paradoxes, is going to require philosophical aid.

After explaining his intentions and saying something about the novels he will deal with, Schulz offers an excellent chapter on Beckett and Descartes. In this he employs the method used in the present thesis: specific works of Descartes are combed for Beckettian moments. This leads into a consideration of a few "stubborn paradoxes", such as the Proustian problem of the past, which appear in both Beckett and Hegel. There is something slightly unsatisfactory about this section: Schulz gets into a position in which he can claim that any side of an argument is Hegelian (this is a Hegelian position of course). For instance, concerning the past, he says that Beckett's narrators discard their past lives because, being unable to understand duration, they are unable to understand history as process and growth. This is compared with Hegel's view of the

"ordinary mind" which conceives conflicting philosophical systems as being right or wrong and which therefore discards one side of the argument. But, in the first place, that is not what the Beckettian narrator does and, in the second place, Schulz would presumably claim as "Hegelian" a narrator who did just the opposite and fully understood process and growth. (Schulz, 1, 43-44)

The Hegelian element in this book, in spite of its title, only really comes into its own in the fourth chapter ("The Dialectic Battleground") and in the first half of the fifth chapter ("Dying and Killing"). Thereafter broader aesthetic and mystical considerations predominate and, although there are plenty of good things about Beckett in the later chapters, they need not detain us while we are concentrating on Hegel.

The fourth and fifth chapters, then, make a case for Beckett and Hegel. They do so fairly convincingly. The following pages owe something to Schulz's discussion, but it should be noted that he does not attempt any systematic account of Hegel nor does he work through any given Hegel text. Instead he puts Beckett and Hegel side by side under the umbrellas of a few different concepts. The result is that he moves freely about in the works of both writers in a way that casts some doubt on his proceedings. I do not mean that his parallels are false, although some of them are rather weak and far-fetched, but that it seems doubtful that he has always managed to put his finger exactly on the right places in Hegel and Beckett. Where one is comparing two obscure and hardly self-consistent writers it is perhaps best to deal with at least one of them systematically.

I shall not refer to Schulz again in what follows. We shall have enough to do in keeping Hegel and Beckett in play without always having to consider an alternative umpire.



### The Dialectic.

My choice of Hegel as a starting-point is not based on merely chronological or arbitrary considerations. Hegel's insistence on the inclusiveness of his work and its participation in the universal movement of philosophy means that there is an economy in first approaching Beckett through him.<sup>1</sup> Although it cannot be true that Hegel includes and surpasses all his predecessors it is certainly hard to find a major philosophical issue untouched in his work. If Beckettian situations have philosophical analogues there is every chance that they will be found in Hegel. But this is less important as a reason for starting with Hegel than the simple fact of the strong parallels to be found between some of Hegel's ideas and some of Beckett's. These parallels are reinforced in several cases by a similarity of expression and, it must be admitted, a similar obscurity.

The insight that makes Hegel's philosophy possible is identical with the motive force that makes Beckett's work continue and not simply grind to a despairing halt. This motivation is the dialectic.

Hegel developed the dialectic in an attempt to overcome Hume's problem of causation. 'Because X is always followed by Y are there any good logical grounds for assuming that X is the cause of Y? Can Y be legitimately deduced from X? For example, whenever I put my finger into a flame I feel pain, but can the pain be said to be caused by the flame? The difficulty is that the pain does not seem to be logically "present" in the flame. It may be objected that if we take another example different results follow. Water when cooled to a certain point becomes ice, for example, and the ice does seem to be "present" in the water. But in fact these examples are inadequate if they permit this sort of materialist confusion. A chemical or physical explanation of why Y follows X leaves our logical

problems untouched; given water and a low temperature we expect ice, but, if asked why, we ultimately fall back on an explanation that lacks formal necessity - we have to say that we expect ice simply because we have always found it in these conditions.

To combat this problem Hegel adopted the dialectical method, the outstanding characteristic of which is that it will only proceed in so far as consequences are contained in causes. Dialectic moves in threes, in triads that approximate to thesis, antithesis and synthesis. If the dialectic works the antithesis is contained in the thesis and the synthesis in them both.

Thus, for example, Hegel avoids the concept "God" because he sees that an act of faith is, indeed, required, to deduce the world from it. There is no logical necessity for "God" to give rise to "world". When he posits the concept "being", however, he finds that it contains its opposite, "nothing", and that these two contain their synthesis, "becoming". How being can contain nothing is explained thus: the being of an object is what is "left" after we have subtracted all its qualities and properties such as its size, shape, colour, age and so on; but what are we in fact left with when we have done this subtraction? Nothing. So nothing is already in being. There is no need to deduce one from the other. Thus, at least in the realm of abstract thought, we have an alternative to the traditional way of handling causation.

The dialectic is the motive force behind Hegel. It is not merely a method, it is a self-propelling account of the universe, indeed, it is the logical structure of the universe. As Stace puts it,

This entire process of categories is a compulsory process forced onwards by the compelling necessity of reason. By rational necessity the thesis gives rise to its opposite and so to a contradiction. Reason cannot rest in what is self-contradictory, and is therefore forced onwards to the synthesis. And so throughout. This process cannot stop. It



must go on until a category is reached which does not give rise to any contradiction.

(Stace, 1, 93)

This could serve as a pretty accurate description of Beckett's endless attempts to "get it all said".

The inexorable march of reason, as described by Stace, is the basis of man's inability to fall silent, although silence would so obviously be an immense relief to Beckett's narrators. As the Unnamable says, "You must go on." Beckett, too, employs the dialectic or, better, the dialectical nature of the mind and the world is what confronts him and his narrators. They proceed, as he does, by "affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered" (T.293) just as Hegel's logic works by cancelling its previous moments as it moves from thesis to antithesis and thence to synthesis. It is doubtful whether Beckett ever reaches a synthesis; this will be our problem in Chapter Five.

Hegel's world-picture, then, is triple. It rests on such triads as "Being-nothing-becoming." The world is adequately described for him under three main heads, Logic, Nature and Spirit, the three divisions of the Encyclopedia. The things of "Nature" include physical objects and the laws that govern them; the things of "Spirit" include all mental and psychical phenomena and are clearly to be distinguished from Nature in that my conception of, say, a table is a different sort of thing from the table itself. The category "Logic" presents more difficulty: Hegel, here at his most Platonic, wants to be able to account for such phenomena as Appearance, Cause, Relation, Reason and so on. Of these he says that they have being (you can't very well admit the world without admitting relation, say) but no "existence". Logical abstractions such as these are clearly not physical objects. They are not mental things either. When I stop feeling angry my anger

is simply not there, but Hegel cannot suppose that Relation is "not there" when isolated from human perception. So we have three categories of being, Nature, Spirit and Logic, of which one, Logic, presents some difficulties, notably as to "where" its components are to be found.

Beckett is also aware of a triplicity in the world. In the section of The Unnamable where the narrator is "confusing himself with Worm" and where the prose becomes disjointed, leaping from topic to topic and switching pronouns at will, we find him asking, "I wonder if I couldn't sneak out by the fundament, one morning, with the French breakfast." He answers his own query with "No, I can't move, not yet." This creates a rich and tormenting Beckettian confusion while repelling the understanding. Obviously the "I" here is ambiguously placed and must be read as both a physical "I" that, for example, "can't move" and a mental one that can be isolated from its body. Perhaps it is a foetus, waiting to make the first movements of life; we have, after all, just been treated to the gnomic sentence "Worm will I ever get born?" The sentence that follows makes it clear that Beckett too is tormented by the confusion: "One minute in a skull and the next in a belly, strange, and the next nowhere in particular." Brain, belly and bowels. But not just that.

To repeat, the whole passage runs: "I wonder if I couldn't sneak out by the fundament, one morning, with the French breakfast. No, I can't move, not yet. One minute in a skull and the next in a belly, strange, and the next nowhere in particular." (T.355)

This sort of passage is conventionally, and correctly, read as a puzzle about the Self. Is the Self mental or physical? Perhaps the Hegelian parallel can take us further than this however. "It is not just a matter of where "I" am, it is a matter of where and what the world is. But to start with the Self: The digestive element and the worm-foetus



element must be taken largely as metaphors. Their strength may lie in their heavy physicality but their sense must be elsewhere; there are strong indications that this passage, and many like it, should be read as abstract speculation. The narrator considers moving, tries to move perhaps, realizes that he can't move and resorts to generalization instead. He says in effect, "It's funny how I locate my Self first in my skull, then in my belly and then nowhere" thus abstracting from his earlier pondering about the chance of sneaking out by the fundament. Here we have the Hegelian triad. In the skull are psychic things, the things of the Spirit; but is the Self there? The belly is the archetypal physical entity; is the Self there? And "nowhere in particular" is the best we can do to imagine where the Self might be.

But we said we could go beyond this with Hegel's help. So we move from the subjective to the objective, and see Beckett's speculations about the Self as being potentially about the world. When the Unnamable moves from thinking about his own chances of escape to thinking in more general terms he is thinking about the world too. All reality is one minute in a skull, then in a belly, then nowhere: all reality is mental (Spirit) physical (Nature) or abstract (Nowhere in particular; Logic).

A little later the Unnamable is again talking about "they" who seem to control him and he says "They want me to have a pain in the neck, irrefragable proof of animation, while listening to talk of the heavens. They want me to have a mind where it is known once and for all that I have a pain in the neck, that flies are devouring me and that the heavens can do nothing to help." (T.356) "They" seem to propose the triad, the three levels of being: physical, the pain in the neck, mental, the mind that knows it has a pain in the neck,

and our abstract plane (the heavens). Examples like this could be multiplied.

The interpretation of Beckett which emerges from this sort of analogy-drawing with Hegel has repercussions for other interpretations and it certainly amplifies them. The view, for instance, that the reference to "the heavens" in the above passage is simply a bitter pointing to the irony of the non-existence of the heavens is perhaps not enough - we can go beyond this with Hegel's help. Beckett is being ironical, of course, but the irony is made more than just another antitheistical jibe by our Hegelian approach. The dialectic has the effect of cutting us off from the cosy personal relationship with God in which He is presented as the antidote for despair. Hegel's God is Absolute Reality, that is He is the structure of the world. In other words God does ordain "how it is" but is unavailable for later modifications. "Talk of the heavens" is useless blather. There is not much "help" to be found in a Nowhere land of logical abstractions.

The above remarks have already brought Beckett more closely in touch with Hegel than has yet been done by any of his critics except possibly Schulz. But all that has been said has been very general and the examples taken at random. The burden of this thesis is that systematic, detailed comparison will produce interesting results. Obviously it is not necessary to relate all of Hegel to all of Beckett. That proceeding would be unbearably lengthy and not really very much more use than a more selective approach. Consequently I have chosen to use one novel of Beckett's, the one most in need of illumination in my opinion, and to compare it with one work of Hegel's - the Phenomenology of Mind.

The Phenomenology expounds Hegel's main theses quite freely and at length; it is not so compressed as the only other candidate among



Hegel's work for our task, the Encyclopedia. It is available in an English translation quite readily.<sup>2</sup> It is Hegel's most famous work. These seem to me to be sufficient reasons for selecting it. The method I adopt could, however, be applied to almost any of Beckett's mature work and to most of Hegel's purely philosophical writings.

\* \* \*

### Depth.

In the Preface to the Phenomenology Hegel observes that during the centuries of Faith "consciousness" possessed "the assurance.....of being reconciled with ultimate reality and with its all-pervading presence, within as well as without." (PM.72) Man ("Self-conscious mind") has moved out of this security but has not been content with a simple self-sufficiency which merely provides "husks" for him to feed on. "Self-consciousness" now desires from philosophy not so much to bring it to a knowledge of what it is, as to obtain once again through philosophy "the restoration of that sense of solidity and substantiality of existence it has lost." (PM.72) Hegel is talking about a situation obtaining in 1807 but it is a situation in which not much is to be hoped. In his own day Hegel had to point out that in expecting philosophy to provide "edification" (which he glossed as a synthesis along the lines of some such misty concept as "the beautiful, the holy, the eternal..." (PM.72) man was asking the impossible of it. Hegel's rigour and insistence on clarity proposed to offer instead a picture of the truth, however unsatisfying. In spite of his antagonism towards Romantic longings for synthesis he describes such longings in terms of pity: since the decay of faith man's mind has become "rooted in the earthly" and "his spirit shows such poverty of nature that it seems to long for the mere pitiful feeling of the divine in the abstract, and to get refreshment from that, like a wanderer



in the desert craving for the merest mouthful of water." (PM.73)

The pity betokens Hegel's foresight that all his systems, worlds and words will not fill the void that has been left in man. Here we come up against one of the central, and most painful, paradoxes in Beckett. In Hegel's terms, post-religious man is seeking an infinite; he erects substitute religions which "pretend to occupy the very centre and the deepest depths". Now, instead of proceeding, as we might expect, to a demolition of these pretensions on the grounds that there is a "centre" and there are "depths", though, alas, not where his contemporaries think they are, Hegel opens the way for a philosophy that will redefine "depths" altogether. He says: "But just as there is a breadth which is emptiness, there is a depth which is empty too: as we may have an extension of substance which overflows into finite multiplicity without the power of keeping the manifold together, in the same way we may have an insubstantial intensity which, keeping itself in as mere force without actual expression, is no better than superficiality." (P.74)

The philosophy to which this opens the door is Existentialism. Not only does it foreshadow Sartre's theory of totalities ("there is no love apart from the deeds of love")<sup>3</sup> but it seems to open the way for the Essence/Existence distinction in that "the depths" are "essences" that come second to the "existence" of the things said to possess them. To refer again to Sartre's example of love, perhaps there simply is no such thing as the "deep" essence "Love"; there are only the actions of love. The important point here is that having expelled Romantic emotion and religion from "the depths", Hegel does not abolish them - he merely says that there is "a depth which is empty" and that it is "no better than superficiality". This emptiness is being, presence, the useless but inescapable aspect of all things.

We shall get back to Beckett by way of Robbe-Grillet. In Pour

"Significations" should give place to "presence". "Significations" are meanings, essences, depths, and, in the Hegelian-Sartrean tradition, they are suspect depths. No amount of "meaning" can replace presence - the reality of the world is its presence. Adjectives in literature, for example, erode "presence" by injecting meaning into it. Adjectives, and art in general, partake of

"la destitution des vieux mythes de "profondeur". On sait que toute la littérature romanesque reposait sur eux, sur eux seuls. Le rôle de l'écrivain consistait traditionnellement à creuser dans la Nature, à l'approfondir, pour atteindre des couches de plus en plus intimes et finir par mettre au jour quelque bribe d'un secret troublant. Descendu dans l'abîme des passions humaines, il envoyait au monde tranquille en apparence (celui de la surface) des messages de victoire décrivant les mystères qu'il avait touchés du doigt. Et le vertige sacré qui envahissait alors le lecteur, loin d'engendrer l'angoisse ou la nausée, le rassurait au contraire quant à son pouvoir de domination sur le monde. Il y avait des gouffres, certes, mais grâce à de vaillants spéléologues on pourrait en sonder le fond."  
(Robbe-Grillet, 1, 22)

Thus much for the valiant explorers who bring up fragments from the depths of the psyche. Clearly Robbe-Grillet is mocking such a view of the nature of literature or of psychology. For him the "profondeur" of the psyche is an inapt metaphor; what he has to say later on the subject of "surface" against "depth" makes it clear that he echoes Hegel's dislike of the pseudo-priority given to the latter.

One of the essays in Pour Un Nouveau Roman is entitled "Samuel Beckett, ou la présence sur la scène" (Robbe-Grillet, 1, 95). In it Robbe-Grillet explains Beckett's move from fiction to the theatre by saying that if we cannot say much that is meaningful about man, at least in the theatre we can know that he is there. "La condition de l'homme, dit Heidegger, c'est d'être là.... Le personnage de théâtre



est en scène c'est sa première qualité: il est là". (Robbe-Grillet, 1, 95) A more interesting, a more real "depth", then, is the "depth" of presence, existence, being-there.

We are now in a position to gloss Hegel's paradox in two ways; "there is a depth which is empty" applies to the hollowness of the Romantic and Naturalist claims of "traditional" writers, as described by Robbe-Grillet. It also applies to the real, if incomprehensible, claim of the Existentialists that existence has an absolute priority, that a thing's existence is its reality and that this "profoundest" (i.e. most important) aspect of an object is, precisely, an emptiness. We shall have more to say about this when we confront Sartre; for the moment the title of his magnum opus can stand for itself - Being and Nothingness.

If we try to interpret the metaphors of "depth" in Beckett in a traditional, religious or Freudian light we find the results curiously unsatisfying. In How It is we find a perfect illustration of the point. The creatures crawling about in the mud are "down here" and the voices, the scribes, the old life, is "up there". We feel it to be almost insulting, a trivialization, to suggest that "down here" is the libido, a dark hell of unconscious desires. And if we develop this and suggest that "down here" is literally some sort of hell, this too seems inadequate in that Beckett, for all his characters' deaths and pseudo-deaths, impresses us as the writer who par excellence speaks of the mess that is "here and now" - how it is is the question. So where are we to go for some help in our understanding of this metaphor? (That it is a metaphor can hardly be in doubt. Surely nobody could suggest that the subject of How It is is a scientific description of survival in mud any more than they could suggest that a Christian should attempt to get to heaven with the aid of a Saturn-5 rocket.)



The answer may be that we should go for help to philosophy. Seen in the light of Hegel, seen as a writer with the same concerns as Sartre and Robbe-Grillet, Beckett at once appears serious in a way that he does not when we apply "depth" psychologically. A look at How It is in terms of the "depth that is empty" gives that novel a perspective in which we can understand it. We find the same thing throughout Beckett's mature work; certainly it applies to the Unnamable. He, too, is "down here" somewhere; he can talk of "them" as being "up there in their world" (T.300) and ask,

Why did I have myself represented in the midst of men, the light of day? It seems to me it was none of my doing. We won't go into that now. I can see them still, my delegates. The things they have told me! About men, the light of day. I refused to believe them. But some of it has stuck. But when, through what channels, did I communicate with these gentlemen? Did they intrude on me here? No, no one has ever intruded on me here. Elsewhere then. But I have never been elsewhere. )  
(T.299)

It is insufficient, and the reader knows that it is insufficient, to be lured into admiration and acquiescence by the hypnotic brilliance of the monologue of which this is a tiny part, by its irony and mad ratiocination. If we are content with a Cartesian view of Beckett in the face of this we remain what Descartes remained - rationalists in a world where reason is not the whole story and where, indeed, it may confuse as much as help. What is needed is a proper acceptance of the fact that the Unnamable here means what he is saying, that he is trying to express something. It is, of course, something inexpressible as Beckett well knows, but philosophy has been struggling to express the inexpressible since the Presocratics.

Thus it is easy for the reader, even if he does not cast aside a sentence such as, "No, no one has ever intruded on me here"

as unimportant, to swallow it as yet another ambiguous dithyramb or yet another utterance to be contemplated in mystic awe. These levels are quite legitimate but, surely, inadequate. Let us try to do better.

"No one has ever intruded on me here" is obviously part of an extended metaphor of place. The Unnamable has communicated with others, even if only with his own "delegates", but he cannot imagine how because he has the conviction that he is finally isolated, and has always been so. For what can this be a metaphor? Surely it is a literary perception of the anguished isolation that is permanently revealed by philosophical investigations into the nature of consciousness and the self. Hegel has set the scene - "there is a depth which is empty" ÷ there is nothing in the Unnamable's "me", nothing has ever got through into that emptiness. Robbe-Grillet proposes that the time has come for a turning away from the "traditional" depths of passion to a contemplation of being-thereness as more important, but Beckett finds that it is precisely this empty concept of "presence" that opens a void into which comprehension disappears - for if it is irreducibly true that Malone's pencil "is there" it is also irreducibly true that Malone "is there" and how have the twain ever met in so entirely discrete a world? And what sort of a "being-thereness" have Malone and the Unnamable got? A subject's "being-there" is different in kind from the pencil's and just as empty. And it is quite inescapable; "I have never been elsewhere". If his "delegates" are his senses how have they communicated with the emptiness that is himself?



### Subjectivity (The Preface)

Insisting on the importance of a scientific philosophy, Hegel observes that the religious man shrouds his consciousness in "sheer emotion" and sleeps. The painfulness of consciousness is a demon with which Beckett will wrestle long and hard. Hegel lays down the foundations for a language in which to discuss consciousness (in Baillie's translation the three main divisions of the Phenomenology are "A. Consciousness. B. Self-consciousness. C. Free Concrete Mind".) Already in the Preface he justifies this stress on consciousness, the subject; I offer glosses from the early pages of The Unnamable:

The living substance, further, is that being which is truly subject, or, which is the same thing, is truly realized and actual (wirklich) solely in the process of positing itself ("I, say I" says the Unnamable), or in mediating with its own self its transitions from one state or position to the opposite ("I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not me"). As subject it is pure and simple negativity ("Impassive, still and mute, Malone revolves, a stranger forever to my infirmities, one who is not as I can never not be"), and just on that account a process of splitting up what is simple and undifferentiated, a process of duplicating and setting factors in opposition ("Malone is there"). ... True reality is merely this process of reinstating self-identity. ... It is the process of its own becoming, the circle which presupposes its end as its purpose, and has its end for its beginning ("And indeed I greatly fear, since my speech can only be of me and here, that I am once more engaged in putting an end to both. Which would not matter, far from it, but for the obligation, once rid of them, to begin again, to start again from nowhere, from no one and from nothing and win to me again, to me here again, by fresh ways to be sure, or by the ancient ways, unrecognisable at each fresh faring").  
(PM. 80-81. T. 293-304.)

This section of the Preface to the Phenomenology comes under the subtitle "The Absolute as Subject". We shall have more to say about this. Beckett works out the subjectivity of his characters to the point where it too appears to be described as



absolute:

What I say, what I may say, on this subject. The subject of me and my abode, has already been said since, having, always been here, I am here still.  
(T. 304. My italics.)

The confusion as to what is him and what is not him that the Unnamable feels echoes Hegel's paradox that "substance is essentially subject". With this we are introduced to an idealism and to a sort of Deism - "the Absolute as Spirit"--which are not more realistic or comprehensible than the Unnamable's wandering speculations.

This marriage of substance and subject is "the truth". The Absolute is the combination of substance (the "an-sich", the objects of consciousness) and subject (the "für-sich", consciousness itself). Now, although Hegel leaves the door open for God (despite his dislike of that "meaningless" word) as Absolute Subject, what he is concerned with in the Phenomenology is man's mind - human self-consciousness; of this he admits that "consciousness" for itself "is a state quite outside of science". (PM. 88). This hint is important - it allows of an indefinable area at the heart of the self that will be useful for Sartre and Beckett. Subjectivity, then, is uniquely human - the attribute of developed human minds:

While the embryo is certainly, in itself, implicitly a human being, it is not so explicitly, it is not by itself a human being (für sich); man is explicitly man only in the form of developed and cultivated reason, which has made itself to be what it is implicitly.  
(PM. 83)

The German words in brackets in the above lead me to prefer "for itself" to "by itself" earlier in the sentence. We then have a conformity between Hegel and Sartre on the distinction between things (including embryos), which are "an-sich", "en-soi",

"in themselves", and human minds, which are "für-sich", "pour-soi", "for themselves". What a double-headed monster this is for Beckett's heroes. Not only are they human, with the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, but they are "human for themselves", "für-sich"; conscious, that is, of being; of being themselves; of being human.

Hegel, however, does not pursue his analysis of the subjective with Sartre's vigour. He certainly insists in several places that subjectivity is "being-for-itself" and is "pure negativity", concepts to be much clarified and developed by Sartre; but his self is not quite the "empty" entity that this might lead us to suppose. For example, Purpose is "the unmoved which is self-moving; as such it is subject". This leads Hegel into his idealist thesis in which he claims that the actual has an identity with our mental pictures of it; but "what is actual and concrete is the same as its inner principle or notion simply because the immediate qua purpose contains within it the self or pure actuality. The realized purpose, or concrete actuality, is movement and development unfolded but this very unrest is the self". (PM.83) It is worth considering here this "aside" of Hegel's to the effect that purpose is "in" the self, or vice-versa. Malone, for instance, in proposing to tell his stories, is really after the "pure actuality in himself". The offensiveness of this suggestion that "purpose, contains the self" and that "pure actuality" is in the self, which is also "pure negativity" gives us some insight into Malone's problem. He spins out his words and stories in an attempt to create an existence; after all, if the actual is the same as its "notion" then let us try to get the notion right as a way of getting the actual right. He is in search of

meaning - of himself - and our reading of Hegel would seem to suggest that Malone's "executed purpose" (in this case his scribbling) is "the actual as existent" or, better, is an "unrest" which, precisely, "is the self". "Unrest" describes the condition of Beckett's "narrators" very well. But there is something inadequate in the assertion that Malone's self is constituted by his babblings. It would not help Malone to know himself, or Beckett to understand Malone, if the theory were adopted that the very pain of his unfulfilled quest for the self was his self. At least, it would be the last and worst joke.

\* \* \*

#### Consciousness    The Introduction

Altogether, Hegel establishes a vocabulary with which to discuss the self. That it is important follows naturally from his view of the centrality of the self and that it has been influential will appear from our discussion of later philosophers. What the Hegelian analysis also produces however, is a kind of spotlight on a new and peculiarly ruthless little corner of despair. Equipped with this new vocabulary, fluent in the intensely abstract and confusing language of consciousness, what are we going to say? Some clarification of what is sayable is made in the Introduction that follows the Preface to the Phenomenology and we want to know now what Hegel has made possible.

In the Introduction we come across this ominous tag, "consciousness ... suffers this violence at its own hands; it destroys its own limited satisfaction". (PM.138) What is this consciousness, then? Things, we have seen, exist "an sich", per se, in themselves; this is their "Truth". They give themselves



to me, however, in another form of being - "being-for-my-consciousness". This is my knowledge of an object. But what, then, is the "Truth" of knowledge? The table's "Truth" is its existence "an-sich"; what is the "Truth" of my knowledge of the table? Hegel answers that "consciousness furnishes its own criterion in itself", this criterion being our immediate apprehension, "inside" consciousness, of what is true, (PM.140). Knowledge has "being-for-my-consciousness" and the "being-an-sich" of the object simultaneously in consciousness. "For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, on the other, consciousness of itself." (PM.141). In other words, I am conscious of the table and conscious of being conscious of the table. Three things are thus in play - the table, my consciousness of it and my consciousness of that consciousness. The table is self-substantiating, it is "True" in its existence "an-sich"; my consciousness also furnishes its own "Truth" in that it observes itself as well as observing the object and automatically irons out any discrepancy between them. Here Hegel makes another of his disturbing asides - this "ironing out" process changes the object per se. If this is not Mr Watt's problem, I don't know what is.

Consciousness, thus, has two objects - the object per se and the existence for consciousness of that object. We have so far spoken of this latter as though it were merely reflective consciousness (consciousness conscious of itself) but it is in fact our "experience" of the object. To make this clear: when I am conscious of a table I can also become conscious that I am conscious of the table; I cannot simply become conscious that I am conscious. I cannot say that I am conscious that I know; I must say that I am conscious that I know X. (Naturally there are

objections to this rather dogmatic elucidation of Hegel.) Our "knowledge" of an object per se is our consciousness of it, our "experience" of it is our consciousness of our knowledge of it. The mind is not content to rest here however, it wishes to "press forward" to its true form of existence. What does this involve? It involves the abolition of the discrepancy between the object "an-sich" and our knowledge of it. We are sickeningly aware of the distinction between the two objects of our consciousness, viz. the object and our knowledge of it. And we feel that our mind's true form of existence is one in which it "will reach a position where appearance becomes identified with essence" (PM 145). This "essence", presumably, is the object's existence "an-sich", and this "appearance" is how it appears to my consciousness. In other words, Hegel is proposing a terminus ad quem for consciousness, a point towards which the mind tends. At this point a marriage will take place between the essential existence-per-se of objects and our consciousness of them. But this implies that here our consciousness of objects will come to share their "an-sich" "Truth". In other words, when consciousness effects the marriage between objects and our knowledge of them, by embracing both, it is grasping its own essence and will "connote the nature of absolute knowledge itself" (PM.145).

This is the thesis of Hegel's Introduction to the Phenomenology (PM.131-145). What it amounts to for our understanding of Beckett is how destructive it is of the old stable Ego and how freely it moves into absolute, mystical and religious language. It is not trivial to add that it also demonstrates the maddening complexity and inclusiveness required for any serious discussion of the fundamental issues of subjectivity. This complexity itself throws considerable doubt on the value of the results achieved



and here perhaps one can obtain an insight into that peculiarly Beckettian torment of having "to speak of things of which I cannot speak" (T.294). Hegel, having posed the question of the nature of the mind, is forced on by his insatiable thirst for truth up an ever-more-tortuous path towards an unobtainable "atomic" paradise - a paradise, that is, where all the possibilities have been explored, all the exceptions given. The connexion between this unapproachable peace and Wittgenstein's "atomic language" will be obvious; the connexion between both these and Beckett's need to "get it all said" is also evident.

A comparison between Hegel's Preface and Introduction and parts of The Unnamable on these stylistic grounds would be revealing. We are concerned here, however, not to establish a stylistic analogy but to find out whether Beckett and Hegel are talking about the same subject, if that pun is allowed. The Unnamable says: "... all sounds, there's only one, continuous, day and night, what is it, it's steps coming and going, it's voices speaking for a moment, it's bodies groping their way, it's the air, it's things, it's the air among the things, that's enough ..." (T.390/1). The lack of conventional punctuation is deceptive, the monotony can hypnotise. But if we remain alert we can feel the weight of a sort of epistemological fury here. We could paraphrase this passage: "Our heads are always full of sound - there is no rest and silence in the mind, but what is it that so constantly impinges on our consciousness? It is the events of life reduced, as a philosopher always reduces them, to their simplest - all human action is steps, voices, bodies ... perhaps that's not enough, perhaps we are not allowing for the invisible, the air ... well, the air and all it contains, air filled with things, things surrounded by air". This is the Unnamable



battling on with his "pensum". Like Hegel, he is simply trying to say something, some simple something about the simplest fact - himself, his existence. He goes on:

"... that's enough, that I seek, like it, no, not like it, like me, in my own way, what am I saying, after my fashion, that I seek, what do I seek now, what it is, it must be that, it can only be that, what it is, what it can be, what what can be, what I seek, no, what I hear, now it comes back to me, all back to me, they say I seek what it is I hear, I hear them, now it comes back to me, what it can possibly be, and where it can possibly come from, since all is silent here, and the walls thick, and how I manage, without feeling an ear on me, or a head, or a body, or a soul, how I manage, to do what, how I manage, it's not clear, dear dear, you say it's not clear, something is wanting to make it clear, I'll seek, what is wanting, to make everything clear, I'm always seeking something..."  
(T.391)

The opening phrases of this quotation refer to the sound mentioned in the passage quoted immediately above (the sound is an external object, an object of perception) and state that the reciter "seeks" the sound. Does he do this in the same way as the sound does ("like it")? That is, do I comport myself towards objects as they comport themselves towards me? No. I comport myself "like me" ("für-mich"). So, do we agree that I comport myself like me as I seek the external object, the sound? No. I seek "what it is", I seek what the sound is (it's essence, in Hegel's terms, but it's existence in the terms of Sartre). "It can only be that, that it is". That what is? The sound, "what I hear". But how can the Unnamable "possibly" discover what anything is? He is not aware of having an ear, a head, a body, a soul. Now this, of course is precisely how perception works. We hear sounds without hearing our ears. We receive the sense-data in our heads without feeling (Beckett's word) our brains. We experience physical and mental phenomena without being aware that it is our body that is doing so. And where, in any of this, is the soul

to be found?

This is precisely the "mess" on which Hegel has turned the spotlight of his analysis. We are aware of sounds. And we are aware that we are aware of sounds. The "Truth" of the sound is its existence "an-sich". The "Truth" of my awareness of it lies in my awareness of that awareness. Any mind aspires to a marriage between these truths in order to arrive at "absolute knowledge itself". If Hegel's analysis is inaccurate it deserves to become the chief torment of the intellectual damned. If it is accurate, if, that is, it reflects a real situation in our commerce with the world, it has really only made matters worse. We are "always seeking something", we cannot stop; but "all is silent here" and there is no way out of the echoing prison of subjectivity - I am me, perceiving sounds. How do I know? Because I am aware that I am perceiving sounds as well as being aware of the sounds. And how do I know that? Hegel, after all, has made matters worse; quite literally it becomes "folly to be wise", the Unnamable goes mad under the burden of the incomprehensibility of consciousness as set out by Hegel.

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### Names

Since we shall be considering the relationship between Beckett's world and words such as "God" and "Being" we cannot leave the preliminary sections of the Phenomenology without considering the important discussion of statements about God in the Preface.

As so often, Hegel approaches a central point obliquely. He introduces his discussion of statements about God by saying that he merely needs "examples" of statements of any sort to "explain

what has been said". But this coyness should not put us off; example or not, the discussion of the proposition "God is Being" is of great importance. Of this proposition we are told that "The predicate is "being": it has substantive significance, and thus absorbs the meaning of the subject within it" (PM.121). This amounts to the accusation that this proposition is "identical", "trivial": Hegel speaks of the "unaccustomed restraint" that is imposed on thought by such directionless propositions and of the mind being rebuffed and "thrown back on the subject" (PM.121) by such "triviality". Already we are finding how difficult it is to talk or to be silent on such subjects.

A little later in the Preface we meet God again, in a way even more significant for our purpose. Hegel, oblique as usual, suggests that we should avoid proper names in philosophy; he means that we should not employ the word "God". Instead we should speak of an immediate "Concept" such as "being", "the One" and so on. This of course follows from the earlier discussion of "identical" propositions. "Names" are not, do not have, "Concepts". (This is a premonition of Wittgenstein's theoretical "atomic" language which would consist of nothing but purely individual "names" which alone denote reality.) What are names, then? Hegel says, "Apart from the sensuously apprehended or ideally presented self, it is in the main the mere name qua name which denotes the subject pure and simple, the empty unit without any conceptual character." (PM.124) Two points emerge from this. First, there is a "self" which denotes what is purely subject and, second, pure subject is "empty" and is represented by a "name". Now, the first of these points refers to the notion that when we "apprehend" an object "sensuously" (i.e. with our senses) or when we find it "presented" to us "ideally" (i.e. imaginatively) we are confronted with the



"self" or "subject" of the object; the second point is that this subject is "empty", "without any conceptual character" and can be denoted by a name.

The first point appears to be a paradox: in perception we are confronted with the object as subject. Hegel seems to mean here that the objects of our perception give themselves to us in their uniqueness - when I look at one table in a row of identical tables I am in no doubt as to which table I am looking at, it is "that" table. The second point is that if I employ a proper name (i.e. a name that represents the table's uniqueness just as the name "Plato" only refers to one individual) to refer to the table in a proposition, this name has the same qualities as my perception of the table, namely that it refers to the "self", the "subject", the uniqueness of the table.

The connexion of this with Wittgenstein has already been noted. It connects also with Existentialism in that the existence (if not the "Being") of an object is all that can be meant by Hegel's point about its "sensuously apprehended ... Self". As this is an "empty unit without any conceptual character", it is without "essences", it is all that is left when essences have been "subtracted" from an object, it is therefore the "nothing" of "being" which we discussed under "Dialectic", above. Thus we have adopted the curious position that an object's "name" is its existence. Now, it is precisely about the name "God" that Hegel is talking and we can develop an even more "trivial" proposition than "God is Being" by positing that the name "God" is God's existence. That is to say that the empty name "God" is nothing more than what is left when all the essences and attributes of God have been subtracted - i.e. his existence.

This discussion is relevant to Beckett, even if we apply it

to other propositions than those about God. It obviously revolves about a linguistic point concerning meaningful and meaningless propositions that is a general concern of Beckett's, but that it is about God is particularly suitable. On the linguistic level we are in the well-known world of Mr Watt. Much has been made of the ringing periods of Mr Watt's speculations on pots ("it resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted". W.78) but he continues with an equally interesting thesis:

It was in vain that it answered, with unexceptionable adequacy, all the purposes, and performed all the offices, of a pot, it was not a pot. And it was just this hair-breadth departure from the nature of a true pot that so excruciated Watt. For if the approximation had been less close, then Watt would have been less anguished. For then he would not have said, This is a pot, and yet not a pot, no, but then he would have said, This is something of which I do not know the name. And Watt preferred on the whole having to do with things of which he did not know the name ... to having to do with things of which the known name, the proven name, was not the name, any more, for him.  
(W.78)

A Hegelian interpretation of this passage helps to clarify Watt's predicament. "Natural philosophizing" (Kaufmann's translation), by which Hegel means common sense and intuition, "treats us to a rhetorical mélange of commonplace truths" (PM.126) and it is just this common-sense philosophy, about which Hegel is so scathing, that leaves Watt dissatisfied. The "commonplace truths" of the pot, its "purposes" and "offices" are "in vain", they do not fulfil the questing mind, the mind that asks "What?" Kaufmann glosses this section of the Preface thus, "The task of philosophy is ... to supplant notions with Concepts" ... and this is just what Watt tries to do. He has the common-sense notion of a pot, and he has

the name "pot" but he does not have that one thing that satisfies human reason - in Hegel's usage the Concept of the pot. No wonder he cannot say the name "Pot" and "be comforted". If this name didn't apply to the object it would of course be easier, but Beckett makes it quite clear that Watt is talking about something to which he cannot avoid giving the name "Pot". Let us remind ourselves of the point quoted earlier; "It is in the main the mere name qua name which denotes the subject pure and simple, the empty unit without any conceptual character" (PM.124). Watt is wrestling with this inadequacy in the nature of names. Here we can see that our discussion of the Existentialist interpretation of Hegel's thesis was not merely an aside. The "essences" of the pot (its "purposes" and "offices") are not in question; nor is the accuracy of its name "Pot"; what "excruciates" Watt is the pot's individual existence, for which a proper name would have to be found. The Platonic "nature of a true pot", the ground of the pot's "Being" perhaps, is not quite the same as this pot's individual existence. But Watt only has one name for all pots - "Pot" which denotes their general existence ("Being" perhaps) but does not denote the individual existence of this pot. This is why "the known name, the proven name, was not the name, any more, for him".

As we have seen, however, Hegel is really concerned with propositions about God. We shall have more to say about God and perhaps it is sufficient here to accept provisionally the critical commonplace that Mr Knott is God and note that Watt indulges in this piece of rhetoric: "But what conception have I of Mr Knott? None". (W.118) Mr Knott's name, then, a proper name of course, the name that "designates the pure subject" is "void of Concept". Perhaps it is for this reason that at the climax of his oeuvre



Beckett abandons names and describes his most devastated "hero" as "the Unnamable".

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### Sense - Certainty..

Ironically, perhaps, the Phenomenology is not a systematic work of philosophy. Kaufmann's discussion of how it was composed and how odd its structure is should make us cautious about approaching all its sections with the same expectations (cf. Kaufmann, 1, 108-175). It does contain, however, the germs of many of the ideas elaborated by later philosophers, and by Beckett, and it is with these that I shall be concerned. The lengthy sections on morality, culture, world religions and so on have much less light to throw on Beckett than the sections on consciousness, the Self and the Absolute.

Section A, the first of the three main sections of Baillie's translation, is entitled "Consciousness". It begins with a chapter called "Sense-Certainty," that is with the simplest situation, that of consciousness confronted with an object: this is the situation beyond which we have felt nervous to move since the Cartesian cogito; certainly it is the first situation of the Unnamable.

The knowledge, which is at the start or immediately our object, can be nothing else than just that which is immediate knowledge, knowledge of the immediate, of what is.

We have, in dealing with it, to proceed, too, in an immediate way, to accept what is given, not altering anything in it as it is presented before us, and keeping mere apprehension free from conceptual comprehension (PM.149)

which is at least no clearer than:

And things, what is the correct attitude to adopt towards things? And, to begin with, are they necessary? What a question. But I have few illusions, things are to be expected. The best is not to decide anything, in this connexion, in advance. If a thing turns up, for some reason or another, take it into consideration.  
(T.294)

This is where Beckett must be seen as genuinely philosophical. He begins this novel at precisely the point at which modern philosophy starts. The first three sentences are "Where now? Who now? When now?" and these have their equivalents in Hegel who proposes two "universal" forms of the "this" - "Now" and "Here". "Now" and "Here" are forms which do not alter according to the actual When or Where they apply to. "This" is therefore universal, but it depends on another "universal" - "I", "pure Ego". These three universals (Now, Here and Ego) are established by posing the questions. Where? When? Who? Where now? Who now? When now? For it is always now. So the Unnamable's consciousness, like Hegel's starts with "what is"; here, now, with me.

"How proceed?" is the question the Unnamable asks next, "By affirmations and negations invalidated as offered, or sooner or later," (T.293) And indeed this seems to be the valid way in Hegel's view:

The truth for consciousness of a "This" of sense is said to be universal experience. Every consciousness of itself cancels again, as soon as made, such a truth as e.g. the Here is a tree, or the Now is noon, and expresses the very opposite: the Here is not a tree but a house.  
(PM.158)

As Moran says, by way of bringing Molloy to a close, "Then I went back into the house and wrote. It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining." (T.176)

Hegel and Beckett, so far, are parallel; immediate knowledge is followed by immediate negation. The negation, of course, depends on a previous affirmation, "Here is a tree." The paradox of the negation stems from the affirmation. It is in trying to "say" the tree that we go wrong.

Those who ... speak of the "existence" of external objects, which can be more precisely characterized as actual, absolutely particular, wholly personal, individual things, each of them not like anything or anyone else (say that) this is the existence which ... has absolute certainty and truth. They "mean" this bit of paper I am writing on ... but they do not say what they "mean". If they really wanted to say this bit of paper which they "mean", and they wanted to say so, that is impossible, because the This of sense, which is "meant", cannot be reached by language, which belongs to consciousness, i.e. to what is inherently universal. In the very attempt to say it, it would, therefore, crumble in their hands; those who have begun to describe it would not be able to finish doing so: they would have to hand it over to others, who would themselves in the last resort have to confess to speaking about a thing that has no being.  
(PM. 159-160)

This is exactly what happens to the Unnamable. All that he says "crumbles in his hands", he cannot finish "describing", he admits at last that he is talking about nothing.

What we have learned from Hegel on immediate knowledge is that objects, simply contemplated, do not yield us up their here-and-nowness; on the contrary, they are evanescent and elude us as we grasp at them. We have now learnt that one cannot say an object; there is a difference in kind between words and objects that makes this forever impossible. Hegel goes so far as to suggest Beckett's own solution (the employment of "vice-existers") when he talks of "handing it over to others" who, eventually, will learn that they are talking about nothing. Mr Watt learns this lesson of the inherent falseness of all propositions; "He made the distressing



discovery that of himself too he could no longer affirm anything that did not seem as false as if he had affirmed it of a stone" (W.79). What is so illuminating about these parallels is the fact that Hegel's version establishes the point (in this case the point that one cannot grasp the Here and Now, cannot say the This) as philosophically necessary. No longer can we think, "Yes, poor old Malone seems to have lost his grip on reality; I have felt that way myself sometimes, but after all there is a graspable reality which other people - philosophers for instance, or I myself when I am feeling up to it - can discuss, clarify and explain". We now have to consider the possibility that when Beckett produces his paradoxes, seemingly self-contradictory asides and so on, he is not merely attempting to find objective correlatives for the psychological state of his characters. He is telling the philosophical truth. He is not dealing with madmen and their warped views of reality; he is dealing with reality itself, exactly as conceived by the sane, prosaic reason of a "normal" academic philosopher.

One is faced with a choice, after all. One can do one of two things when confronted, for example, with this from The End: "Strictly speaking I wasn't there. Strictly speaking I believe I've never been anywhere" (NK.61). One can either let one's mind skate over it, relishing it as a paradox, a crazy aside, a meaningless pair of sentences interesting only in that they are a grammatical joke (because they sound all right and exist as legitimate sentences); or one can decide that they are serious, that they have a meaning. "Strictly speaking I believe I've never been anywhere" says Beckett's narrator, and Hegel's philosophical rigour happens to lead him to make similar statements when he, too, is speaking "strictly". This should encourage us to choose our

second possibility and try to read Beckett as meaningful. Even without Hegel, Beckett's tormented battle with expression seems to deserve serious consideration. "Strictly speaking". Why "strictly" if there is not a "strict" fundamental, true, non-everyday way of speaking? And if there is such a way of speaking, who speaks in it? In this case, it so happens, Hegel for whom, strictly, the Self is nowhere.

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### Perception.

The second chapter of "Consciousness" is "Perception", alternatively titled "Things and their deceptiveness", which promises some light on the Unnamable, and others. It is Malone in fact who has most to say about "things"; but first, Hegel.

Perception "has negation, distinction, multiplicity in its very nature" (PM.163). Hegel is trying to establish the point at which perception moves from sense to intellect, for example the point at which my sensory apprehension of an object becomes an intellectual understanding of what I am looking at. "Negation" comes at the very beginning of this process, as we saw in the last section.

The This ... is established as not This, or as superseded, and yet not nothing (simpliciter), but a determinate nothing, a nothing with a certain content, viz. the This. The sense-element is in this way itself still present.  
(PM.163)

Which is to say, among other things, that when we consider a state of awareness just slightly higher than immediate sense-certainty, when we consider "Perception", there at once enters a destructive agent. Before even considering self-consciousness we have arrived at a "contradictory" point in the nature of the world - the This established as not This. The reason for this contradiction

would appear to be that "This" should refer to the immediate existence of a thing but can in fact only refer to the properties of the thing apprehended by the senses; thus, to take Hegel's example of salt, if I enquire of myself what I mean by "This" salt I can only reply that I mean this white, powdered, sharp-tasting entity; but these things are not, of course, "This" salt; the whiteness is different from the "thisness". So "This" brings a "not-This" with it, a situation which it is hard to conceive but without which the deceptiveness of things in Beckett's world is hard to understand.

The properties of the salt that give themselves to our perception are quite distinct from one another (PM.164-165). Its whiteness does not at all affect its sharp taste for example. But they all share the same Here-and-Now and Hegel hits on a happy way of expressing this relationship by saying that the "also" required in a description of an object (the salt is white and also tastes sharp) can be promoted to an "Also" which is "the pure universal itself ... the "Thinghood" keeping them together" (PM.165). But we do not perceive universal "whiteness" or "sharp-tastingness", we perceive this whiteness and also this sharp taste. The salt is "One"; we exclude from our perception all other things, all the properties which the salt does not have. Thus there is an inherent contradiction between the fact that I identify the salt by perceiving its properties and the fact that these properties are universals. Hegel deals with this contradiction quite specifically (PM.167-168) and develops it further. Properties may be universals, he says, "but the particular quality is a property only when attached to a "one", and determinate only by relation to others" (PM.168). It is this step that takes us from sense-impressions to consciousness. The contradictions



breed a higher consciousness which is concerned with itself and not with the sense-object. To express it crudely, when we start to think about our perception of an object we actually think about ourselves, our perception, and we cease to think about the object. Hegel describes what happens in this process in language that echoes the Trilogy;

I am thrown back on the beginning, and once more dragged into the same circuit, that supersedes itself in every moment ...  
Consciousness, then, has to go over this cycle again  
(PM.168)

Life in the Beckett world tends to be cyclical (Moran recapitulates Molloy's decomposition, Malone comes back again and again to his point of departure, the Unnamable sees Malone pass before him "at doubtless regular intervals"). But here we are dealing with a very short-term cycle, the cycle of sense-certainty-perception-consciousness. This feels rather like the churning and whirling of the Unnamable's "mind" but the points of connexion that I think worth establishing are (a) the compulsory aspect of Hegel's and Beckett's descriptions of the thinking process and (b) the incomprehensibility of some parts of the Trilogy, especially The Unnamable in any other light than this. I need hardly quote passages to establish the compulsory nature of the "pensum" undergone by Beckett's "heroes", the "you must go on" in the last line of The Unnamable can stand for them all. Point of connexion (a) is between this compulsion and the compulsion expressed in the careful choice of words in the passage from Hegel quoted above - "dragged" and "Consciousness ... has to". The thinking mind must go on, it cannot stop. Point (b) is really the thesis I am propounding - viz. that Beckett is not really comprehensible without some philosophical illumination. Again the point to be stressed is that the hypnotic music of Beckett's prose is only a

part of the journey - there is further to go. Thus: Hegel proposes a sleight-of-mind whereby consciousness, when engaged in perception, is found, as explained above, to have "gone back into itself" (PM.168). Only such a philosophical proposal can make sense of the following.

Perhaps its the door, perhaps I'm at the door,  
that would surprise me, perhaps its I, perhaps  
somewhere or other it was I, I can depart, all  
this time I've journeyed without knowing it,  
it's I now at the door, what door, what's a  
door doing here, ...  
(T.418)

The tension in this passage between perceiver and perceived is quite clear. From the dialectic of the door (object) and the "I" (subject) arises what the Unnamable cannot help having - experience. He narrates his experience of "going over" the cycle of sense-impressions, perceptions and consciousness.

\* \* \* \*

### The Unity of Objects.

So far, under "Perception", we have looked at properties, the "Also" (existence?) that connects them, their distinction, their union, their contradictory universality. The difficulties Hegel has encountered have really arisen as he has tried to move from simple sense-certainty (the sort of "consciousness" we share with animals, I would hazard) to a "perception" which includes a measure of understanding. This latter, as we have seen, is a mixed blessing to say the least.

In considering understanding we can start from properties again: "The entire diversity of these aspects comes not from the thing but from us; and we find them falling apart ... from one another, because the organs they affect are quite distinct inter se, the eye is entirely distinct from the tongue and so on." (PM.170)

Thus it is we, ourselves, some self "behind" our organs of perception, who constitute the unity of an object, "We preserve and maintain the self-sameness and truth of the thing, its being a "one"." (PM.170) Consciousness thus makes an object "one" at the same time as distinguishing its properties, and "Consciousness is at the same time aware that it reflects itself also into itself, and that, in perceiving, the opposite moment to the "also" crops up. This moment, however, is the unity of the thing with itself, a unity which excludes distinction from itself. It is consequently this unity which consciousness has to take upon itself" (PM.171).<sup>\*</sup> Which is as much as to say that an object's real esse is its percipi. This burden that consciousness carries is the burden of the existence of the world - only man perceives, so all that is perceived is man's. Beckett's Berkeleyan background is well known and instantly available in Film, the plot of which involves Buster Keaton in ridding his environment of all perceivers to be confronted at last by himself.

To formulate Hegel's position here we can say: Perception and understanding create the unity of objects (a unity jeopardized by perception's inevitable fragmenting of objects into properties.) However, among these objects must be numbered the empirical self - the personality and properties of the individual; "consciousness ... reflects itself also into itself". Thus consciousness creates the unity of the human being himself. In Proust Beckett makes an oblique approach towards this conception when he attributes to Proust the idea that the world is "a projection of the individual's consciousness". (PTD.19) This world projected by consciousness does not have an innate unity - it depends on voluntary memory for its unity: "The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place every day". (PTD.19) It is



Habit that insists on this daily re-creation of the world, the Habit that is bred of (and breeds) familiarity. We must notice carefully what Beckett says of this: "Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects." (PTD.19) I would lay a stress on the "countless subjects" of Proustian man which relate to the "countless objects" of the world. Here we have an empirical self confronting the phenomena of existence on an ad hoc basis; the Habit which holds these selves together is the ersatz Self, it imitates and performs the function of the Self. Habit, supported by voluntary memory, assures us each morning that we are still the same person that we were yesterday, "It insists on that most necessary, wholesome and monotonous plagiarism - the plagiarism of oneself." (PTD.33) Only by self-plagiarism can we be assured of continued identity.

To sum up: perception creates the unity of objects, but perception also perceives itself; thus it creates the unity of itself. This unity is described in Proust as the work of a particular organ of perception, the voluntary memory.

\* \* \*

### Consciousness. The "inner world"

The third section of "consciousness" is entitled "Force and understanding - the world of appearance and the supersensible world." Here Hegel makes his first approach to a mystical/existential view of the world and comes yet closer to Beckett's country. In "perception" he has discussed objects first as groups of properties and then as unities. He now points out further that we apprehend objects as universals, but also in their singleness, in other words that when I look at a table I know it

belongs to a universal category "Table" but also that it is "this" single, unique, table. This leads Hegel into a discussion of the "true being" of things, the "inner world" of the object. He establishes the lines of force of his picture of perception by proposing four areas between which perception takes place: there is consciousness (1) which perceives the object (2) and creates its unity, (Hegel insists here that these two are, in a sense, only one "moment"; we can talk as though there are two objects, "my consciousness" and "the table" but what we are concerned with is one unified entity, viz. "my consciousness of the table"). Beyond (1) and (2) there are: (3) the "inner world" of the perceived object and (4) a further consciousness to correspond to this. We can expect that this duality, (3) and (4), will also be subject to the rule that in consciousness of an object there are not two objects but only one unified entity - in this case "my consciousness of the inner world" of the object.

The inner world is so far for consciousness a bare and simple beyond, because consciousness does not as yet find itself in it. It is empty, for it is merely the nothingness of appearance, and positively the naked universal. This type of inwardness suits those who say that the inner being of things cannot be known (Hegel here refers to Goethe); but the reason for the position would have to be taken in some other sense. Certainly there is no knowledge to be had of this inner world, as we have it here; not, however, owing to reason being too shortsighted, or limited, or whatever you care to call it. ... but on account simply of the nature of the case, because in the void there is nothing known, or, putting it from the point of view of the other side, because its very characteristic lies in being beyond consciousness.  
 (PM.191-192)

It is time to relate this to The Unnamable, but first I think we should stress that when Hegel says that the "inner world" is "merely the nothingness of appearance" he is not contradicting

himself; he means what he says. He goes on to explain this point by telling us that the incomprehensible "inner world", called "the holy of holies, the inner sanctuary", must be "filled" with something and that we try to fill it with "dreamings, appearances, produced by consciousness itself." This, however, is unnecessary; the "inner world" of an object is not a sanctuary nor need consciousness implant anything in it - it is something that arises naturally out of our perception and it is filled with "appearance qua appearance". Hegel says he realizes that an "inner world" is usually taken to be the opposite of "appearance" (i.e. "inner-world" = "reality") but he points out that "Understanding" (which is the sort of consciousness that relates to the inner world, the No.4 that relates to the No.3 in our description of lines of force above) is related to "inner world" only through the "mediation" of the "play of forces" of sense-certainty and perception (i.e. of No.1 and No.2). (PM.193). In short, the "inner world" of an object appears at first as "the implicit, inherent being, universal and still without a filling" and then, in truth, as appearance qua appearance. (PM.193)

Assuming here, as elsewhere, that Beckett's descriptions may be taken metaphorically, an assumption justified by the fact that if we only take them literally we are bound to dismiss them as impossible, we find that the Unnamable's surroundings read remarkably like Hegel's paradoxical theorising. The Unnamable is motionless, staring straight ahead into the grey air, "close to me it is grey, dimly transparent, and beyond that charmed circle deepens and spreads its fine impenetrable veils". (T.302) The "charmed circle" seems to be the immediate area of Perception in which the narrator perceives Objects and beyond which the light of certainty, such as it is, cannot penetrate. "There is no night so deep", however, "that it may not be pierced in the end, with



the help of no other light than that of the blackened sky, or of the earth itself". (T.302) The unexpected conclusion of this sentence parallels Hegel's paradox about appearance - both preclude the possibility of some light being thrown on "reality" from outside, both propose man's perception, consciousness, understanding as a closed system within which all possible explanations are, or can be, given; both exclude divine or supernatural help from the process of understanding the world. The Unnamable now suggests that the grey he perceives may in fact be "the enclosure wall, as compact as lead" (T.302), a suggestion that he accepts (there being no possibility of going beyond for explanations). At least he proposes that, if it were possible, he could throw a "javelin" into the grey to tell "whether that which hems me round, and blots out my world, is the old void, or a plenum". (T.302) This is exactly how Hegel proceeds - observing that the "inner world" of objects is a void and then showing how it is a "plenum" in fact, a space entirely filled, filled by "appearance". Quite how satisfying Hegel's process is may be questioned. After all, has one advanced much beyond "void" when one has rejected it and come up triumphantly with a "plenum" called "appearance qua appearance"? Beckett, as so often, expresses in strong metaphorical terms the dissatisfaction we feel with this sort of philosophical "solution" - not the dissatisfaction created by disagreement but the agony created by agreement.

In this situation where the solution is no less painful than the problem and the correct solution no more help than a false one, the Unnamable is doomed to his babble. Hegel calls his "inner world" the "supersensible". It is beyond the reach of sense-perception, it is "the changeless kingdom of laws, the immediate ectype and copy of the world of perception". (PM.203) The "inner world", for understanding, is the "appearance qua appearance" of these laws; but when

we try to explain this we run up against a tautology. If we perceive lightning we "explain" it by referring to the changeless laws of electricity - the lightning is the "appearance" of, an example of, electricity; its "inner world", its "true being", is just this appearance itself. But this is an explanation which explains nothing - the laws of electricity are identical to the laws of lightning, they are the laws of lightning. It is like trying to explain the growth of a puppy by saying that all puppies grow. Consequently, to say that the inner world of an object of perception is its appearance, and specifically its appearance qua the appearance of a changeless law, then, to say that this changeless law exists in its appearances, such as the appearance of the object, is as much as to say nothing at all. To quote Hegel, "It is explanation that not only explains nothing, but is so plain that, while it makes as if it would say something different from what is already said, it really says nothing at all, but merely repeats the same thing over again." (PM.201)

This puts the Unnamable's babble into perspective. We started by calling the "inner world" a void; then "filled" it with the formula "appearance qua appearance"; now we learn that it is inexplicable and that all rational discussion of it "says nothing at all". In the section which starts "All these Murphys, Molloy's and Malones do not fool me" the Unnamable goes through a similar process. (T.305) Having dismissed the superficial (perceived objects) he claims "only I and this black void have ever been". (T.306) Is he certain? He asks "And the sounds?" but replies "No, all is silent". Then "And the lights...must they too go out?" and answers "Yes, out with them, there is no light here." So the world of sense-certainty and perception has indeed been transcended. What is left? "Nothing then but me, of which I know nothing, except that I have never uttered, and this black of which I know nothing either, except that it is black, and

empty". (T.306) Thus far the "inner world" is void. He will try to "speak of it, of its appearance". He then makes a move that is incomprehensible without something like our Hegelian reading. He returns to "Basil and his gang" (why, if he has not been "fooled" by the Murphys and Molloys?) and dismisses them with "Inexistent,, invented to explain I forget what", just as if they had been made to fill the void like Hegel's "changeless laws" - explaining nothing. "Ah yes, all lies, God and man, nature and the light of day, the heart's outpourings and the means of understanding, all invented..." (T.306).

Of course, Hegel does not leave us here. He proposes an "inverted" world to replace the tautological world he has dismissed. The "first super-sensible world" was the world of changeless laws conceived in Platonic terms. Now a "second supersensible world" emerges which admits change as an inherent part of its reality. So much is change part of this "inverted" world that, indeed, everything within it is in a permanent state of tension with its opposite. Hegel expresses this in an almost mystical passage in which all that is in "the first supersensible world" is contradicted in the second; black becomes white. But the meaning of this emerges as Hegel moves on to a discussion of opposites in a true dialectical process. The point is that black is "the inherent nature of white" (PM.208). The marriage of opposites is obscurely but emphatically established here - a necessary thesis in view of the way the dialectic works.

#### Consciousness. The "Supersensible" worlds.

We are now approaching the end of the first main section of the Phenomenology, "Consciousness". Hegel is moving upwards, from the



lowest form of awareness to the highest. His aim is to give an adequate account of man's comprehension of the world. This account starts from the premiss that understanding is first a matter of universalization.<sup>4</sup> The tendency to universalize produces the "first supersensible world". But when we want to explain the world this first level is not enough. We may start to understand, say, white things because we associate them with one another and learn in the end to posit the universal "whiteness", but we cannot explain this without resorting to the "second supersensible world", the world in which whiteness is defined by its opposite, blackness, and vice versa. Once this stage is reached man has, without noticing it as it were, moved from consciousness to self-consciousness, (PM.210) and therein lies the burden of this whole dialectical process. "Explanation" requires, produces, self-consciousness.

There is so much satisfaction in explanation, because consciousness being there, if we may use such an expression, in direct communion with itself, enjoys itself only. No doubt it there seems to be occupied with something else, but in point of fact it is busied all the while merely with itself. (PM.210)

Is this true of Beckett? That is, is "explanation" a path towards self-consciousness for the vice-existers? We might remember here that Hegel's "spiritual biography of modern individual man" (Mure, 1, 64) is not really chronological on any large scale. More important than the possible "real-time" chronologies (man's development from the animal, for instance, or the growth of perception in the child) is the logical time or logical space within which his categories are related to one another. This same distinction could profitably be made in the case of Beckett; it is a neglected point, but if the simple rule is observed that we cannot take the trilogy, for instance, literally (except on one of many levels) it becomes probable that its non-literal meanings do not necessarily inhabit "real" time and space. In which case

the apparent development from, say, Molloy to The Unnamable can parallel the development, also only apparent, that we find in Hegel. The dialectical process may take time but its significance lies in its logical, not in its chronological, order.

This distinction leaves us freer to move about within Beckett in our search for explanations. Although I am attempting to establish the mutually-enlightening relationship between the Phenomenology and The Unnamable it would be needlessly inhibiting to pretend that because self-consciousness does not really loom very large in the first main section of Hegel's work we must restrict our discussion of self-consciousness in Beckett to the later sections of his novel. The Unnamable is acutely self-conscious from the first questions. But he discovers the satisfactions of explanation as Hegel discovers them, and with them the long joys of self-consciousness.

In a sense all Beckett's work is an attempt at explanation of the inexplicable. It appears often that explanation is a substitute for a real confrontation with the issue of existence. The Unnamable tries to explain why he stopped believing Mahood at a certain point; "I'll explain why", he says, "that will permit me to think of something else and in the first place of how to get back to me". (T.324) Explanation enables the mind to start moving "back" towards the Self, while in a sense the explanation is irrelevant because "in point of fact", as we know very well, the Unnamable is "busied all the while merely with himself". There is a strong underlying assumption, especially in Malone Dies, that explanation is a duty owed to "them", or to someone, a "pensum" intimately connected with discussion of, or attempts on, the Self. Malone, after a few preliminaries, starts on the elegant tale of the impossible Saposcats, breaking off with the reflection, highly reminiscent of Hegel, "I wonder if I am not talking yet again about myself". He asks himself, "Shall I be



incapable, to the end, of lying on any other subject?" (T.189)

So, "explanation", for Hegel and for Beckett, is a dawning of self-consciousness. And we saw that for Hegel explanation is only possible once the mind has risen to an appreciation of the "second supersensible world", the world in which white is defined by black to the extent that he can claim that black is "the inherent nature of white". The evident self-contradiction of this sort of juggling with opposites is again familiar to us from Beckett; to give only one of many examples, in Endgame Hamm narrates a story which is punctuated at close intervals by "It was an extra-ordinarily bitter day", "It was a glorious bright day", "It was a howling wild day" and so on.

Struggling to include as much as possible of the world in his explanation, before moving on to the section directly concerned with Self-consciousness, Hegel raises his eyes, as it were, from the details of the mind's perception, understanding and explanation of objects and lets into the picture "infinitude" and the mind's perception of itself. Life is every distinction and every unity (and perception is concerned with these.) "Explanation" brought self-consciousness out of mere perception and this new, self-conscious view of life must include an "apprehension of infinitude" that is, of the infinite number of distinctions inherent in objects. This is tantamount to an "apprehension" of the ineffability of the objective world. Hegel puts it thus: "In that this notion of infinitude is its object, it (consciousness as self-consciousness) is thus a consciousness of the distinction as one which at the same time is at once cancelled." (PM.211) This is obscure, admittedly, but it seems to me to involve the (Beckettian) ungraspability of the world. There is implied an infinite distance between perceiver and perceived brought out by the simultaneous self-perception of the perceiver. For example, I perceive the whiteness of



an object; I "explain" it by resorting not merely to the "first supersensible world", the world in which the white object participates in the Platonic Form of Whiteness, but also to the "second supersensible world", the world in which I understand white by knowing black. In this world there is already an infinitude of self-reflections between white and black and the situation is exacerbated by the introduction of the self-reflections of self-consciousness. In mere consciousness I "am" the perceived object; in self-consciousness I am both the perceived object and aware of myself as perceiver. But being aware of myself as perceiver means that I am also aware of myself as a perceived object in which case I am aware of myself as aware of myself as a perceived object. This is the "infinite regress" of self-consciousness objected to by Sartre, as we shall see.

To substantiate this as being Hegel's meaning it is only necessary to quote the passage immediately following the sentence cited above.

Consciousness is for itself and on its own account, it is a distinguishing of what is undistinguished, it is Self-consciousness. I distinguish myself from myself; and therein I am immediately aware that this factor distinguished from me is not distinguished. I, the self-same being, thrust myself away from myself; but this which is distinguished, which is set up as unlike me, is immediately on its being distinguished no distinction for me. Consciousness of an other, of an object in general, is indeed itself necessarily self-consciousness, reflectedness into self, consciousness of self in its otherness. (PM:211)

Beneath the complexity of this concluding section of "Consciousness" lies an immediately recognizable account of what happens between man and his world. In the final page of this section Hegel ties up the threads of his argument and crowns the mountain he has built with a disarming trick of the dialectic whereby the terms of the process-so-far are dismissed. He is clearing the ground before moving on to Self-consciousness, and his summary of the position reached at this point, besides its remarkable coherence and clarity, also reads like

an exact description of what The Unnamable is about. Hegel's thesis, in the discussion that follows, is summarized in the scheme of perception involving poles numbered 1 to 4, as on page 58 above.

Raised above perception, consciousness reveals itself united and bound up with the supersensible world through the mediating agency of the realm of appearance, through which it gazes into this background that lies behind appearance. The two extremes, the one that of the pure inner region, the other that of the inner being gazing into this pure inner region, are now merged together; and as they have disappeared qua extremes, the middle term, the mediating agency, qua something other than these extremes, has also vanished. This curtain [of appearance], therefore, hanging before the inner world is withdrawn, and we have here the inner being [the ego] gazing into the inner realm - the vision of the undistinguished selfsame reality, which repels itself from itself, affirms itself as a divided and distinguished inner reality, but as one for which at the same time the two factors have immediately no distinction; what we have here is Self-consciousness. (PM.212. The square brackets are Baillie's.)

To clarify this passage we can rely on Mure's gloss on it: "The curtain hides only a void until the understanding penetrates and finds - only itself." (Mure, 1, 73) This sense of looking through appearance to see oneself is prevalent in Beckett one of whose greatest achievements is his ability to objectify the horrific and sterile self-communion that constitutes all consciousness of all objects. (I perceive the table because I am conscious of perceiving the table; there is no exit from this closed and self-depending system.) As so often Beckett reveals the painfulness of the philosophic intuition.

Do they consider me so plastered with their rubbish that I can never extricate myself, never make a gesture but their cast must come to life? But within, motionless, I can live, and utter me, for no ears but my own. They loaded me down with their trappings and stoned me through the carnival. I'll sham dead now, whom they couldn't bring to life, and my monster's carapace will rot off me". (T.327)

This is one anguished cry among many in Beckett that parallels Hegel's theory of consciousness as the constituent of a union with a world, not the world of "trappings" and appearances, but that of a "within". As Hegel puts it, in a message pertinent to the present



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This is one anguished cry among many in Beckett that parallels Hegel's theory of consciousness as the constituent of a union with a world, not the world of "trappings" and appearances, but that of a "within". As Hegel puts it, in a passage reminiscent of Beckett's



style, "It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain, which is to hide the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless we ourselves go behind there, as much in order that we may thereby see, as that there may be something behind there which can be seen." (PM.212-3)

\* \* \*

### Self-consciousness.

In "Consciousness" Hegel has established that there is a unity between consciousness and its objects. This indissoluble marriage appears to torment Beckett in various guises, among them the Unnamable's "It's of me now I must speak, even if I have to do it with their language". (T.326) where the silence of "me" is only attainable through an involvement in the trappings of the world; that is, where consciousness is doomed to an objective babble.

The unity between consciousness and its objects gives rise to self-consciousness which, compared with "sense-certainty" and "perception" is a "return out of otherness".(PM.219) This is the first point made in section B of the Phenomenology, "Self-Consciousness". It appears that there are two possibilities, or that there must be two "moments". There is self-conscious apprehension of the otherness of objects (referred to as "negative" and involving the thought "I am not X") and there is pure self-awareness ("I am I"). This latter is described as "only motionless tautology, Ego is Ego".(PM.219) This is remarkably similar to the Unnamable's "but within, motionless, I can live, and utter me, for no ears but my own" quoted above. Of course, no Beckettian character does remain "within" or "utter me" because of the opposite urge, the desire for life. As Mure expresses Hegel, "Desire is the subject's urge to live through filling the empty "I = I" with an element

of the sensible world" (Mure, 1, 74) which is exactly why the "vice-existers" are needed. And indeed both of the "moments" of experience described by Hegel seem to be equivalent to Beckett's often-stated dichotomy. In the present example, the "objective" world of Hegel is the "rubbish", the "trappings", the "carnival" of Beckett. I would suggest that the crude mind-body split celebrated in Murphy relates, as chapter 6 of that novel makes explicitly clear, to the relative simplicity of Cartesian dualism while the voices, words and rubbish surrounding the Unnamable's elusive Self relate, as we might well expect, to a more sophisticated epistemology and metaphysic. In other words if Murphy is Cartesian, The Unnamable is Hegelian.

Hegel elaborates further on this relationship between self-consciousness and the world. Self-consciousness becomes "convinced of the nothingness of the other", and by "negating" the "other" thus, it "acquires the certainty of its own self". (PM.225) This does not have the despair in it that Beckett's version has, but in a sense that is the foundation of Beckett's uniqueness - he offers a creative, emotional reaction to a precise, philosophical reality in place of the commoner, and easier, reaction to the generalized conditions of "life". Beckett's "version" of this negation of the other and affirmation of Self by Self-consciousness is present more or less passim in the trilogy as one of the "profounder" modes of narration adopted when the games no longer serve. The "moment of truth" early in The Unnamable illustrates this, "Ah yes, all lies, God and man, nature and the light of day, the heart's outpourings and the means of understanding, all invented, basely, by me alone, with the help of no one, since there is no one, to put off the hour when I must speak of me." (T.306) And the references to the negativity, indeed the non-existence, of the objective world appear on nearly every page: either it is suddenly

made apparent that all the objective details of the monologue are fictions of the Unnamable's ("That's a good continuation" (T.398) "But let us close this parenthesis and, with a light heart, open the next" (T.357) etc.) or the objects mentioned are simply and violently denied, ("Mahood, he was called Mahood, I don't see him any more, I don't know how he lived any more, he isn't there any more, he was never there, in his jar, I never saw him..." (T.399).)

We can follow this parallel between the novelist and the philosopher right up to the conclusion of this passage on negation and self-affirmation. Hegel crowns his argument with the following sentences:

"...self-consciousness is thus only assured of itself through sublating this other, which is presented to self-consciousness as an independent life... Convinced of the nothingness of this other, it definitely affirms this nothingness to be for itself the truth of this other, negates the independent object, and thereby acquires the certainty of its own self." (PM.225)

Except for the last clause, this quotation is a philosophical equivalent of "Nothing then but me, of which I know nothing, except that I have never uttered, and this black, of which I know nothing either, except that it is black, and empty." (T.306)

The last clause of the Hegel quotation marks one radical difference between the two writers that is everywhere apparent. In Beckett there is no certainty. But one might do well to ask whether "certainty" is really the inevitable outcome of Hegel's dialectic.

\* \* \*

#### Master and Slave.

Having considered the relationship of self-consciousness to the unselfconscious world of objects, Hegel naturally moves on to the



relationship between different self-consciousnesses. "Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" (PM.226). This is leading in to the famous discussion of master and slave ("Lordship and Bondage" in Baillie's translation) of which much has been made. For our purpose the two features of this discussion that throw light on Beckett are, first, the necessity of the master-slave relationship for continued self-consciousness ("Servitude is not only a phase of human history, it is in principle a condition of the development and maintenance of the consciousness of self as a fact of experience"-- Baillie's note, PM.228) and, second, the violence inherent in the master-slave "struggle" and its necessity.

The first of these points is based on the fact that self-consciousness needs another self-consciousness to achieve "satisfaction" - in simple terms, a man totally isolated from other men since birth would never appreciate his self-consciousness on the level of a pure abstraction, he would not be conscious of being self-conscious. Two self-consciousnesses, then, brought into contact, realize their own self-consciousness and immediately assert it by acting so as to show that they are not mere objects and "the relation of both self-consciousnesses is in this way so constituted that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle." (PM.232) The winner of this struggle is master, the loser slave. The winner shows that he is not a mere object and both parties can assent to his full self-consciousness: "the master is the consciousness that exists for itself". (Here, incidentally, we find Hegel's usage, "für sich", coming close to Sartre's usage "pour-soi". But the important thing for us here is that Sartre attributes "pour-soi" existence ex hypothesi to all human beings and not merely to "masters". There is much of the Hegelian version in Beckett, as we shall see.) So the master establishes and nourishes his self-

consciousness at the expense of the slave. But the slave reaches the same point by another route; through "labour" and working to effect what the master desires the slave enters into a creative relationship with the objects on which he works and through "this activity giving shape and form" he attains "the direct apprehension of his independent being as its self". (PM.238) Thus servitude is necessary to the maintenance of consciousness, which is our first point, and the condition of servitude is that of violent struggle, which is our second point. How do these relate to Beckett?

The answer to this will involve an assessment in Hegelian terms of the significance of the couples and "pseudo-couples" in Beckett. If there is one thing in his work that is almost as important as the agony of being alone it is the agony of being with another. Murphy and Mr Endon, the pairs of servants in Mr Knott's household, Mr Knott himself and Watt, Mercier and Camier, Didi and Gogo, Pozzo and Lucky, Nagg and Nell, Hamm and Clov, Winnie and Willie, A and B, Moran Senior and Moran Junior, and then, passing lightly but not insignificantly over the second two parts of the trilogy, the endless pairs of How It Is; this is only a list of the more important examples. Not all of these, of course, are master-and-slave couples; indeed, only Pozzo-Lucky and Hamm-Clov fall into that category exactly.

Certainly the mutual dependence of Hegel's master and slave is faithfully reproduced in these two pairs. Pozzo, having treated Lucky like the lowest sort of slave (and he refers to him as a slave by implication in Act One, "As if I were short of slaves!"). reveals that it was Lucky who taught him "all these beautiful things" ("I can't bear it...any longer...the way he goes on." [WFG.34] In the second act of Waiting for Godot Pozzo's dependence on his slave is even more

marked as they come in together with Lucky leading Pozzo because the latter has gone blind.

Hamm and Clov are equally mutually dependent, although here, too, the initial impression given is that Hamm is master and Clov slave. But Hamm is blind and needs his slave for all sorts of tasks. On the other hand only Hamm knows the combination of the larder lock. In the case of both these pairs it seems that consciousness, self-consciousness, is one of the products of their union, as in Hegel. They literally keep each other conscious in that they keep each other alive, and they develop self-consciousness by reassuring themselves that the other is paying attention. At least the masters (Pozzo and Hamm) are prepared to go to great lengths to achieve any sort of an audience; Nagg, Nell, Didi, Gogo will do very well, but obviously Lucky and Clov are the usual recipients of their masters' voices. This leads us on to the other couples mentioned - and indeed to any of Beckett's people. Didi and Gogo need one another as witnesses of the Hegelian sort ("So there you are again"; "Am I?") as do Mercier and Camier who, when they are reunited, begin once again to look at one another "with something of the old look" and Camier says "I all but gave myself up." (MC.114) Even Mr Knott needs a witness to his not needing. The consciousness of self is in some degree dependent on other self-consciousnesses in these examples; the most extreme version of this, of course, is the Berkeleyan esse est percipi which is the thesis of Beckett's Film.

The necessary involvement of violence in these relationships is made quite clear by Beckett. Pozzo whips Lucky who kicks Estragon. The assaults range from the trivial (the tramps cannot bear to embrace on account of the stink of garlic) through the comically violent (the stoning of Watt by Lady McCann) to the grotesquely cruel (the means of communication adopted in How It Is). In both Hegel and Beckett the violence appears gratuitous, but in both cases the reason for it is the



same. Hegel puts it that master and slave "must enter into this struggle, for they must bring their certainty of themselves, the certainty of being for themselves, to the level of objective truth". (PM.232) Beckett is naturally not as explicit as this, but even in the obscurity of How It Is where we find Pim and Bom communicating by violent nauseating means the result is that the narrator can say of their meeting and first exchange "me too great benefit too I have that impression great benefit especially at first hard to say why less anonymous somehow or other less obscure". (H.66) Later, throwing confusion as ever on the issue of whether there really are many consciousnesses in the world or only the one, the narrator puts in: "With someone else to keep me company I would have been a different man more universal." (H.74)

Thus far we have been covering fairly well-trodden ground. It will be noticed that Malone Dies and The Unnamable were omitted from the list of works given above in which Beckett employs the device of the couple. In these two works, though not exclusively there, Beckett develops a more sophisticated version of the two consciousnesses. We do not really find couples but we do become aware of a tension between an "I" and a "You" that replaces the tension between couples. The "I" is characteristically the narrator; the "You" is characteristically a "Them" an "other", "voices" or, in How It Is, "scribes". As I say, this is not confined to the second two parts of the trilogy. It appears at least as early as Watt in the complex relationship between Watt and Sam. This can be extended perhaps to include the relationships between Watt and Beckett, Sam and Beckett, Watt and Knott, Knott and Sam and Knott and Beckett. I do not propose a lengthy analysis of these "moments" in the novel which are, besides, not altogether in the novel; suffice it to observe that these relationships are obviously different in kind from, say, that between Didi and Gogo, and yet mutually-dependent

consciousness is clearly an issue with all of them. For example, is Sam creating Watt? If so, who is creating Sam? Beckett? But Sam is Beckett, isn't he? And who is creating whom between Watt and Knott? And so on.

Now this second type of "couple" relationship in Beckett has not been analysed in Hegelian terms as the Hamm-Clov and Didi-Gogo type has been. But it seems crucial that the transparently fictional couples set up in the trilogy (Narrator and Narrated) be considered in these terms. The clue dropped by Beckett in naming his sub-narrator in Watt "Sam" cannot be ignored. The most important twosome in Beckett's oeuvre is Beckett and the blank page; as an objective correlative of this there is Malone and his stories or the Unnamable and his babble. Early in his monologue Malone, describing his "present state", says "all my senses are trained full on me, me," (T.186) which sets up the position of Beckett poised over his paper, waiting. Of course, in spite of, or because of, this concentration on himself, he does not penetrate through to himself; mind and body, ego and experience, remain apart; "It is there I die, unbeknown to my stupid flesh." (T.187) Meanwhile Malone/Beckett yet again resorts to the establishing of a fictional couple, himself and his creature, in this case Saposcat. Before plunging into the Saposcat story he concludes his account of his "present state" with "Somewhere in this turmoil thought struggles on, it too wide of the mark. It too seeks me, as it always has, where I am not to be found. It too cannot be quiet. On others let it wreak its dying rage, and leave me in peace." (T.187) All that Beckett can do is tell stories about Malone: all that Malone can do is tell stories about Saposcat. They cannot talk of themselves so they talk of others; but, in the end, we find we can talk about them by talking about their creations. This is exactly the mirror situation between self-consciousnesses that Hegel describes.



In The Unnamable this process is tidied up. The "Malone" stage is jettisoned. The self, Beckett's self, babbles on in search of itself, casting aside "All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones" (T.305) and making the relationship between himself and his "vice-existers" quite explicit:

It is now I shall speak of me, for the first time. I thought I was right in enlisting these sufferers of my pains. I was wrong. They never suffered my pains, their pains are nothing, compared to mine, a mere tittle of mine, the tittle I thought I could put from me, in order to witness it. (T.305)

The created "other" is there for the "one" to witness it and it is now being rejected as a waste of time, as an impediment preventing the Unnamable from speaking of himself. Here, we might think, Beckett has risen above Hegel's formula whereby self-consciousnesses are mutually-determining; now we are going to get some direct action. But no, there are two further road-blocks, one contingent and one necessary. The contingent impediment is the appearance of Basil, Mahood and Worm. The central section of The Unnamable does not in fact talk directly about "me" so much as about these three. The necessary impediment to talking about "me" is of course the simple fact that the "I" who inhabits the pages of the novel is not Beckett. Even here there is a dialectic to be perceived, this time between author and character. In other words the process of self-consciousness in Beckett is necessarily dual, as Hegel says.

\* \* \*

Stoicism, Scepticism, Unhappy Consciousness, Conclusion.

We have now reached the end of the section of the Phenomenology most useful for the elucidation of Beckett. Section B, "self-consciousness", continues with a discussion of Stoicism, Scepticism



and the "Unhappy Consciousness". Stoicism is seen in somewhat Beckettian terms in that it is found to confine itself to the realm of thought where consciousness is "free" (rather in the way the Unnamable is "free") whether in prison or on the throne. "Thought is free." Unfortunately this is precisely the source of Beckett's anguish - although no attack can penetrate the citadel of my thought, I cannot get in there either; alternatively I cannot get out. Murphy and the Stoics have "body tight" minds.

Scepticism finds itself to be the only reality in the flux of uncertain life. The sceptic can take nothing as certain but behaves as though, at least, he exists. In fact this is almost identical to the Stoical position: Scepticism "is aware of being this stoical ataraxia of self-thinking thought, the unalterable and genuine certainty of itself" (PM.248) which leads us beyond Beckett. However, Hegel develops a point here that will, in the end, enable us to make a final confrontation between him and Beckett in Chapter 5 below. He relates the stoical consciousness to the Master and Slave discussion, as his example of prison and throne should make reasonable. In scepticism Hegel proposes that the Master-consciousness and the Slave-consciousness are contracted into one. This produces the "unglückliches Bewusstsein", the "Unhappy Consciousness" which is "the Alienated Soul which is conscious of self as a divided nature, a doubled and merely contradictory being" (PM.251) that thirsts for unity. This thirst for unity is regarded as a thirst for unity with the "unchangeable", with "immutability". (PM.252-253) This "unchangeable" is at first defined as "the alien, external Being", glossed as "God as judge" by Baillie. The second "moment" of the unchangeable is Christ (who is a "particular" like conscious man and not only universal). The third "moment" is the self-discovery of consciousness in spirit ("Geist") through which consciousness "becomes

aware" within itself that its particularity has been reconciled with the universal". (PM.253)

Clearly we are in no position to push Beckett, protesting, through these sudden Christian hoops. It will perhaps become slightly less ludicrous to suggest doing so when we have looked at some other philosophers. Then we may be able to consider this section of the Phenomenology again, and develop a Beckettian commentary on it and on the two concluding sections of Hegel's work, "VII Religion" and "VIII Absolute Knowledge".

Notes to Chapter Two

1. Cf. Stace, 1, 1 and Mure, 2, viii and 58.
2. Besides the Baillie translation I have used for this thesis (cf. Bibliography) there is now available an excellent translation by A.V. Miller (Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, O.U.P. 1977) which includes a paragraph-by-paragraph "analysis" of the text by J.N. Findlay.
3. Cf. Kaufmann, 1, 379.
4. This is Hegel's Platonic inheritance. Cf., for instance, the Parmenides.



## CHAPTER THREE.

Heidegger's Being and Time and Beckett

Is it true that Beckett's work "could almost be seen as a literary exploration of Heideggerian metaphysics"?<sup>1</sup> What sort of a thing would "exploration" be here? Is it formally possible for Beckett to be doing what this quotation suggests?

"Exploration", I suppose, here means testing, that is, exploration in the sense in which we might use that word of operations in a Chemistry laboratory. Beckett is seen as putting Heidegger to the test: he builds people and worlds according to a Heideggerian prescription and it is for us to judge whether they make sense and, therefore, whether Heidegger's views are accurate.

Is it possible for a novelist and playwright to "build people" like this? Can a literary world ever be a serious realizing of a philosophical thesis? The objection to this would seem to lie in our discomfort at the idea of creative genius writing according to a blueprint - we feel it must cramp his style. But writing according to a plan is something that many of the greatest writers, Shakespeare and Milton for example, have done consistently. Among all Shakespeare's plays there is only one with an original plot, which should help to show that the existence of a blueprint is not necessarily a limitation on genius. But then, this is not really our problem - it is extremely unlikely that Beckett has ever written a single line with Heidegger in mind, with one notable exception, as we shall see.

What then is Heideggerian about Beckett? This Chapter will be devoted to an exploration of a series of Heidegger's concepts and an attempt to link them with similar points in Beckett. For the moment the important thing is to see if Beckett and Heidegger survive in the same world. I would claim that they do, and that they are linked by a common ontology. Beckett, and the earlier Heidegger, are suspicious

of metaphysics but their interest in ontology seems to be identical, or, rather, like the obverse and reverse of the same coin. This is made obvious when we refer to our notable exception to the rule that Beckett does not seem to have Heidegger in mind. Molloy, discussing the subjects he has studied, comes out with a phrase that is pure Heidegger: "my knowledge of men was scant and the meaning of being beyond me" (T.39). The expression "the meaning of being" is Heidegger's own property; it is not an expression that is used in English, where we would use "the meaning of existence", or of "life", instead. But it has its own resonance for any reader of Heidegger: Being and Time has a short Foreword that haunts the rest of the work with its profundity and directness. It opens with a quotation from Plato to the effect that, in the Sophist, he has become perplexed by the expression "being" and Heidegger continues:

Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word "being"? Not at all. So it is fitting that we should raise anew the question of the meaning of Being.  
(BT.19. Heidegger's emphasis)

The words employed in the German for "meaning" and "Being" ("Sinn" and "Sein") are only susceptible of this translation into English, in this context. "Sinn" could be translated as "sense", but not naturally here. (It is as well to make the point again that I am not trying to see Heidegger as a direct and conscious influence on Beckett, although he may well be that, but as a philosophical explorer of the same territory).

In the French version of Molloy the passage quoted above appears thus:

Mais je n'ai jamais eu à ce propos que des idées fort confuses, connaissant mal les hommes et ne sachant pas très bien ce que cela veut dire, être.  
(Molloy. Paris: Eds. de Minuit, 1951. p.58).



This means that Beckett, in turning the above into English, deliberately chose to compress and strengthen the philosophical connotations of his sentence. What is more, we have here a reflection of Heidegger's linking together of man (Dasein) and Being (Sein). Molloy moves straight from the idea that he is ignorant of man to the idea that he is ignorant of Being, which is a negative version of Heidegger's proposal that he must interrogate Dasein to reach Sein.

Being and Time appeared in Husserl's Jahrbuch für Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Forschung in 1927 with the subtitle "First Half". This "first half" is in fact only the first two parts of the first half of the treatise: the third part of the first half and the whole of the second half have never appeared. The second half was to work on time and ontology through the media of Kant, Descartes and Aristotle. The third part of the first half, to be entitled "time and Being", is a more obviously serious lack.

The two parts of the work that did appear deal respectively with the Being of a special sort of entity, "Dasein", (roughly "man") and with Temporality. So, in a sense, even without the section on "time and Being" we do have a treatise on "Being and Time". But the being in question is never "Being in general" except by implication. For the most part Heidegger sticks closely to his programme and deals with the Being of Dasein. In other words, just as Beckett avoids metaphysics Heidegger never gets to them.<sup>2</sup> They are both "stuck", for reasons that may not in the end be so different, "merely" with people and worlds.

It is inevitable that this will be construed with the assistance of a spatial metaphor. The reader will now see Heidegger and Beckett as earthbound while above them and below them the heights and depths of Being go unplumbed. It is worth remembering however that all metaphysical and ontological language is metaphorical and, to that extent, "not true". We try to push this fact away from us by employing words



such as "ultimacy" and "primordially" but these are every bit as metaphorical as conceptions of "God up there" or "profundity" of "the abyss". To talk of the "ultimacy" of a question cannot literally mean that it is the last question beyond which there can be no others; after any answer man can ask "why?" When Heidegger talks of the "primordially" of Being he cannot literally mean that Being is the first number in a series.

Returning to our original point we now find that we must rephrase the question thus: Is it true that Beckett tests by literary exemplification the philosophical theses Heidegger proposes about people and worlds? Answering this will involve selecting Heidegger's main theses and seeing if they appear in Beckett. In one way I have already started this process by adopting, without a by-your-leave, the expression "people and worlds". This does not appear in Heidegger but is influenced by his definition of "world" as something only available to each of us personally: it is intended to delimit the non-metaphysical area of analysis.

Now, we have said that all metaphysical and ontological language is necessarily metaphorical, but as we start to consider the language Heidegger uses just in this matter of "people and worlds" we find that it too is stiff with metaphor. One of our comparisons, for instance, is going to be between Beckettian man and Heidegger's concept of "Geworfenheit", "Thrownness". There is no question but that this is a metaphor: Heidegger does not intend us to conceive of man as "thrown" into Being literally. And indeed when the actor in Act Without Words is literally flung onto the stage we automatically grope for the meaning of that flinging in just the same way as we try to seize the philosopher's concept. In other words, what we may find is that the philosopher does not necessarily only deal in literal truth and the

novelist only in "poetic" truth. They overlap.

This proposal (that philosophy can work, must at times work, by literary means) would not seem at all strange to Heidegger. Increasingly he has turned to poetry to assist him in his uncovering of Being. From the verse fragments of the Presocratics he has moved to the enigmatic beauty of Hölderlin's poetry without any sense of a discontinuity in his work. Indeed he has constantly put philosophy and poetry into the same category as the supreme mental achievements. We should thus be encouraged in our attempt to associate Heidegger's philosophy with Beckett's desperate poetry.<sup>3</sup>

. . .

Dasein. "Being-There".

Throughout Being and Time Heidegger uses the word Dasein to denominate entities that "are there", as the etymology of Dasein indicates. For our purposes it is sufficient to equate this term with "man", but Heidegger's decision to use it instead of "man" reveals his first category: man "is there" in a way that other things are not.

Being and Time raises "the question of the meaning of Being" (BT.1) and it does so by making "an entity -- the inquirer -- transparent in his own Being" (BT.27). "This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term "Dasein" (BT.27).

So the analysis of Dasein (which I shall treat henceforth as an English word) will lead to any possible answers about the meaning of Being in general. And Dasein is man, but man with a special emphasis, man as the entity that "is there". Not only that, man is also the entity that "comports itself" towards the question of Being: Dasein is the questioner as well as the questioned - Dasein is the entity for which



Being is an "issue" and "understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being" (BT.32).

Thus in fact three categories emerge from Heidegger's opening remarks: Being, Being-There (Dasein) and the "understanding" with which Dasein already comports itself towards Being. The "understanding" is here apparent as an "inquiry".

Does this have anything to do with Beckett? For Robbe-Grillet it is a way into Beckett's theatre. His "Samuel Beckett ou la présence sur la scène" quoted above in Chapter 1, opens

La condition de l'homme, dit Heidegger, c'est d'être là. Probablement est-ce le théâtre plus que tout autre mode de représentation du réel, qui reproduit le plus naturellement cette situation. Le personnage du théâtre est en scène, c'est sa première qualité: il est là. (Robbe-Grillet, 1, 95).

This quality of the theatre, Robbe-Grillet argues, is particularly important for Beckett. Characters in Ibsen or Shaw "are there", of course, but they are principally vehicles - they are going somewhere, doing something - only later can we think "he's there". But Didi and Gogo in Godot are not going anywhere and not doing anything, they are just "there" with a vengeance. And this quality, far from removing the tramps from our comprehension, in fact digs deeper than the purposeful qualities of traditional characters and brings us closer to human reality. Robbe-Grillet, talking of going to a Beckett play, presumably having read the novels, says "on allait enfin voir l'homme de Beckett, on allait voir l'Homme" (ibid. 95). Watching the tramps we are watching Beckettian man and seeing Man because we are having stressed for us his quality of Being-There. We are watching Dasein.

This might well appear to be a special case that can be made only for Beckett's theatre. But the characters of the novels share this kind of contingent Being-Thereness, this "présence". For one thing the



narrators, in the Trilogy and How It Is at least, keep a bizarre hold on the present (and the common etymology of "present" and "presence" is no accident), so that although the Unnamable is reluctant to open his wordy-gurdy with the word "I" (= "Present!") as Molloy and Malone did before him, he does start with three questions about the present, "Where now? Who now? When now?" The usual emphasis here is on the interrogative half of these phrases, but the repeated "now" is also revealing.

Molloy is "there" in his mother's bed. Malone is in more or less the same position and the Unnamable is positioned or stationed or deposited in a similar stasis somewhere where he can observe. It is interesting that in his early description of his place he says "Malone is there" instead of the more natural "Malone is here" (T.294). But that is marginal compared to the point that underlies Beckett's choice of position for his narrators. In bed one is most nearly "just there". It is the position in which one's purposes and meanings are minimized. Belacqua in More Pricks Than Kicks moves a lot, even makes a sort of fetish of his journeyings (cf. MPTK, 39-40) although he is "bogged in indolence" like Murphy. In spite of which Murphy also gets about, and Watt is quite a mover. But Beckett is clearly very concerned to get people to stay still. He blinds and maims them, puts them in sand, jars, wheelchairs, dustbins and mud. Progressively his characters, talking or silent, grind to a halt. Putting his narrators in bed or similar is clearly a step in the right direction. And is all this not an attempt to get rid of the spurious sense of purpose engendered by motion? To get the "just-thereness" of a character on to paper or the stage?

Besides Being-There Heidegger's first three categories include "Being" and "Inquiry", the latter being a way in which Dasein comports

itself towards the former.

It is rather vague to claim that Beckett is concerned with Being. In the case of both Heidegger and Beckett this ultimate concern is left to emerge by itself from an analysis of man and his world. In Heidegger, however, Being is the stated, specific goal whereas Beckett of course has none. Since this is the ultimate concern, on the other hand, perhaps we should leave it to the last chapter. Which leaves Inquiry.

It may have been noticed that in what was said above Inquiry had two sorts of status. It had the ontological status of man's Being-towards-Being and it also had the ontical status of Heidegger's own proposal in Being and Time, viz. that he will inquire into Being via the Being of Dasein.

Both these meanings of Inquiry apply to Beckett. He certainly gives his characters the ontological characteristic of inquiring. Indeed it is what they do best and most often. That their inquiry is directed towards their own Being is also clear, and it is reasonable to suppose that anything they learn about their own Being implies something about Being in general. There is an element of the compulsory (as well as the compulsive) in the inquiries of the people in the novels. I would propose that this is an ontological compulsion not a moral or psychological one. "You must go on" says the Unnamable, almost at his last gasp, and the raging question "Why?" seems not to be adequately answered by the proposal of a moral imperative, a God who tells us to go on, nor by the proposal that we are compelled to go on by some neurosis. On the other hand an ontological answer seems a lot more satisfactory. Inquiry is the way of Being of Dasein. Inescapably we are that sort of entity that "is there" and one of our first and inevitable modes of being there is to have already an understanding of being there, and hence of Being.

On the ontical level too Beckett parallels Heidegger. It is often useful to see Beckett's oeuvre as a "quest" or an "exploration".<sup>4</sup>



Heidegger analyses Dasein as the first step along the "trail of Being". Beckett pushes and pushes his people into tighter and tighter corners in his search for a self that will be more than a self: clearly he does not just want to "find himself" in the romantic cliché - he wants to find "the Self", that is, something that will render "the mess" intelligible, something really quite like Being, as we shall see.

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### Phenomenology

It is worth making the point that Heidegger employs a phenomenological method throughout Being and Time. This means that he is using the method of Husserl, to whom the book is dedicated, which involves an attempt to do precisely the opposite of building a system. Husserl's slogan was "Zum Sache selbst" ("To the things themselves") and this is phenomenology's aim, to uncover, disclose and make clear phenomena in their Being. The intention is to uncover the obvious and to disclose things in their transparency. This in itself brings Heidegger closer to a literary cast of thought, particularly to the aims and methods of the Nouveau Roman. It also means that he limits his horizons, eschews metaphysics and is involved in elucidating things "as they are" rather than in placing them in positions within schemes. "Ultimate" questions are in a sense bypassed, there is no attempt in Heidegger to construct a "chain" of priorities that will lead up to an absolute, as in Plato or Hegel. This is really the way in which Phenomenological - Existentialist philosophy differs radically from "traditional" philosophy.

Beckett, of course, issues strong caveats against traditional metaphysical speculation. If his work is taken as a whole we can see that the heavily ironic treatment of philosophy in the early novels gives



way to a desperation in the later work that seems rather beyond being helped by metaphysics or even logic. The point is that both Beckett and Heidegger perceive the futility of even asking many of the "traditional" philosophical questions. The following paraphrase of one of Heidegger's points in Vom Wesen der Wahrheit, made by Arne Naess, could apply equally well to the novelist or the philosopher:

Man misunderstands himself when he seeks the light, seeks "the meaning of his existence", or "a goal" which will be illuminated for him. Beyond the light-giving function which man, as Dasein, himself is, there is no further source of illumination. (Naess, 1, 239).

\* \* \*

Existenz. "Existence". Faktizität. "Facticity".

Heidegger offers us, then, a phenomenological analysis of man as Dasein, that entity which already inquires into, and has some understanding of, the meaning of Being.

Dasein exists. It is unfortunate that in English we sometimes use "exists" to mean "merely exists" as in the expression "He's not living, he's merely existing" which could be used, for instance, of someone with severe brain-damage which has wiped out all conscious activity. In Existentialist terminology "to exist" means precisely the opposite, as we shall see.

Heidegger bases his special usage of Existenz on the etymology of the word. Just as he breaks down the common German word Dasein into its component parts to emphasize the special sort of Being that man has, so he breaks Existenz down into the component parts of its Latin root. Ex-sistere means "to stand out from". Thus the first feature of Dasein's existence is that it "stands out" from something. From what? The answer will appear more precisely when we have

examined the concept of the "world" in the next section, but for the present we can say that man "stands out" in such a way that he is set over against his world not simply in the subject - object relation that has dominated philosophy at least since Descartes but also in a dynamic relationship that takes into account his past and his future.

Dasein's past is facticity and his future is possibility. Other sorts of entity, stones and animals for instance, have no understanding of the factual situation in which they find themselves and have no possibilities genuinely open before them. As we shall see, this means that they do not have temporality. A stone does not have an authentic past. But this is anticipating later points. Dasein, then, alone "exists". Dasein alone "comports" itself towards its possibilities and has some sort of understanding of them. Until Dasein has chosen among them it cannot be said to have any "essence", but it always already has an existence, whence the important thesis, taken up in Sartre as a sort of war-cry, that "Existence precedes essence". It is perhaps imperfectly understood that this thesis appears in toto in Heidegger, as for example when he refers to "the priority of "existentia" over "essentia"." (BT.68).

Thus Dasein's existence consists in his choosing of his own possibilities, his choosing of his own essence. "Man makes himself" in other words. So much for the "futural" aspect of Dasein's "standing out", what of the past aspect which we have characterized as facticity? It is not, perhaps, strictly accurate to define facticity as the past in that we largely experience it as a limiting of our freedom to make choices about the future. Facticity is "the way things are" (How It Is?). It is all that cribs, cabins and confines us but, like all such limitations, it is also the condition of the possible. It is a fact that man cannot simply extend his arms and fly; and it is a fact that I



cannot afford to hire a helicopter; which means that my possibilities of getting to the top of a building are limited to the stairs or the lift. In a sense this example shows how facticity is in the future - I must choose between the stairs or the lift by which I shall go up to the top of the building because I shall not be able to go up another way. But it is easier to think of this as belonging to the past: the building and all the conditions of getting to the top of it are already "in position" before I make any choices. My situation is always already factual.

For Heidegger, on the trail of Being, Man's Being is the first target, and he finds in his analysis of Existenz that all man's "ways of Being" are possibilities perceived in the welter of facticity. He calls man's "ways of Being" "existentials". Dasein's Being is "existence" which is "potentiality-for-Being" or "Being-possible" (BT.163). Dasein projects itself upon or into its possibilities - this is its existence.

Man's free choices, of course, are not only limited by facticity (I cannot choose to be born a Russian if I am born English) they are also limited by themselves. Man can only choose one possibility at a time and this excludes the other possibilities; I cannot go up to the top of the building in the lift and by the stairs at the same time. Using the lift removes the possibility of the stairs as surely as the shape of my arms removes the possibility of flying up unaided. Of course, I can use the stairs "next time", but by "next time" the world may so have altered that I can fly up unaided or can hire a helicopter.

So, man "is there", he already has some sort of understanding of Being, his own way-of-Being is "existence" which involves an inevitable appreciation of facticity and a self-directioning towards his own possibilities.

Beckett's characters may be said generally to "exist" in the Heideggerian way. There is, in nearly every work of his, an extreme illustration of facticity coupled with an exploration of the wild and fantastic attempts man can resort to in order to project himself into



possibilities. The factual situation is usually illustrated by physical limitation - amputation, paralysis, blindness. On this level Beckett is a pessimist if it is optimism to minimize facticity and maximise possibility in one's account of man. Facticity also appears as the master-servant relationship (Hamm-Clov, Pozzo-Lucky) in which both parties are heavily dependent. Projection into possibilities is largely verbal (of course, the actual projection always is a mental process and, as such, verbal) and takes the form of the story-telling and fantasizing that makes up so much of the novels and a good part of the plays. The narrators of the novels are obvious examples, but Hamm is the most revealing character in this context. He cannot "exist" in his physical environment except mentally and so invents an endless "story", which, although obviously drawn from his past, in fact operates existentially in that he has constantly to choose how and where to take it within the factual limitations of his own memory. Hamm's choices are pointed up by Beckett quite clearly on the many occasions when he stops to comment on his story-telling or to improve a phrase. For example in the following passage he does both of these things:

Hamm:           .....(Narrative tone.) Come on now, come on, present your petition and let me resume my labours. (Pause. Normal tone.)  
                   There's English for you. Ah well ...  
                   (Narrative tone.) It was then he took the plunge. It's my little one, he said.  
                   Tsstss, a little one, that's bad. My little boy, he said, as if the sex mattered (E.36).

Even more striking is the way Hamm disregards his own earlier remarks. For instance he asserts that the day in question during the story was a hot day, a cold day, a windy day and a dry day. This sort of choice, like the choice of the words themselves, is the freedom that faces the creative writer. It is the pseudo-choosing of a fantasy world and, although it parallels the choices of "real" life, it is not really governed by facticity. Thus Beckett, and Hamm, are "really"

plunged in a highly factual world - but when they tell stories they have a kind of mad freedom which automatically means that the stories are simply not "about" the "real world" although they are so desperately meant to be. The same applies in most of the novels.

My chief example of facticity and existence in Beckett, however, apart from this general one, is taken from his first, unpublished, unperformed, untranslated play, Eleuthéria, written in 1947. I shall not recount the plot of this play (which can be found in Fletcher and Spurling's book The Plays of Samuel Beckett). It is enough simply to say that its hero, Victor, is a renegade from society who is trying to drop out of the everyday concerns of his family, friends and fiancée. The most important character in the play besides Victor is a glazier who voices Beckett's wisdom, presumably. This "Vitrier" tells Victor to "define himself": "Vous définir..... prenez un peu de contour, pour l'amour de Dieu" (p.62 of the typescript) and he explains, "Vous n'êtes tout simplement rien, mon pauvre ami". But this request that Victor should choose an essence and not simply hover in suspended freedom over his possibilities is precisely what he is trying to avoid. He replies, "Il est peut-être temps que quelqu'un soit tout simplement rien".

Eleuthéria is a play about the tension between individual Existenz and the two things which place this in jeopardy; first, facticity (in the shape of Victor's friends and family) and second, choice itself - only by choosing not to choose can one remain free. This tension is also apparent in More Pricks Than Kicks and Murphy.

In-der-Welt-sein. "Being-in-the-world".

Dasein "is there" already, it has some understanding of its Being which reveals to it that it "exists" in a factual way. In Beckettian



terms we can translate this summary of our position so far thus: Beckett's characters "are there", statically and solidly present, with some understanding of themselves and an inescapable feeling of Being which manifests itself in the almost overwhelming facticity of the situation; but it is only "almost" overwhelming - they continue to "exist", to "stand out from" everything else much though they would like to sink down into the unconsciousness of objects. We can think of Didi and Gogo, just "there" somewhere, certainly understanding enough to keep them miserable, somehow aware of Being, but hopelessly enmeshed in the toils of facticity represented above all by the curtailment of their freedom occasioned by having to wait for Godot. They "exist" constantly, projecting themselves into questions about the future, considering the possibilities.

The question now arises, if man is "there", where is he? Where is "there"? Heidegger's answer is that man is "in-the-world". But he uses this in a specialized sense; he does not simply mean that man is in an objective universe in the same way as a chair is in a room. The chair does not "exist", it is simply "present-at-hand" ("Vorhanden"). As such it is present-at-hand inside another present-at-hand entity, viz. the room. Dasein, however, exists and can truly be said to be in its world (BT.78-80). To make this distinction clear Heidegger uses the example of the chair and the wall. He analyses the statement "The chair "touches" the wall" as follows:

Taken strictly, "touching" is never what we are talking about in such cases, not because accurate re-examination will always eventually establish that there is a space between the chair and the wall, but because in principle the chair can never touch the wall, even if the space between them should be equal to zero. If the chair could touch the wall, this would presuppose that the wall is the sort of thing "for" which a chair would be encounterable (BT.81).



Dasein, however, can "encounter" walls and chairs, can "touch" things. Dasein can really "be" in the world. "Being-in" is "the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state" (BT.80).

The table, the chair and the wall, however they are disposed, are "worldless", whereas Dasein is always in-the-world. Here Heidegger is determined not to be mistaken: he insists that "Being-in" (and "the world") is not something that is added to Dasein, not "a "property" which Dasein sometimes has and sometimes does not have, and without which it could be just as well as it could with it" (BT.84). Dasein is already "in-the-world", the ontological definition of Dasein's Being must include this "Being-in" as an essential state.

Are Beckett's characters "in-the-world" in this sense? Do they particularly manifest "Being-in" as an essential state of their Being?

Certainly Hamm specifically describes his own limited environment as "the world". He orders Clov to wheel him round the room/stage of Endgame with the phrase "Right round the world!" (E.23). There is a strong feeling that Hamm is only because he "is in" this world of his. "Outside of here it's death!" he proclaims towards the end of the play (E.45).

And if we take, for instance, Malone's room as being more than literally intended we can read his description of his "present state" as applying to his "world" too: "This room seems to be mine. I can find no other explanation to my being left in it" (T.183). In fact this is the worst possible explanation of Malone's being in the "room"; how on earth would he be able to possess a room unless this room is his own in an inalienable way, that is, unless it is his world? We shall have more examples to give of "Being-in-the-world" in Beckett when we discuss Geworfenheit, below.

Dasein is already in-the-world. And it is involved in the world (its world) in a manner so intimate that subject-object dualism is rendered irrelevant. Heidegger here provides an answer to Murphy's Cartesian schizophrenia:

When Dasein directs itself towards something and grasps it, it does not somehow first get out of an inner sphere in which it has been proximally encapsulated, but its primary kind of Being is such that it is always "outside" alongside entities which it encounters and which belong to a world already discovered (BT.89).

Curiously it is in Murphy itself that we find Beckett adopting this at-least-partial solution to the dualism of the "inner" and the "outer". When we first meet Celia's grandfather, Mr. Kelly, he is mending the tail of his kite and imagining what it will be like to fly it. "Already he was in position, straining his eyes for the speck that was he, digging in his heels against the immense pull skyward" (M.23). Here the kite is Mr Kelly in a manner that is unintelligible except along the lines of our Heideggerian epistemology. Mr. Kelly "grasps" the kite "outside", up there "alongside" it, not from some "inner" sanctum. This is clearly not Beckett's last word on this subject and we shall have to look more closely at the whole question of dualism in the two writers in a separate section.

For our present purposes we must develop Heidegger's alternative to dualism, "Being-in-the-world", to illuminate further the concept of "the world".

Things which are not Dasein are not all merely "present-at-hand". In fact Dasein's primary way of encountering entities is in their "readiness-to-hand" ("Zuhandenheit"). We do not meet a chair (or a kite) as something "just lying about", we meet it first as an article of "equipment" ("Zeug") which is ready-to-hand. We see a chair as something to sit on before we see it as a "brute" object. In other words "concern" is closer to us than mere bare perception (BT.95). Dasein's way of Being

towards entities encountered within-the-world is "praxis", that is, concerned dealing. Even the things of "nature" are not exempt from this; the tree is "equipment" for making chairs; the mountain is an obstacle, a likely source of a stream, a place of refuge; the South wind "means" rain.

All this "equipment" is inextricably interrelated and the world is the totality of this "equipment". Thus "Being-in-the-world" amounts to absorption in the totality of equipment (BT.105). This becomes clearer when we consider that all equipment refers back to Dasein. The South wind "means" rain, which "means" the growth of crops, which "means" food, which is for Dasein to eat. Thus my world extends out as far as these "chains" of reference go (BT.116).

Does Beckett make the distinction between "Vorhanden" and "Zuhanden", between objects which are present-at-hand and those which are ready-to-hand? Perhaps we have here a distinction that will make some sense of that event, "of great formal brilliance and indeterminable purport", the visit of the Galls to Mr. Knott's house in Watt. Perhaps it will also shed light on Watt's inability to say; of a pot, "pot, pot" and be comforted. The Galls come to tune the piano and their visit disturbs Watt. He describes his disturbance thus,

....the scene in the music-room, with the two Galls, ceased very soon to signify for Watt a piano tuned, an obscure family and professional relation, an exchange of judgements more or less intelligible, and so on, if indeed it had ever signified such things, and became a mere example of light commenting bodies, and stillness motion, and silence sound, and comment comment (W.69-70).

In other words Watt's world has broken down. It is precisely the "Zuhanden", equipmental interrelationships that constitute Dasein's world that fall away from Watt's memory of the incident, leaving only his appreciation of the merely "Vorhanden" aspects of the incident.



"Meanings" such as judgements and family relations break down until Watt can only perceive his memory of the incident as an abstract design, the meaninglessness, the absurdity, of the merely present-at-hand.

The merely present-at-hand is incapable of being, or having, a world. As Beckett indicates in the Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit:

All have turned wisely tail, before the ultimate penury, back to the mere misery where destitute virtuous mothers may steal bread for their starving brats. There is more than a difference of degree between being short, short of the world, short of self, and being without these esteemed commodities (PTD.122).

The "ultimate penury" is the gazing at the empty and absurd object perceived as "just lying there". It is the nausea experienced by Sartre's Roquentin as he gazes at the famous root of the maronnier, it is just "there", meaningless and worldless.

The episode in Watt where the hero finds himself unconvinced by using the word "pot" to refer to a pot (W.78) may also be based on the ready-to-hand/present-at-hand distinction. When an object slips over from being one to being the other it becomes uncanny and disturbing. Heidegger talks about "The helpless way in which we stand before" a piece of broken equipment - the breaking robs the thing of its readiness-to-hand and thrusts it, before our very eyes, into the merely present-at-hand. This is what seems to be happening to Watt's pot, "It was in vain that it answered, with unexceptionable adequacy, all the purposes, and performed all the offices, of a pot, it was not a pot" (W.78). Watt's pot, in other words, is acting or masquerading as a ready-to-hand pot, but it is not that, it is some other thing, some merely present-at-hand object to which the name "pot" (which implies its ready-to-hand function)

cannot be given. Heidegger returns to this phenomenon later when discussing understanding. "When we merely stare at something", he says, "our just-having-it-before us lies before us as a failure to understand it any more"(BT.190). And he comes very close to describing the effect on Watt of both the Galls and the pot when he starts drawing his conclusions about understanding and meaning. "Only Dasein can be meaningful", we learn, "all entities whose kind of Being is of a character other than Dasein's must be conceived as unmeaning .... And only that which is unmeaning can be absurd. The present-at-hand, as Dasein encounters it, can, as it were, assault Dasein's Being" (BT.193. Heidegger's italics). Watt's pot is absurd, and the Galls' visit "assaults" his Being.

In this connexion it is interesting to consider Beckett in the light of the following gloss on Heidegger made by I.M. Bochenski:

On the one hand human existence is thrown down into the world and is attuned to and utterly subject to the beings in it; in this way the world transcends human existence. On the other hand, human existence is really the "formative" agent of the world; it transcends the world (Bochenski, 1, 171).

This ambiguity of man's Being-in-the-world is clearly that of the narrators of the trilogy to go no further. It explains why they appear sometimes to be "utterly subject" to their worlds (down-and-out, disabled, immobilized, impotent) but at other times to be the "formative agents" creating their worlds, as for instance in the case of Moran's half of Molloy which is his own "report" and who is to say how fictitious?

There is a strong identification made in Beckett between the narrator and his space - the latter is quite clearly his Heideggerian "world". Malone, for example, thinks that his body is the world and that he has swollen to fill the universe (T.235) as indeed he has, or rather, his world and universe have contracted to the limits of his

body, or at least of his "room". Similarly he points out that, like Miss Carriage in Murphy whose personality is extended, via a lead, to her Dachshund, he is extended to his possessions: "I say my pots, as I say my bed, my window, as I say me" (T.253). This cuts both ways of course, reflecting the ambiguity mentioned in Bochenski's gloss. Either Malone's world of objects is himself and he is their "formative agent" or he is an object not really in possession of himself and thus "utterly subject" to his factual environment.

The "space" which Malone, in particular, occupies is Heideggerian space in that it is personalized. Science measures space objectively as the separation of things merely present-at-hand but Dasein primarily occupies space in terms of the connexions of the ready-to-hand. Heidegger gives a striking illustration of what this means when he says that my glasses are "environmentally more remote" than the picture I look at through them (BT.141). The picture is "closer" to me in my world than the glasses, which I do not notice as I look through them. I construct my world out of the ready-to-hand and thus learn about space, I do not "first" know about space and then set up my world within it (BT.136 ff). "Space is not in the subject, nor is the world in space" (BT.146).

Heidegger returns to this point towards the end of Being and Time when discussing Dasein's temporality. He observes that space is not an unfortunate adjunct of the linking of body and mind. As we have seen, the whole burden of his thesis about Being-in-the-world is that this Cartesian dualism is meaningless. Dasein, because it is "spiritual" (that is, conscious and possessed of an understanding of its Being) can be "spatial" in a way that a Thing cannot. Just as a stone has no time, no history, no "real" past, so it has no space either. The scientific view only applies to the present-at-hand; the world and



its Things, since they are always my world and my Things (Malone) are ready-to-hand. Hence "The world is not present-at-hand in space" (BT.419-421).

\* \* \*

Realität. "Reality". Dualism.

So Dasein exists in its own world and encounters that world first as "ready-to-hand". The concept of Being-in-the-world (the "essential state of Being" of Dasein) does away with dualism, as we have seen. Being-in-the-world is something that Dasein always is already, it is its Being. This is an idea that Heidegger inherited from Husserl for whom consciousness is a "noetico-noematic" correlation. That is to say that the "noema" (the object perceived) is part of the nature of the "noesis" (the perception). The nonmental object is as much a condition of consciousness as the mental subject. Thus for Husserl and Heidegger consciousness is no longer interior and self-sufficient (cf. Gurwitsch, I, 48 ff). This is the burden of our argument, above, in re Mr. Kelly's kite.

Heidegger claims that the apparent insolubility of the problem of dualism is based on a misleading "fragestellung" (posing of the question). If we "put together" a present-at-hand Subject and a present-at-hand Object and then ask how they can be bound together in consciousness we naturally prevent any possible answer. "Not only do we lack the "cement"; even the "schema" in accordance with which this joining-together is to be accomplished, has been split asunder.... What is decisive for ontology is to prevent the splitting of the phenomenon" (BT.170). Not surprisingly a substantial section of Being and Time is devoted to a comparison between Existentialist and Cartesian ontology

(sections 19, 20 and 21).

The question now is whether Heidegger has not, in closing the door on dualism, opened it on the even more pernicious realm of subjectivism. If Dasein's world is always its "own" world, if "world" is something that is always "mine", what price a common world in which we all exist? No amount of analysis of merely present-at-hand objects "within-the-world" will afford us a way out of this dilemma:

Neither the ontical depiction of entities within-the-world nor the ontological Interpretation of their Being is such as to reach the phenomenon of the "world". In both of these ways of access to "Objective Being", the "world" has already been "presupposed" (BT.92).

A scientific analysis of objects within-the-world will not allow us to understand "worldhood". Science likes to proceed from the certainty of the inert present-at-hand to the ready-to-hand "uses" to which it can be put. But Heidegger insists that Dasein does the opposite of this, "readiness", for him, is not merely a sort of "subjective colouring" added to presence. On the contrary, readiness precedes presence. Does this mean that we can have no objective standards and that "the world" is mine to do as I like with?

Heidegger is well aware of this difficulty and he goes out of his way to explain himself by adopting the traditional ontological category "Reality" and discussing it in the light of his own ontology. In doing so he is able both to re-assert his rejection of subject-object dualism and to refute charges of subjectivism. This discussion (section 43 of Being and Time) can be put alongside Beckett's treatment of the same problem. In the case of Beckett we shall have to look at Murphy, especially the famous Chapter 6 of that novel and the Mr. Endon episode, and then at any later developments in this area.

In traditional ontology, according to Heidegger, "Being" is always

conceived in terms of the present-at-hand. The present-at-hand thus gains the name "Reality" because it is, indeed, made up of res, Things. What, above all, characterizes Things is their substantiality, so the Real is the substantial, and Being is treated as though substantiality were its basic characteristic. To overcome this Heidegger enters into three arguments.

First, can the "Real" world, the "external world", supposedly "outside" our consciousness be "proved"? This is the classic Cartesian question and it is the point beyond which Murphy does not try to get when he pictures his mind, as described in Chapter 6.

In so far as Reality has the character of something independent and "in itself", the question of the meaning of "Reality" becomes linked with that of whether the Real can be independent "of consciousness" or whether there can be a transcendence of consciousness into the "sphere" of the Real (BT.246).

Thus Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected nor how the two experiences came to overlap (M.77).

For Murphy even his body is part of Reality and he has no notion how it is connected with his consciousness. He even proposes the Cartesian solution of some supreme third party, beyond body and mind, who holds them together.

Kant has a solution that purports to bind together body and mind, Reality and consciousness. He observes that Time, as consciousness of change, is "in me" and that for me to be conscious of change there must be something "outside me" that is permanent. The trouble with this argument, in Heidegger's view, is that it merely yokes together two present-at-hand entities (consciousness and the Real) in the same way as Descartes' argument, and that this is not enough. "The Being-



present-at-hand-together of the physical and the psychical is completely different ontically and ontologically from the phenomenon of Being-in-the-world" (BT.248). This is precisely where Murphy, (not Murphy's creator) has gone wrong. "There was the mental fact and the physical fact, equally real if not equally pleasant" (M.76). Murphy cannot see how the twain can meet any more than Heidegger can see how Kant can make them meet. This is exactly the point brought up in our discussion of Being-in-the-world. Merely present-at-hand entities, such as a chair and a wall, cannot "touch", cannot "meet", cannot "encounter" or be encountered by each other. Unless we grant Dasein a kind of Being (Being-in-the-world) that is different from the Being of the present-at-hand we inevitably end up in Murphy's obviously false position.

Let me repeat that this is not the position of Murphy's creator. Beckett is looking for a way out of dualism, too, and our position is now this: both Heidegger and Beckett establish the inadequacy of the premisses from which Descartes, Kant and traditional ontology start; Heidegger offers an alternative; does Beckett? Heidegger's alternative is that:

The Real is essentially accessible only as entities within-the-world. All access to such entities is founded ontologically upon the basic state of Dasein, Being-in-the-world..... Being already in a world - as Being alongside entities within-the-world (BT.246).

Beckett is at least aware of a possible alternative to dualism in his essay on Proust. He points out that the Proustian moment of vision, when the involuntary memory and the perception of the present come together and thereby bring us into contact with our lost selves, overcomes dualism. The memory is Ideal and imaginative while the present situation that stirs it up is Real and empirical. The double-

act involved in this moment of truth is "at once an evocation and a direct perception, real without being merely actual, ideal without being merely abstract, the ideal real" (PTD.75). "The ideal real" has certainly beaten dualism. But this has not got very much to do with Heidegger's solution. Heidegger dismisses dualism as a false question in a way that is a lot more radical than this example from Proust. Does Beckett get beyond it?

Readers of the trilogy must notice that the dualism motif, so strong in Murphy, has almost entirely disappeared in Molloy. Indeed it is not at all prominent even in Watt. The impression given is that other, more urgent considerations have intervened and take up the narrators' energy. True, in Watt there is the debated question of the significance of the compounds fenced-off in the asylum where Watt meets Sam. If we take these compounds to be symbolic of the limitations of perception then they show us Beckett still aware of the "outer" and the "inner" (the "big world" and the "little world" of Murphy) but accepting a passage from one to the other. Watt and Sam can get through the holes in their respective fences in a way that seems to mark an advance over Murphy's total inability to communicate with Mr. Endon (= "Within"). But by the time of the trilogy such problems have been superseded by considerations of a more fundamental sort. For instance who is "narrating" whom? Who determines how much communication there can be between people? Is the entire business a fiction of Moran's? of Malone's? of Beckett's? Certainly the last of course. There is a sort of hankering after the old Murphysque obsession in places after Murphy, but it appears less painfully or just differently. In Godot Estragon asks Vladimir, "We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?" (WFG.69) which is something of a joke compared to the more violent and serious issues in the play. It is only too

painfully obvious that the tramps exist: they suffer, therefore they are. In Play the spotlight commands each head to speak of its own experiences, isolated from the others, but this is not an ontological isolation so much as a psychological and emotional one. In How It Is there is the "public" world of the meetings with the other figures that crawl through the mud and the "private" world of memories about life "up there" in the light. This is perhaps the definition of how dualism appears in later Beckett. The Real appears as a painful if ambiguous Here and Now. The Ideal appears as memory and fantasy. But we can never be sure which bits of the Real are not in fact memories or fantasies more or less thoroughly disguised. As a result, in How It Is and The Unnamable, the Real and the Ideal merge as they do in the Proust essay, outer and inner are one and Beckett has achieved, ipso facto, the integration and homogeneity of Heidegger's Being-in-the-world.

The question of whether the "external" world can be proved is the first of three headings under which Heidegger chooses to attack the errors of traditional ontology. The other headings are "Reality as an ontological problem" and "Reality and Care". The second of these we cannot fruitfully discuss until we have met the concept of "Care" in the next section (below). The first (discussed in BT. pp. 252-255, i.e. also in the section nominally about "Care") sets about trying to use the illegitimately-employed concept of Reality properly. Heidegger borrows Dilthey's idea of Reality as fundamentally being "resistance" but establishes that "The experiencing of resistance - that is, the discovery of what is resistant to one's endeavours - is possible ontologically only by reason of the disclosedness of the world" (BT.253). Here Heidegger is using "disclosedness" in a special sense that ties in with all his other usages. Dasein is the entity that "discloses" the world by existing (i.e. "Standing-out" from it) and by "behaving" towards it



and understanding it to some extent. The condition for standing-out, disclosing and so on is obviously that the world "already" exists. So resistance can only be experienced because Dasein is already "there", disclosing the world and "endeavouring" to do things in it. So Reality is not a primordial entity that needs to be proved "first". In so far as it can be, it is.

This second phase of Heidegger's attack on traditional ontology has its parallel in Beckett. In the trilogy, in How It Is, and in many of the texts, there are constant references to a past life, to an area, a world already "given", with an accompanying impression that the narrator and his creations are churning about memories of this given past life. It is all they have in their minds, all they can pass the time with, it is irredeemable. "Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous" (PTD.13). None of the characters appears at anything like a beginning; they are already "en situation". The likes of Malone can say, "The search for myself is ended. I am buried in the world" (T.199).

This leaves us with one unresolved question. We asked earlier whether Heidegger, having avoided dualism, does not fall into subjectivism. The answer to this will have to appear in the course of our analysis of Heidegger's concept of Being-with-others. Meanwhile we must put his concept of "Care" in its place.

\* \* \*

Sorge. "Care".

Early in Being and Time Heidegger explains that the kind of Being that Dasein has when we consider it as Being-in-the-world is "concern"

("Besorgen"). Our way of Being-in is to have "concern", which is thus a definitive term for all our activities with the world conceived as the ready-to-hand. For example, "Producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something" and so on (BT.83). And the Being of Being-in-the-world is "concern" because "the Being of Dasein itself is ....care" ("Sorge") (BT.83-84). This "has nothing to do with "tribulation", "melancholy" or the "cares of life".... These - like their opposites, "gaiety" and "freedom from care" - are ontically possible only because Dasein, when understood ontologically, is care" (BT.84).

Thus, Dasein is "in-the-world" in a concerned way because it is itself care. Heidegger devotes an entire chapter (Book 1. Chapter 6) to the elucidation of this concept. In this chapter he works round and with the idea of care in a way that takes in the concept of Angst and has reference to several other ideas which we have not yet dealt with. For our present purpose it is enough simply to point out how care itself gets defined. Heidegger recapitulates the points that we have so far covered. Thus, Dasein "exists" and understands its existence; understanding is "self-projective Being towards its ownmost potentiality for Being" (BT.236). This means, as we saw in our discussion of "Existenz" above, that Dasein is "ahead-of-itself" or, more fully, "ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world". This does not mean that Dasein is busy out there "welding together" the objects that are present-at-hand into a world. No, Dasein's "ahead-of-itself-in-Being-already-in...., is primordially a whole" (BT.236). In other words Dasein, its existentiality and its facticity are equally primordial. Naturally this totality that Dasein is includes its "concern" with the world and its "Being-alongside" and using of the ready-to-hand. Heidegger considers that this description of Dasein's Being is in fact what the word "care" means.

This may not be immediately perspicuous. The fault here may be partly Heidegger's. He allows the term "care" to be used in a way that at times seems to rely on his own special definitions and at times seems to require simply conventional colloquial interpretation. This being the case I think an attempt at clarification is in order.

Care is what men have but tables do not. If you burn your table, or chop it up, or sing to it, it cannot "care". Burning, chopping up or singing to a man (an entity with the character of Dasein) must result in some reaction; even if it is the negative one "I don't care" this is clearly ontologically different from the table's "not caring". In a sense Heidegger is looking for the most fundamental difference between Dasein and Reality and he is using Socratic-Aristotelian methods, albeit disguised. Care is the "basic" difference between men and other things. Because man cares he is in a world. That is to say, the table is worldless, meaningless until we see it as part of our world. Tables do not have worlds of their own; it is because of us that they are revealed as tables. Because man cares he exists. That is to say, I can project myself into my possibilities. Tables have no possibilities, no future, no existence. And because man cares there is facticity. That is to say, my world and my existence inevitably already include the factual, and the factual only is factual because I can care about it. Care, in other words, is the basic condition for there being such a thing as Dasein existing in a factual world.

Much later in Being and Time we learn that "the care-structure includes the phenomenon of Selfhood" (BT.370). But we can leave this point to our discussion of the Self, below, and turn now to consider whether Beckett employs anything like "care" in his work.

In one way, of course, Beckett must be working within the framework of something like care. If Heidegger's analysis is correct, and it is



very hard to quarrel with a definition of man as the "caring" entity, then all literature, in so far as it is concerned with Dasein, is concerned with "care", and Beckett is no exception to this. So our inquiry boils down to this, we must ask whether Beckett takes any special trouble to emphasise aspects of existence that reveal "care", perhaps in view of the fact that such a concept is so fundamental as to be easily overlooked.

One of Beckett's most succinct, and often-quoted, dicta on the difficult art of writing appears in the Three Dialogues With Georges Duthuit. When asked what alternative he offers to the "plane of the feasible" that he has rejected, Beckett replies that he prefers

The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express (PTD.103).

Perhaps the most opaque of the clauses in this quotation is the last. Why is there an obligation to express? And why does Beckett keep returning to this point throughout his later work? To give only two examples, there is Molloy's

Not to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never to stop saying....(T.28).

where it is clear that Molloy is somehow driven on to "say"; and the many occasions in The Unnamable, especially in its closing pages, when the narrator insists "you must go on". And it is not merely a question of Beckett and his characters making light statements about being obliged to go on talking. The whole motive force behind the "whey of words" is clearly some sort of compulsion. Malone must go on telling his stories, saying something, until the end, even the creatures in the mud of How It Is build up the impression that they must go on "quoting" - "I

say it as I hear it" (H.passim). And Beckett himself is in the grip of the same ineluctable command, he must "go on" too.

I would propose that this obligation, which seems at once quite normal and quite arbitrary, is an expression of Heideggerian "care". We feel that we understand Beckett's inability to fall silent, perhaps because the state of unconsciousness (= wordlessness) is inconceivable to us, but if asked to explain why there is an "obligation to express" we cannot do so adequately. This ambiguity reflects exactly the ambiguity of something which is a really basic assumption, something like "care" in fact.

The obligation to "say" is the obligation to be involved with, to "produce, attend to, make use of" and so on (see above p. 29 ). The narrators in Beckett would dearly love to do "nothing", as we shall see, but they must go on "churning". This actually is the state of Dasein, of "Being-there". Being-there already means being involved with. Dasein is care. Not prescriptively, of course; that is where we make our mistake when we try to "explain" the "obligation to express". It is not a prescriptive law "handed down", it is a descriptive law, like gravity. Man is obliged to express by being man.

It could be objected to the above that on Beckett's side we have an obligation to produce words (or paintings in the original statement) while the ontological obligation to "care" ["Dasein is care"] is specifically a matter of actions. This objection, however, misses the point in that it refers to the results of the "obligation" and does not sufficiently emphasise the obligation itself. Heidegger's point is that it is man's condition to care, whatever he cares about; Beckettian man has the same condition but it appears as an obligation to express, whatever he expresses. Expression, like cooking, is only possible because Dasein is, "already", the sort of entity that cares.

Selbstsein. "Being-one's-self".

We shall deal with the Self as such in a separate section, below. Meanwhile it is necessary to outline briefly Heidegger's preliminary definition of what it is to "be-one's-self". Dasein exists understandingly in a factual world that is primarily ready-to-hand, rather than just objectively "real", and his way of being in that world is care. To this Heidegger must add some account of who Dasein is.

As so often, the answer is contained in the question. Dasein is that sort of entity of whom we can ask the question "who?". Of other things we must ask the question "what?". And the answer to "who?" is always "I myself". Dasein is characterized by "Jemeinigkeit", "in-each-case-mineness". Dasein is always "me" and the question "who?" can only be answered by a "me" or on behalf of a "me". It is thus a "subject" or a "self" (BT.150).

But Heidegger is a lot warier than Descartes about seizing on this apparently indisputable starting-point. Dasein is indeed "I", but the "I", the self, is not an object present-at-hand within the world which can be analyzed and described in the same way as a table. "In clarifying Being-in-the-world we have shown that a bare subject without a world never "is" proximally, nor is it ever given" (BT.152). The Self is already in the world and if we conceive of it as isolated from the world it must "be understood only in the sense of a non-committal formal indicator" (BT.152). The Self just is not any "given" thing, like another arm or leg say, there is no "nature" for the Self to possess, no "essence" except, of course, Dasein's essence which is "existence". So the Self is existential, "Dasein is its Self only in existing" (BT.152).

The burden of this is that the Self exists [Dasein is already "I"



and already exists) and that means it exists in a world. But the world contains "Others". I have quoted the passage in which Heidegger points out that the "bare subject" is never "given" without a world. His very next sentence runs "And so in the end an isolated "I" without Others is just as far from being proximately given" (BT.152). The "Others" are already "there with us" in the world. This important point (a crucial part of all existentialist philosophy, especially that of Buber and Sartre) will be discussed in the next section. For the moment we should see if this preliminary stage, that of Being-one's-self, appears in Beckett.

In general Beckett's work reveals the unsatisfactoriness of beginning with the Cartesian "Ego" as the fixed point of speculation. The word "I" must appear a record number of times in his oeuvre, but there is a feeling of insane repetition about it, of hollowness and unimportance. As in Heidegger, man can say "I", and indeed in all situations he is obliged to be in his own world, the world that must be "mine", but this is only a formal, contentless sort of condition-for-existence. As Kierkegaard says, "One keeps on saying "Ich-Ich" until one becomes.....ludicrous" (Kierkegaard, 1. 136).

In Eleuthéria Victor explains himself thus: "D'abord j'étais prisonnier des autres. Alors je les ai quitté. Puis j'étais prisonnier de moi. C'était pire. Alors je me suis quitté" (p.115 of typescript). These marvellously-balanced sentences, if they are not just rhetoric, show us a character realizing that he is already in the world with Others and putting his escape from them on exactly the same level as his escape from himself. Being-with-Others and Being-one's-Self are equiprimordial conditions of Dasein's existence.

Above all, the Self in Beckett, as we shall see, is specifically more than just a matter of this saying "Ich-Ich". Unless we adopt Heidegger's view of the "I" as a mere formal indicator we are hard put

to it to explain the constant appearances, especially in the trilogy, of sentences in the first person describing waiting or seeking the Self. Molloy, for instance, says

And as for myself, that  
unfailing pastime, I must  
say it was far now from my  
thoughts. But there were moments  
when it did not seem so far  
from me, when I seemed to be  
drawing towards it....etc.(T.163).

In other words "I" is inadequate, in both Heidegger and Beckett, as a term for the Self, merely indicating in both cases that we are dealing with a "who?" not a "what?", that is with Dasein for whom the world is always "mine".

\* \* \*

Mitsein and Mitdasein. "Being-with" and "Being-there-with".

By these two terms Heidegger expresses the two aspects of Dasein's Being-with-Others. On the one hand I am always already in a world "with" others, my Being-in-the-world is a Being-with, and on the other hand Others are "there" with me in the world.

My world is primarily composed of the ready-to-hand. The ready-to-hand is equipment ("Zeug") and equipment, by definition, is referential, it is always equipment "for" something. And the thing to which a piece of equipment refers always refers to something else in turn. Thus a "chain" is automatically built up from anything ready-to-hand, a chain of references that always leads back to the entity for which "Zeug" is ready-to-hand, Dasein. Thus, the hammer is for fixing the roof, the roof is for excluding the rain and the rain is excluded because Dasein prefers to be dry. In this way other Daseins are revealed to us, we see the equipment in our world being used by others, we follow back chains of reference to their originators - men like

ourselves. And of course our own world is full of others, "The world is always the one that I share with Others" (BT.155).

Even when I am alone I still have "Being-with" as an ontological characteristic. I am aware of being alone only because I have that sort of being for which an Other can be missing.

Dasein has been defined as "care" ("Sorge"). The sort of care I have for the ready-to-hand has been called "concern" ("Besorgen"), and now we encounter another sort of care, the care I have for other Daseins, for which Heidegger employs the term "solicitude", ("fürsorge"). As with all Heidegger's terms the "solicitude" carries no ethical weight. Even when I ignore a fellow Dasein I am displaying "solicitude", but in a "deficient mode" (BT.158). The point is that only Dasein can "ignore", and Dasein can only do this because it is Dasein's ontological character to be able to be solicitous.

Being with Others belongs to the Being of Dasein, which is an issue for Dasein in its very Being. Thus as Being-with, Dasein "is" essentially for the sake of Others. This must be understood as an existential statement as to its essence. Even if the particular factual Dasein does not turn to Others, and supposes that it has no need of them or manages to get along without them, it is in the way of Being-with (BT.160).

I think we have here an ontological thesis than can help us to understand Beckett. There is a sort of painful, inescapable bond between the Self and the Other, between Dasein and Dasein, throughout Beckett's work. The tramps in Godot say that they don't need each other but they are bound together just as much as Lucky and Pozzo or Hamm and Clov. And what is Heideggerian about this binding is that it is ontological, something to do with the tramps' Being, and not social or psychological, or at least not fundamentally social or psychological. Their inability to separate is deeper in their natures



than a simple need for company or love, they sound when they talk as though they are a single person "talking to himself". Lucky's increasingly close connexion with Pozzo exists in spite of the latter's avowed intention of selling him. And Clov states simply to Hamm, when asked why he doesn't leave, "I can't leave you".

Selecting almost at random from the Texts for Nothing we find a mountain of similar evidence. Here is some of the opening of the fourth Text.

It's the same old stranger as ever,  
for whom alone accusative I exist,  
in the pit of my inexistence, of  
his, of ours.....  
I'm not in his head, nowhere in his  
old body, and yet I'm there, for him  
I'm there, with him, hence all the  
confusion.....  
He wants me there, with a form and  
a world, like him, in spite of him, me  
who am everything, like him who is nothing.  
And when he feels me void of existence  
it's of his he would have me void, and  
vice versa, mad, mad, he's mad.....  
He thinks words fail him, he thinks  
because words fail him he's on his way  
to my speechlessness.....(NK.87).

Here we have a tearing tension between the nominative and the accusative, a fierce struggle that can be taken as being between the author and his character. No doubt this is a fair interpretation, but it does not completely satisfy; we feel that the "I" has a less nebulous existence than that of a fictional character, that this is less trivial than the sort of joke between author and character indulged in by Fielding or Thackeray. More significantly we have here two Daseins, the Self and the Other, labouring for clarity in the mind of the Self. I exist for the Other, he exists for me, "in the pit of my inexistence" (see above, on Being-one's-Self and below on the Self tout court). "All the confusion" arises because he and I are inseparable. If he needs me he needs me with a "world" (here used in a sense very like Heidegger's).

Sometimes I am "everything" and he is "nothing", as in the quoted passage, and sometimes vice versa. Which reads very like a gloss on Heidegger's analysis of "just standing around". This is the minimum mode of existence, the least Dasein-like state that Dasein can be in, barring death as we shall see, but it is still quite different from the Being of something merely present-at-hand.

Even if we see the Other  
 "just standing around", he is  
 never apprehended as a  
 human-Thing present-at-hand,  
 but his "standing-around" is  
 an existential mode of Being -  
 an unconcerned, uncircumspective  
 tarrying alongside everything  
 and nothing (BT.156).

When Hackett and the others see Watt standing by the tram stop he is almost like a roll of tarpaulin or a carpet. But not quite. Even Watt, stationary in the gloaming, just "standing around", is Dasein and has to be dealt with as such.

Throughout the majority of the fiction the characters are alone. But alone precisely in the Heideggerian way of being alone, alone because their Being is a Being-with-Others. Molloy is always trying to avoid or escape from people (like Buster Keaton in Film). He says he could have followed "A or C" and spoken to them, and he wanted to, but he didn't, he stayed in his "observation post", "But instead of observing I had the weakness to return in spirit to the other, the man with the stick. Then the murmurs began again" (T.13). Molloy wants to stop, to cease to exist, to go silent. But he is in the world and Being-in-the-world is a Being-with-others and others mean "murmurs" as we see. He then tries to avoid being accosted when he goes into his town, and all he wants is for the police to leave him alone, but they don't. And he tries to escape from Lousse's house and eventually succeeds, and so he goes on. But besides the physical presence of Others, he carries within

him the imperative of that first Other, his mother. And Moran, who follows him, is not only accompanied by his son for most of his journey (and has constant skirmishes with physical Others) but carries within him his images of his quarry, Molloy, and Gaber's instructions, and Youdi's authority. Thus these narrators of Beckett's become "puppets" indeed.

Malone, as his name implies, is alone, but not alone in the ontological sense, his Being is clearly not that of the isolated present-at-hand. He is very clearly in a world and his whole Being appears as Care both in the positive sense that he is "concernful" about his "possessions" (ready-to-hand, while he can still reach them at least) and "solicitous" about the Others who actually are his stories. If the reader confuses Malone with his fictions he is to be forgiven, Beckett intends it, "Dasein "is" essentially for the sake of Others".

The Unnamable is even more explicit. "Why did I have myself represented in the midst of men?" he asks. "It seems to me it was none of my doing" (T.299). Indeed, it was not. He speculates on how he knows what he knows and illogically decides that, although he has never had any contact with anyone, "they" gave him "lectures". "They.....gave me the low-down on God.....But what they were most determined for me to swallow was my fellow-creatures" (T.300). Which is Beckett's way of expressing the inescapability of Being-with-Others.

It will not have escaped the attentive reader that this reading of Beckett implies an explanation of the author-character nexus that is so important in his work. Fictional characters are the author, and yet they are not him. Beckett himself would have to speak of Worm in the accusative because, although Dasein's world is other Daseins, other Daseins are just that - Other. This ambiguity, which appears in Buber for whom "I - Thou" or "I - it" are preferable to "I" and yet do not



annihilate "I", is the ambiguity of the Self which we have only started to explore.

Two points from Beckett in conclusion. First there is the motif in the fiction of the escape to the isolation of a beach, a cave or a hut. All the characters, mobile and immobile, escape to such places at one time or another. They are never able to stay there and they get lured back into the world of Others every time. The impossibility of isolation is only stressed by the obvious irony of an expression such as, "It is easy for a man, a proper man, to live in a cave, far from everybody" (NK.55).

Second there is the puzzling matter of the compounds in the lunatic asylum in the third part of Watt. These, the gardens of Watt's and Sam's houses, are bounded by fences which do not meet. That is to say Watt's compound has a fence and Sam's has one parallel to it; there is a gap of a few yards between the fences. This can be taken as an epistemological symbol - Sam and Watt, like any two people are incommunicado. But then there is the fact that some unknown agency has burst a hole through both fences at the same point, so Sam and Watt can meet and communicate. This is a development from the solipsism of Murphy and from the lack of communication in Mr. Knott's house. It symbolizes Beckett's giving up of solipsism as a possibility. He does not again seriously try to contend that Man's Being is ontologically monadic.

For Beckett Being is inescapable (suicide is pointless and unsuccessful, c.f. Molloy, Godot, etc). In parallel with Heidegger Beckett learns that Others are inescapable; Heidegger says that Dasein's Being is Being-with, Beckett expresses the same thing passim, especially in Film where the Other is carried "within", like a character in an author. But Being, for Beckett, is also that traditionally inescapable

situation, Hell. This can be illustrated from several places, but a brief consideration of the title and contents of The Lost Ones should be enough. All of which adds up to a familiar conclusion - that hell is other people.

\* \* \*

Geworfenheit. "Thrownness". Entwurf. "Projection".

Before following Heidegger's developing series of concepts any further it is worth noting the close parallel to be drawn between a theme in Beckett and Heidegger's concept of Geworfenheit.

Dasein "is there". But it does not choose the time or place of its arrival. Whatever man does or thinks or feels it is obvious that, first, he is already there. This gives rise to a metaphor that describes man as "thrown" ("geworfen") into Being (BT.174): Man always has a "mood", or a "state of mind", a basic component of which is this feeling of having been thrown into the "there". The "there", of course, is facticity, and we have seen that facticity is the negative aspect of possibility. Dasein's Being is its Being-possible and the "fundamental existentials" that is the Being of this potentiality is understanding. From my "state of mind" I look backwards, as it were, at my thrownness into facticity; from understanding I look forwards into my possibility.

Understanding has the structure of "Entwurf", projection, which is a keeping-open of possibilities. "Understanding is the existential Being of Dasein's own potentiality-for-Being; and it is so in such a way that this Being discloses in itself what its Being is capable of" [BT.184]. The etymological connection between this projecting ("entwurf") and thrownness ("Geworfenheit") is no accident. Man is thrown into Being and throws himself into his own Being. Does anything like this appear in

Beckett?

Perhaps the locus classicus of thrownness in the modern theatre is Beckett's Act Without Words, I which opens

Desert. Dazzling light.  
The man is flung backwards on stage from  
right wing. He falls, gets up immediately,  
dusts himself, turns aside, reflects (E.57).

It will be noticed that reflection here follows thrownness. As we gaze at the creature flung before us, "there" in the dazzling light, we feel the force of Heidegger's query "Has Dasein as itself ever decided freely whether it wants to come into "Dasein" or not, and will it ever be able to make such a decision?" (BT.271). All the many further stage-directions, in Act Without Words I, to "reflect" are examples of projection. The man tries to seize his possibilities, which are given to him by his understanding, and quickly learns the factual limitations of his situation. This short play can be seen as a perfect Heideggerian parable for Geworfenheit and entwurf with the Beckettian rider that seizing possibilities is harder than it looks.

Other examples abound. Both Murphy and Watt are plonked down into our ken without a by-your-leave. Watt, especially, is just thrust off the tram into the story. But the best examples appear later. Molloy, for instance, is just thrown into position: "I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there" (T.7). In Cascando "Voice" speaks of "him" as "a ton weight" who is "stuck in the sand" (Cascando p. 41) rather like Winnie in Happy Days who has been thrust into the sand and is jerked back into "life" daily by her alarm-clock. In The Expelled the "hero" arrives at the beginning of the story by being flung down some steps. He makes it clear that he is frequently flung out like this, and usually pursued and beaten, but on this occasion, "For once, they had confined themselves to throwing me out and no more about it" (NK.10). At the first line of How It Is we are plunged



in medias res, that is, into the mud alongside the creature who, like all Beckett's creatures, is "already" there. Malone is in much the same state as Molloy, "One day I found myself here, in the bed" (T.183). The Unnamable is even clearer about this and often refuses to accept that he was ever anywhere else, as for instance, "I have been here, ever since I began to be" (T.296) and all he says about how he got there is implied in his reference to the "signing" of a "life-warrant". "They" sign the warrant and we are flung into Being.

So much for thrownness. What of projection? Here Beckett seems to be parodying Heidegger - all his moribunds project wildly, aimlessly, artificially. Malone is the best example. He draws up a plan of what he is going to do before he dies (cf. "Being-towards-Death" below) and makes a determined effort to fulfil his last remaining possibilities, that is, his abilities to tell stories, to talk, to list things. To some extent he achieves his project. To some extent the brevity of life, the pooriness of memory and the interventions of the unexpected conspire to thwart him. But he cannot do other than project. Nor can Beckett avoid filling his own time by inventing stories.

We can now construct a preliminary list of the "equiprimordial" existentials of Dasein. Dasein is "there", thrown into factual existence, already in-a-world, already with-others, already concerned with the ready-to-hand, already solicitous about others, already with understanding and in a state-of-mind, and only thus can Dasein be-Itself. None of these constitutive items "precedes" or explains any of the others, they are equiprimordial, part-and-parcel of Dasein's existence and generally to be subsumed, if at all, under the heading "Care", which is the meaning of Dasein's Being.

Das Man. "They". Uneigentlich Existenz. "Inauthentic Existence".

We now come to a vexed and much-misunderstood existentialist thesis. Heidegger, Sartre and, by implication at least, other existentialists employ what is almost a new term in philosophy - "authentic" - and use it to describe human behaviour in a way that is nearly always taken ethically. Herein lies the first problem. In Heidegger at least, in spite of all its positive connotations, the term "authentic" is used entirely without ethical content. It may be normal to draw from his discussion of authentic and inauthentic existence ethical conclusions, but to do so requires the addition of imported factors to the original thesis. Taken as it stands, this thesis at no point states or implies that Dasein should try to be authentic. At no point is inauthentic existence described as "wrong" or "evil".

The second problem we shall leave until we come to talk about Sartre in the next chapter. It arises from a query inherent in the authentic - inauthentic distinction - namely, is authentic existence as defined in existentialism ever possible? As I say, this problem appears most forcibly in Sartre on "mauvaise foi" and can be left until we meet that concept. Meanwhile I must outline briefly Heidegger's non-ethical concepts, "Das Man" and "Uneigentlich Existenz".

"Das Man" roughly means "the they" or "people". It is the crowd, the herd, rather than the individual. In "everyday Being-with-one-another" Dasein "stands in subjection to Others. It itself is not; its Being has been taken away by the Others" (BT.164). Dasein is its possibilities; my existence is my understanding projection of myself into my possibilities, but in "average everydayness" Dasein's "possibilities of Being are for the Others to dispose of as they please" (BT.164). Heidegger gives the example of employing public transport or reading the newspaper that is also read by so many others. My "own" existence is subordinated

to a public existence that is not mine. In our average everydayness, "We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they (man) take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as they see and judge" (BT.164).

"The Self of everyday Dasein is the they-self, which we distinguish from the authentic Self - that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way" (BT.167). Thus existence dominated by "them" is inauthentic existence, and inauthentic existence is the Being-in-the-world of everyday Dasein.

Perhaps surprisingly this is another constituent part of Dasein's primordial Being-there. "Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self, and fallen into the "world" (BT.220). Here "world" is in inverted commas to indicate that it has the denotation of the ordinary usage rather than Heidegger's special meaning. So it means "world" rather as in the Christian conception of "the devil, the world and the flesh" - Dasein "falls" into the world, that is, into the "they". And Dasein is constantly "tempted" by the "world" and by the relative ease of only being its "they-Self". Once we have fallen into the world we become "tranquillized" by it, but this implies nothing static, rather we are driven into "hustle" and hurry that drives us along, "alienating" us from ourselves. But this "worldly" "they-Self" we fall into is not really "Other", it is still "myself", so in falling we become "entangled" in ourselves; we can never become Other however inauthentically we behave. "Dasein plunges out of itself into itself, into the groundlessness and nullity of inauthentic everydayness" (BT.-23).

The primordially of the "they-Self" is established in the following passage, which also serves as Heidegger's summary of his position up to this point:



As something factual, Dasein's projection of itself understandingly is in each case already alongside a world that has been discovered. From this world it takes its possibilities, and it does so first in accordance with the way things have been interpreted by the "they". This interpretation has already restricted the possible options of choice to what lies within the range of the familiar, the attainable, the respectable - that which is fitting and proper (BT. 239).

If Dasein only consults its "they" possibilities it remains blind to its own possibilities or it resorts to mere "wishing" about them and wish-states-of-mind, daydreams, are really the opposite of a genuine grasping of possibilities. "They" never choose, "they" have always already chosen, and to exist inauthentically is to let their choices operate for me too (BT.345). Inauthentic Dasein is "carried along by the nobody" (BT.312). Listening to the voice of "they", Dasein fails to hear itself (BT.315).

Do we find any of this in Beckett? Do his characters suffer under "the dictatorship of the "they"?" The second Act Without Words appears to be a comment on the "everyday" Being of man, and is a good place to start in its clarity.

In Act Without Words II a goad, emerging from the wings of the stage, prods into life two men in sacks. They go through the motions of a daily routine, dressing, eating, undressing and so on, in alternation, and Beckett creates the impression that the goad, like Winnie's alarm clock, will go on goading until there is nobody left to torment. Thus each player in this mime appears to exemplify an endless and deadening routine and to conform unquestioningly to habits imposed upon them. Significantly "A" and "B", as they are called, go through their routines quite differently, thereby giving the impression of choosing their own possibilities and consequently of existing authentically. But the overall structure within which they exercise this freedom makes

a mockery of it. Their conformity to what the goad clearly expects of them is absolute; to emphasize the point, they wear the same clothes (not merely similar clothes, the very same garments) and eat the same carrot. Here we have two people under the tyranny of the "they", this last being represented by a goad. And in fact the goad is a better illustration of "Das Man" than a crowd of people would be, for Heidegger is at pains to emphasize that "they" are no particular group of people or individuals, "they" must only be the indefinite, collective neuter. Something like an impersonal goad, in fact.

Act Without Words II can be seen as an illustration of the situation that we feel all through the trilogy and that appears unambiguously in How It Is, the situation of being compelled to "go on". It is no coincidence that, scattered all through the fiction after Watt, there are references to the source of this compulsion as "they". In the Texts for Nothing for instance we find the following,

We seem to be more than one,  
all deaf, not even, gathered together  
for life. Another said, or the same,  
or the first, they all have the same  
voice, the same ideas, All you had to  
do was stay at home....(NK.71-2).

And Molloy has this aside:

All the things you would do gladly,  
oh, without enthusiasm, but gladly,  
all the things there seems no reason  
for your not doing, and that you do  
not do! Can it be we are not free? (T.36).

It is the "they-Self" that prevents us from doing what is not acceptable to "them", although there "seems no reason" to refrain. Later Molloy talks about the spurious relief of getting lost in the "they" and of coming back again:

Yes it sometimes happens and will  
 sometimes happen again that I  
 forget who I am and strut before  
 my eyes like a stranger. Then I see  
 the sky different from what it is  
 and the earth too takes on false  
 colours. It looks like rest, it is not,  
 I vanish happy in that alien light,  
 which must have once been mine,  
 I am willing to believe it, then the  
 anguish of return, I won't say where,  
 I can't, to absence perhaps....(T.42).

Here we have Beckett's old trick of splitting the Self and having "I" talking about "me", a split that seems to be along the lines of the "they-Self" and the authentic Self. They are both me but the condition of passage from the latter to the former is that I must "forget who I am". And, as we have seen, this will put me in "alien", or "alienated" light which looks like "rest" ("tranquillity") but "is not" (it is "hustle"). Getting back to me ("myself") is going to feel like getting back to an "absence" after the excitements of the "they-Self".

The Unnamable is constantly talking about "them" and what "they" want. "They", for instance, try "to make me believe I have an ego all my own, and can speak of it, as they of theirs" (T.348). This underlines the irony of Heidegger's position - in being exhorted to "be ourselves" we are presented with an impossibility, for if I "am myself" at your bidding then I am, again, bowing to the dictatorship of the "they". "They" are bound to fail, as the Unnamable implies, by definition, in the attempt to "make me believe" anything about myself, although "I was like them, before being like me" (T.382).

Once again we find ourselves back at the problem of Beckett's narration. Who is narrating what to whom? And once again Heidegger provides some illumination. Take the following crux from the fourth Text for Nothing:



He has me say things saying  
 it's not me, there's profundity for  
 you, he has me who say nothing  
 say it's not me. All that is  
 truly crass. If at least he would  
 dignify me with the third person,  
 like his other figments, not he, he'll  
 be satisfied with nothing less than  
 me, for his me (NK.88).

Here the tension between "him" and "me" can be seen as that between author and character. But there is another level that emerges from our Heideggerian considerations, a level on which the "everyday" Self, the "they-Self" is talking about the authentic Self. On this level we can gloss this passage as follows. The authentic Self ("He") seems to be the origin of the "they-Self" and makes it "say things" such as "it's not me" (the self-rejection of the alienated "they-Self"). There's profundity if you like, I, who don't say anything because my voice is drowned in the voices of the "they" manage here to say something. An apparently stupid situation. It would be better if "he" (my authentic Self) would talk about me (who is after all only a puppet of the "they") in the third person as he does with his other "figments", that is, with the other objects of his perception or imagination. But no, he won't treat me like Tom, Dick or Harry (he can't, he is me), when he talks about me he must talk about me as "his me".

In Lessness we learn that people have been "false" to the "blackened out fallen open true refuge" for a long time, "time out of mind". It is hard to be conclusive, but might this not also be an example of inauthentic existence? The empty, dark, open "refuge" of the Self is what we are "false" to when we fall under the dominion of "das Man".

In Premier Amour we find one of Beckett's aphorisms, the sort of thing about which we feel that we can only say that it has a beautiful "shape". Thus: "C'est pénible de ne plus être soi-même, encore plus pénible que de l'être, quoi qu'on en dise" (Premier Amour, 21). But

talk of "shape" in this context, while it may be the truth, is not the whole truth. In the end, Beckett's sentence means something. With our Heideggerian reading we can say that talk about knowing what it is like to be oneself and not to be oneself reflects Heidegger's two sorts of self, the public and the private, and of course it is more painful, of the two unsatisfactory possibilities, to be estranged from oneself than to be oneself.

Beckett adds a point to this discussion that is not specifically made by Heidegger. It concerns habit. Implicit in the notion of inauthentic existence is the idea of dead, unthinking routines, habits in fact. Dasein can only project himself into his possibilities by understanding what he is doing and grasping his existence, never by merely jogging on along the old road. This thought first appears in Beckett in his essay on Proust, where he describes how habit, in A la recherche, shuts off possibilities. "The creature of habit turns aside from the object that cannot be made to correspond with one or other of his intellectual prejudices, that resists the propositions of his team of syntheses, organized by Habit on labour-saving principles" (PTD.23). In a sense most of his later characters actually strive to achieve this labour-saving state of being deadened by habit. Sometimes it seems their next-best alternative to real death. At least from Watt onwards repetition, the attempt to build something up into a habit, becomes a central motif in Beckett. His narrators do not want to "know", they want to be back in the womb with its dark, empty, endless repetition of heartbeats. Rather remarkably, when we reach The Unnamable we find Beckett referring back, in this context to Proust again. "I invented love, music, the smell of flowering currant, to escape from me" (T.307). "These are only a few of the many inventions that have been dragged in to "pass the time", as the tramps would say in Godot, in the course of

the trilogy. And the flowering currant has just a touch of the Proustian "Fetish" about it; the whole sentence is like a brief résumé of À la recherche. More important is what follows.

"Organs, a without, it's easy to imagine, a god, it's unavoidable, you imagine them, it's easy, the worst is dulled, you doze away, an instant" (T.307). The function of all our habitual assumptions, all our inventions and imaginations is to dull "the worst". When we come to How It Is this process is complete. The only meaning that existence in that mud has, the only way of even speaking of what is happening, of how it is, is through the pattern, the habitual form of life, the great, grotesque, but regular dance of habit-deadened existence. And, significantly, it is in How It Is that Beckett abandons his quest for the Self "itself" and allows habit, the "they-Self", wonderfully projected into the mud, to dominate.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

Eigentlich Existenz. "Authentic existence". Gewissen. "Conscience".

Authentic existence is, of course, the reverse of the inauthentic existence described in the last section. To exist authentically is to exist as Self and not as "they-Self". Heidegger borrows the term "conscience" to describe the power that calls us out of the "they-Self" and into the Self. It is Dasein's own conscience that does this, so it is I who demand my Self from my "they-Self". Conscience is an "appeal" from one to the other, "and because only the Self of the they-self gets appealed to and brought to hear, the "they" collapses" (BT.317). It may collapse, but it does not disappear. Dasein has Being-in-the-world quite as much when it exists authentically as when it does not; as Heidegger points out earlier, "Authentic Being-one's-Self does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition



that has been detached from the "they"...."(BT.168). The call of conscience passes over all the considerations of the "they", of introspection, of psychoanalysis, of anything that treats the Self as an object. It calls "solely to that Self which, notwithstanding, is in no other way than Being-in-the-world"(BT.318). So authentic existence is not detached from the world and the "they"; Murphy's mistake is to make a bid to shut out "the world" and to "come alive" in his mind, but "the appeal to the Self in the they-self does not force it inwards upon itself, so that it can close itself off from the "external world"...."(BT.318). We are in no way discussing solipsism or subjectivism here.

Conscience, in calling to the Self, strictly says "nothing", but it calls Dasein forward into its "potentiality-for-Being-its-Self", that is, it calls on Dasein to exist authentically. And it discourses "solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent" (BT.318). Here the "caller", conscience, sounds remarkably like a Beckettian character, not simply because it talks by keeping silent in a manner that echoes Beckett's paradoxes on this subject, but in its ambiguous anonymity:

The caller maintains itself in conspicuous indefiniteness. If the caller is asked about its name, status, origin or repute, it not only refuses to answer, but does not even leave the slightest possibility of one's making it into something with which one can be familiar when one's understanding of Dasein has a "worldly" orientation. On the other hand, it by no means disguises itself in the call (BT. 319).

The point here, as in Beckett, is that the Self calls to its Self from its Self. And at least one, if not two, of these terms is anonymous and indefinable. The "they-Self" we can perhaps define, but what are we to say of the Self "itself" or of the conscience that calls to it? They are both "me", undisguisedly, but we can say nothing of them.

Compare The Unnamable, passim.

The call of conscience "comes from me and yet from beyond me" (BT.320). Once again we are back at the "First Person - Third Person" problem, discussed in the last section. This calling conscience, at once me and not me, sounds very like the "I" - "They" tension in, say, How It Is or the Texts for Nothing. If we are tempted to call the "them", in Beckett, God, we find Heidegger positing the same possibility. The "Scribes", "up there" in How It Is, bending over the prone forms of the mud-creatures, dictating; or the "He" of the fourth Text for Nothing, seem to be external powers and yet within the narrator. As Heidegger says, one can take "the power itself as a person who makes himself known - namely God" (BT.320). But he has a better explanation, and one that I think will fit Beckett better too. "The fact that the call is not something which is explicitly performed by me, but that rather "it" does the calling, does not justify seeking the caller in some entity with a character other than that of Dasein" (BT.320-1). The caller is an "it", but it is also me, a "who". "In its "who", the caller is definable in a "worldly" way by nothing at all. The caller is Dasein in its uncanniness: primordial, thrown Being-in-the-world as the not-at-home - the bare "that-it-is" in the "nothing" of the world" (BT.321). The caller is "alien" because nothing could be more alien to the "they-Self" than the Self. And Heidegger repeats: "The call does not report events; it calls without uttering anything" (BT.322). There is no possibility of my being mistaken as to who is calling when I hear this silent call - I know it is me. I know myself in my "uncanniness", that is, in my individuality, and I recognize myself unmistakably when I call myself out of the "they-Self" into my own potentiality because I am "Care".

"Conscience manifests itself as the call of care: the caller is Dasein... The one to whom the appeal is made is this very same Dasein" (BT.322).

If Dasein interprets the call of conscience as the voice of God it is merely slipping back into the world, into the "they-Self", hiding in the Objective, resting in inauthenticity. If the voice of conscience is not my voice it is a public voice, "God's voice", the voice of the "they". Vox populi, vox dei. But thus it must be my voice for it is precisely the voice that calls me away from the "they" (BT.323).

We should now be in a position to understand the following comment of Heidegger's that summarizes this basic state of authentic existence. "In understanding the call (of conscience), Dasein is in thrall to its ownmost possibility of existence. It has chosen itself" (BT.334). This is how "man makes himself".

It will be seen that this question of authentic existence is bound up with the question of selfhood, which in Beckett appears as the quest for Self. I have already made some points about Beckett en passant and the bulk of this discussion must be left to our direct approach to the Self in the section so-entitled, below. For the present I would just like to give some examples of Beckett's references to the quest for the Self that will perhaps read a little more clearly with Heidegger in mind.

Arsène, for instance, describes the mystery of Watt's arrival at Mr Knott's house where "he knows he is in the right place at last.... he will be in his midst at last, after so many tedious years spent clinging to the perimeter", he will be able to taste "the long joys of being himself" (W.39). We now have a chance of understanding this without resorting to admiring its shape. The "right place" is the authentic Self which is "in our midst", the "perimeter" to which we cling is the they-Self. Only in the former can we be ourselves.

Frequently through the Texts for Nothing we come across similarly arcane statements that seem a little clearer with Heidegger's help.



"I don't know, I'm here, that's all I know, and that it's still not me, it's of that the best has to be made"(NK.85).

"I know, there is no one here, neither me nor anyone else, but some things are better left unsaid, so I say nothing" (NK.98).

"To be judge and party, witness and advocate, and he, attentive, indifferent, who sits and notes. It's an image, in my helpless head..." (NK.91).

"One, meaning me, it's not the same thing" (NK.91).

"The ears straining for a voice not from without" (NK.91).

"That other who is me...because of whom I'm here" (NK.109).

In each of these examples there is a "me" and some other who is also "me". If these appear susceptible of another interpretation (which is possible, though I suspect it would end up being a very similar sort of interpretation) what can be made of the following from The Unnamable without our Heideggerian view?

What I say, what I may say, on this subject, the subject of me and my abode, has already been said since, having always been here, I am here still... I greatly fear, since my speech can only be of me and here, that I am once more engaged in putting an end to both. Which would not matter, far from it, but for the obligation, once rid of them, to begin again, to start again from nowhere, from no one and from nothing and win to me again, to me here again.... (T.304).

Angst. "Anxiety". Nichts. "Nothing".

Dasein "falls" into inauthenticity. It "flees" from itself into

the "they". This fleeing is not the same as the fleeing of one afraid. If I am afraid, it is of a definite entity within-the-world that threatens me, but when Dasein "flees" into the "they" it is fleeing from itself. Hence we need another term than "fear" to describe the state-of-mind that brings about this fleeing. This is especially so as Dasein, when it flees from what it fears, is in fact totally orientated towards the "fearsome" thing, (Heidegger gives no examples, but this physical one is clear enough: when I run away from a fierce dog all I do has reference to the dog, I can think of nothing else, my whole being is involved with the dog, albeit in the negative mode of trying to avoid it). But when Dasein flees from itself into the world, into the "they", it is quite unable to say definitely what it is fleeing from. So it is even more important to find a term that will differentiate this from fear.

Heidegger adopts Kierkegaard's word "Angst" which we will translate "anxiety"; it has also been rendered as "dread", which is perhaps too strong. Just as "concern" and "solicitude" are both made possible by the fact that "care" is Dasein's fundamental Being, so fear and its related emotions are made possible because anxiety is one of Dasein's fundamental existentialia. Fear is fear of what threatens us from within-the-world. Anxiety is anxious about no specific entity but about "Being-in-the-world as such" (BT.230). "In anxiety one does not encounter this thing or that thing which, as something threatening, must have an involvement.... That in the face of which one has anxiety is characterized by the fact that what threatens is nowhere. Anxiety "does not know" what that in the face of which it is anxious is" (BT.231).

We are anxious in the face of the "nothing and nowhere" that is the world. If this seems incomprehensible it is perhaps worth considering that "the world" cannot mean this or that entity within-the-world nor

can it mean the aggregate of all such entities; it must be defined as the possibilities of the ready-to-hand. And possibility is precisely "nothing-yet, nowhere-yet". In fact we have now followed Heidegger to the point where we can see that his concept of Angst coincides with Kierkegaard's... In discussing original sin in The Concept of Dread Kierkegaard explains Adam's position by saying that Angst is awoken in him by the prohibition to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. The Angst is aroused precisely because Adam is being offered a choice and therefore is confronted by possibility. Kierkegaard goes further and specifically defines this possibility as "nothing". Adam "dreads" in the face of "nothing" (Kierkegaard, 1, 38-40).

Because Dasein turns away from itself, its Self is "disclosed" as being "there" (BT.229). Thus, paradoxically, the fleeing into inauthenticity is the condition for authenticity. I flee because I am anxious; I am anxious in the face of my Being-in-the-world, in the face of the "nothing" of my possibility; my possibility, as we have seen, my own Being-in-the-world, is my authentic existence. Thus Angst is a condition of authentic existence, it "discloses" Dasein to itself.

Anxiety makes manifest in Dasein its Being-towards its ownmost potentiality-for-Being - that is, its Being-free-for the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself. Anxiety brings Dasein face to face with its Being-free for... the authenticity of its Being... Anxiety individualizes Dasein and thus discloses it as "solus ipse" (BT.232-233).

Heidegger returns to anxiety in his discussion of "moods" or "states of mind". Rather disingenuously, he offers anxiety as a simple example of how a "state of mind" is to be described. But we need not be misled about this; he is talking as much about anxiety itself as about states of mind. In the face of itself and about itself, he says,



Dasein feels anxious. To put it another way, Dasein feels anxious in the face of the "nothing" of the world. Heidegger stresses that this "nothing" is not to be interpreted as a lack of something in the present-at-hand, rather it is the condition of the world. "The present-at-hand must be encountered in just such a way that it does not have any involvement whatsoever, but can show itself in an empty mercilessness" (BT.393). "Anxiety discloses an insignificance of the world" (BT.393).

Elsewhere Heidegger asks whether anyone "has...ever made a problem of the ontological source of notness" (BT.332). And what emerges from all this is a picture of anxiety as a fundamental state-of-mind, in which authentic existence is possible, and of "nothing", "nullity" or the "not" as that which we are anxious about, although not in the way of "missing" something that is "not there".

The application of this to Beckett must be obvious. His fiction in particular abounds with characters terrified of "nothing", depending on "nothing", needing "nothing" in a way that makes it quite plain that this nothing is not just a "not something". And the state of mind of the Beckettian narrator is rarely specific fear of things within-the-world, but it is not comfort and freedom from everything like fear either; it is Angst.

Watt is a good place to start to look for examples. Heidegger asks if anyone has looked into the ontology of "notness", and here surely is Watt attempting it in his speculations about Mr. "Knott". Even before he has come properly face to face with Mr. Knott, Watt's narration (or Sam's, or Beckett's) is stiff with the word "not". "Not that Watt was ever to have any direct dealings with Mr. Knott, for he was not", for example (W.64). And the first major event of his stay in Mr. Knott's house (besides Arsène's speech, of which more hereafter) is the visit of the Galls, father and son, to "choon" the piano, which

is described later as "a thing that was nothing" that had "happened" (W.73). This is repeated a few pages later as though Beckett were pleased with the paradox, "a nothing had happened" (W.77). And it is in this connexion that he delivers himself of his oracular reductio: "For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man...." (W.74). Which, of course, is Heidegger's point that "nothing" does not always just mean a "lack" - it can have a positive value. This throws a new light on such dicta of Watt's as "Yes, nothing changed, in Mr. Knott's establishment, because nothing remained, and nothing came or went, because all was a coming and a going" (W.130). The "nothings" in this sentence clearly denote something more than a "lack". Which might even suggest a new interpretation of apparently simpler statements such as "What did he know of Mr. Knott? Nothing" (W.147). After all, the sentences that follow this are: "Of his anxiety to improve, of his anxiety to understand, of his anxiety to get well, what remained? Nothing. But was not that something?" (W.147). The last question goes unanswered.

All this consideration of "nothing", we have seen, is intimately bound up in Heidegger with anxiety. "Anxiety "does not know" what that in the face of which it is anxious is". So it is with Watt. "Of the nature of Mr. Knott himself Watt remained in particular ignorance" (W.199). "For of Mr. Knott he could not speak" (W.214). Mr. Knott would seem to be the nothing in the face of which Dasein is anxious. In the Addenda the verses that begin "Who may tell the tale/of the old man?" conclude with the parallel interrogative "nothingness/in words enclose?" (W.247). The old man's tale is nothingness.

What is significant about this is not merely that we now have an explanation of the negativity of Mr. Knott. We can go further.

Heidegger's definition of the "nothing" can be thoroughly applied to Mr. Knott. We are anxious, it will be remembered, in the face of the "nothing and nowhere" that is the world, the world here meaning that which is created by my freedom, that is, possibility. Mr. Knott is just this possibility. He is, but he is not any one given entity. He is free possibility before it has chosen this or that. This explains his notorious systematic irregularity and unpredictability and his capacity to run through the whole range of possibilities of a given subject. Mr. Knott's meals, appearance and habits are quite indefinable. As one of many examples we can consider his clothes. "The clothes that Mr. Knott wore.....were very various, very very various" (W.199). All sorts of random clothing is attributed to him, which he wears in the most random manner. This seems to symbolize possibility well enough, but what clinches the argument is the deliberately exhaustive list of what he wears on his feet. This list (W.pp.200-201) is too long to quote in extenso but it is an example of one of the most striking features of the novel - a desperate ratiocination that wants to say every possibility in a given context. To explain it away as merely illustrative of an insane rationalism is inadequate; we can start to understand it properly only by taking it as it is and interpreting it in its obviousness. It is a list of possibilities. It includes all possibilities, it therefore puts us in a position to stand back from them, it symbolizes the pre-choice situation of Watt gazing at Mr. Knott, it symbolizes freedom, Watt's gazing at the nothing ["Knott"] of possibility.

If our comparison with Heidegger does no more than establish who Mr Knott is, and why Beckett adopts the technique of exhaustive enumeration in Watt, it has done a great deal. But "nothingness" also figures largely in the other work. It is present in Murphy whose hero finds himself at peace when "the somethings give way, or simply add up, to the Nothing, than which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more



real". This nothing is "the accidentless One-and-Only" (M.168). Then, later, there are the Texts for Nothing with their ambiguous title, and a scatter of references to nothingness in most of the work. From The Expelled, "I raised my eyes to the sky...where nothing obstructs your vision" (NK.13). An ambiguous sentence. From The Calmative, "All I say cancels out, I'll have said nothing" (NK.26), where it is interesting to note the future tense; Beckett does not have the audacity to claim that he has said nothing. Then again the narrator's mind was "always flung back to where there was nothing" (NK.41).

These examples can all be read in a Heideggerian context; and if they are so read they acquire more meaning. Even more obviously Heideggerian is this from Eleuthéria: Victor, the hero, defends his liberty and when asked what he is defending it for ("pour quoi faire?") he replies "pour rien faire". Freedom is precisely to do nothing, to be able to choose but not to choose yet.

Molloy has an interesting aside on nothing. He claims that "to know nothing is nothing" (T.64) in a context which indicates that the second nothing is idiomatic and the equivalent of "easy". The implication is that nothing, previously treated seriously as important, is now the easiest thing to grasp, which, in Heidegger's case, is paradoxically true - before anything I am faced with the nothing of freedom. Moran, like Molloy, "stumbles" in the midst of "nothingness" (T.123) at exactly the point when we expect him, surrounded by his house and his possessions as he is, to feel most certain of "something". Once again, this needs Heidegger. If we take "nothing" as a sort of equivalent opposite of "house", Moran's stumbling is incomprehensible. But if we see "nothing" as possibility in the face of the world, then the house is precisely the condition of Moran's "nothing". And at this point in the tale Moran is specifically concerned with choice - the illusory choice of whether to obey Youdi and the real choice of how to

set out and when.

It may be noticed that I am here stressing the "nothing" aspect of my argument rather than the "Angst" aspect. The two are inseparable, of course; face to face with the nothing Dasein is anxious. Thus if we can demonstrate that Watt or Molloy are face to face with nothing then we can define their state of mind as anxiety. This is so whether or not their state of mind is similar to what is meant by "anxious" in its usual meaning. This is the circular result of Heidegger's habit of giving words totally specialized meanings. "Angst", however, does have an objective content of a sort in Kierkegaard and we may assume that this is implied in Heidegger.<sup>6</sup> Anxiety is "vertigo" for the Danish philosopher, "a dizzy peering into the "abyss" (Kierkegaard, 1, 55). This is a metaphor for Being-towards the nothingness of freedom, the anxious peering into the "depths". It appears thus in Beckett too. Malone, who is as capable as any Beckettian hero of little asides such as "the true prayer at last, the one that asks for nothing" (T.130) also has a revealing explanation: "What I sought", he says, "was the rapture of vertigo,....the relapse....to nothingness" (T.26). And the Unnamable, in whose babble the word "nothing" is repeated over one hundred times, after his endless repositionings of himself and his "vice-existers", finally realizes that he is in an "enormous prison, like a hundred thousand cathedrals" (T.413), and in "this immensity" his voice gets lost in the "vault" in "the abyss" where he is "already" (T.413). In Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Beckett freedom is a vertigo in the face of the abyss of nothingness.

Heidegger proposes a more conventional view of nothingness as well, one which is doubtless also present in Beckett. Bochenski summarizes it thus, "Human existence is related to nothingness as follows: first human existence has no ground, it originates in the abyss of nothingness;

second, it culminates in death, which is another abyss of nothingness; third, the very being of human existence is an anticipation of death, of nothingness: it is intrinsically void" (Bochenski, 1, 171).

It is time for us to consider death.

\* \* \*

Sein-zum-Tode. "Being-towards-death". Ganzsein. "Being-a-whole".

Dasein's Being cannot be a sort of aggregate of the Beings of his body, his soul and so on. It must be the Being of Dasein's unity. So says Heidegger (BT.74). Being-in-the-world is shown to be unified in the section on Care. Care is Dasein's Being and it is defined as "ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-the-world-as-Being-alongside-entities-within-the-world" (BT.237). This definition is sufficient to establish Dasein as a unity if we consider Dasein statically, but once we introduce the concept of temporality something more must be added.

It is significant that the definition of Dasein as Care quoted above refers to Dasein's "average everydayness", that is, to Dasein in inauthenticity. At the beginning of Part Two of Being and Time, introducing temporality, Heidegger is at pains to point this out. He observes that in Part One he was not discussing Dasein's authenticity or totality. The two automatically appear together. Our discussion of inauthentic existence, above, depends largely on propositions from Part One of the work and our discussion of authentic existence depends on material from Part Two. Part Two is entitled "Dasein and Temporality".

The point is that however well we get on defining Dasein as Care and so on we cannot discover its unity or authenticity without time. With time we are able to understand our existential projections into the



future. Also we at once discover the horizon of those projections - death. Being-towards-death reveals the totality of Dasein's possibilities and hence imposes a unity on Dasein's Being.

At death Dasein ceases to "exist", there is nothing more "outstanding" for Dasein to do and it becomes merely "present-at-hand". A dead body does not even rise to the status of readiness-to-hand, it is just brutally present. This provides a contrast with "existence" and helps to define it. More important than this, however, is the direct pressure exerted by Being-towards-death on the Self to exist authentically. Not only is death the horizon that creates a unity for Dasein, it also forces Dasein to "be itself" by virtue of its inescapability. We saw that inauthentic existence involved allowing the "they" to replace "me" as the maker of decisions, the projector of existence. Now the one occasion on which I cannot find a replacement for "me" is at my death. If authentic existence is characterized by being "always mine" then Being-towards-death is guaranteed authentic (BT.283-4).

Then, we are always old enough to die. Death is always impending, another possibility among the many, an indefinite but undeniable element in the factual (BT.289). The "they" tranquillizes itself about death, but thereby only proves that Dasein's Being is Being-towards-death; the tranquillizing is Being-towards-death in a negative mode (BT.295). Death is Dasein's "ownmost possibility" (BT.303). The authentic state of mind of Being-towards-death is Angst. We have seen that this "anxiety" is a vertigo in the face of possibility, and death is the final possibility, the possibility of no-more-possibility. In the face of death Angst is the only authentic way of Being.

When we consider death we are, by implication, considering our lives as a whole.

Authenticity is related to totality, and we can expect the authentic only in the unified whole. However, unless we commit suicide immediately on having this thought, our Being-towards-death, that is our potentiality for Being-a-whole, will be characterized by anticipation. But then all our existential projects are characterized by anticipation, by expecting, by waiting for (BT.349). This positive waiting is quite the opposite of the dreaming, hankering-after, wishing-for and mere willing of inauthentic existence (BT.239-40).

It will at once be apparent that there is a good deal of this in Beckett. Malone's entire narrative, for instance, illustrates Being-towards-death. Sometimes he authentically grasps his possibilities, firmly aware of the probable limits of his existence and determined to shape his remaining time into a whole. This is the state he is in when he plans what he is going to do with his remaining time. He decides to tell certain stories in a certain order, make an inventory of his possessions, die. A perfect example of authentic Being-towards-death within the limits of the factual. At other times he is far away, plunged deeply into his stories about others. For him, as for the Unnamable, they are "vice-existers", in other words they are his "they-Self". When he tells their stories he is letting "them" exist for him. This, incidentally, underlines the paradox involved in the concept of free, authentic choice. Once Dasein has chosen X he is no longer free to choose Y, that is, he is no longer free. There is a clear sense, in Malone Dies, of Malone "putting off" talking about himself; we feel that the narrative is away from the centre, away from the point, while we learn about the Lamberts, Saposcat and Macmann. And indeed it is, these are Malone's ways of passing the time. When considering his projects, Malone is existing authentically, but when engaged on them he is inauthentic. The issue becomes clear in The Unnamable. The



narrator in this last part of the trilogy says that he has invented Malone and the others much as they invented Saposcat and the others, and he rejects them accordingly :

All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone (T.305).

The Trilogy becomes a striving after authentic existence when seen in this light. In Malone Dies this is coupled with a Heideggerian Being-towards-death, but by the time we reach The Unnamable, although the narrator has learnt that he must try to do without others (without "they", without projects) if he is to be able to stop talking (that is, stop being, that is, become a whole at last) he is patently unable to stop. He "must go on". So here Beckett again develops a Heideggerian proposition into a picture of hell. It is all very well, he implies, to talk of Being-towards-the-end, but how are we to get to the end in a world in which Zeno's "grains of millet" can never add up to a heap, "the impossible heap", as Clov discovers.

This reference to Endgame is not fortuitous. In both the major plays, Godot and Endgame, the situation of anticipation and Being-towards-death are explored. Indeed a lot of Beckett's theatre is terminal; Happy Days implies an impossible third act in which Winnie is totally buried, Krapp's tape is his last, and so on. And obviously there is an opportunity here to interpret the waiting element in Godot in existentialist terms. I shall quote most of a paragraph from Being and Time which can be compared with Godot, perhaps especially so in the extra knowledge that in German it is entitled Warten auf Godot.

Dasein comports itself towards something possible in its possibility by expecting it (im Erwarten). Anyone who is intent on something



possible, may encounter it unimpeded and undiminished in its "whether it comes or does not, or whether it comes after all".....To expect something possible is always to understand it and to "have" it with regard to whether and when and how it will be actually present-at-hand. Expecting is not just an occasional looking-away from the possible to its possible actualization, but is essentially a waiting for that actualization (ein Warten auf diese). Even in expecting, one leaps away from the possible and gets a foothold in the actual. It is for its actuality that what is expected is expected. By the very nature of expecting, the possible is drawn into the actual, arising out of the actual and returning to it (BT.306).

In Waiting for Godot there is a tendency for the reader or the audience to put the emphasis on Godot. Who is this person who does not come? But, reasonable though this question is, the play itself is clearly about waiting. Now waiting is how we comport ourselves towards possibility, according to Heidegger, and for Vladimir and Estragon this is roughly the case too. And we have seen that authentic existence consists in remaining free to choose, that is, in not choosing. So the tramps are authentically keeping their options open while waiting for possibility. Meanwhile it is essential that they do nothing that will preclude their genuine availability for possibility. In other words they must do nothing. Which is why nothing happens in the play. Thus, when they try to hang themselves they fail and go into pointless dialogue instead, a dialogue designed to avoid action:

VLAD: Well? What do we do?

EST: Don't let's do anything. It's safer.

VLAD: Let's wait and see what he says.

EST: Who?

VLAD: Godot.

EST: Good idea (WFG.18).

Later Estragon asks whether they are "tied", and here is the existentialist rub - they are tied, tied to inaction if they are to remain authentic. In a sense, thus, they are tied to possibility - if only they would give up waiting for possibility and plunge into possibility, as Pozzo so clearly has done, then, like Pozzo, they would be free to come and go. It is Beckett's addition to this scheme that neither freedom (the tramps) nor involvement (Pozzo) brings anything more than misery. It is also Sartre's addition. As we shall see, for Sartre man is "condemned to freedom" (the tramps) and is always in "bad faith" (inauthentic existence, Pozzo).

This waiting for possibility, Being-towards-death, waiting-to-be-a-whole motif permeates Beckett's work. So far we have mentioned Malone Dies, The Unnamable and the plays, but more examples can be given.

In Text for Nothing VIII the narrator states explicitly that he "wants to cease" but then plaintively adds that "being" would be nice too. In other words Beckett is elaborating the paradox: only at the end can I be me, and then it is too late (NK.111).

On a simpler level, there is the constant reference to death throughout Beckett's work, and always death is a welcome horizon; in From An Abandoned Work for instance, we read, "Oh I know I too shall cease and be as when I was not yet, only all over instead of in store, that makes me happy" (NK.145). Earlier, in Eleuthéria, death is seen as desirable but with attendant disadvantages; Victor says, "Si j'étais mort je ne saurais pas que je suis mort. C'est la seule chose que j'ai contre la mort. Je veux jouir de ma mort. C'est là la liberté: se voir mort" (Typescript, p. 116). So death is freedom except, without consciousness to enjoy that freedom, one is not free.

Molloy equates dying with becoming complete. "Perhaps there is no whole, before you're dead" he says, thereby giving a précis of several



pages of Being and Time (T.27). And he suffers from this dilemma of talking about his "life" when, since his life is not yet "whole", he cannot know what his life is. "My life.....now I speak of it as something over, now as of a joke which still goes on, and it is neither, for at the same time it is over and it goes on, and is there any tense for that?" (T.36). This surely is Heideggerian Being-towards-death. Death is our "wholeness" and we must anticipate it to exist authentically, but anticipating is already-having, so we talk about "my" life properly only when we consider it as already over. An unsatisfactory situation, as Beckett implies, but one we must grasp if we are to make much sense of this, also from Molloy:

For what possible end to these  
wastes where true light never was.....?  
Yes, a world at an end, in spite of  
appearances, its end brought it forth,  
ending it began, is it clear enough?  
(T.40).

Molloy thinks that death might be worse than life, an odd but common fear in Beckett as in Shakespeare, and he doesn't want to commit suicide, but deathless life is worse than anything, as he makes clear by describing his progress as a "veritable calvary, with no limit to its stations and no hope of crucifixion" (T.78).

Moran is in the same ambiguous situation. He wants to be wiped out, but he dreads death as a "regeneration" (T.141). On the other hand he views his disintegration as not merely a process of ageing - it is also some sort of a "clawing" upwards on the part of a man who is "dispossessed of Self". Moran is firmly embedded in the "they" and we can imagine that his destruction will be good for him in that it will at last teach him authentic existence. The price in Beckett is always exorbitant.

This Being-towards-death theme is the property of the characters in the plays, the trilogy and all the central work that emerged from



Beckett's great creative period (1946-1953?). It is perhaps less in evidence in How It Is and the later shorts. Here there is an abandonment of progressive movement towards some point and the static or repetitive situations described do not seem to admit of any possible end. In the early work, too, although death is frequently present, it is imposed on the characters from without, as it were, and not much considered by them from within. Belacqua and Murphy are watched shuffling off their mortal coils by detached and ironic eyes. Belacqua's maker, however, does indulge in one revealing aside. Before he undergoes the bizarre operation (on neck and toe) under the anaesthetic of which he will die, he is ignorant of the significance of his impending doom. "He did not pause to consider himself in this matter, the light that the coming ordeal would shed on his irrevocable self, because he really was tired of that old bastardo" (MPTK.173). Which is interesting in that it assumes that the "ordeal" of death can illuminate the "self" - Being-towards-death brings authentic existence with it.

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Schuld. "Guilt". Entschluss. "Resolution".

"Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self, and fallen into the world" (BT.220). This we now understand as Dasein's inauthentic involvement with "das Man", "they". But if inauthentic Dasein is characterized by "falling", authentic Dasein is characterized by "guilt". Neither of these concepts has anything to do with sin or lawbreaking (BT.224). Guilt is primordial and precedes any "indebtedness" (BT.329). We have dealt with "falling", by implication, in the section on inauthentic

existence, above, and now we must examine this apparently ineluctable guilt. With it we must look at another aspect of authentic existence, one that accompanies guilt, "resolution".

"Dasein as such is guilty" (BT.331). Here is yet another of the equiprimordial existentialia of Dasein. And Dasein is guilty because freedom is freedom to choose only one possibility, so Dasein always "lacks" the other fulfilments - the possibilities it does not choose. This "lack", which is obviously inescapable, Heidegger treats as similar to the "lack" which is at the basis of all sorts of guilt. He interprets guilt as an "indebtedness". Indebtedness means not having or not doing; thus Dasein's basic inability to choose everything, which means "not doing" most things, is an indebtedness, a lack, a guilt. "Dasein as such is guilty".

Conscience, we saw above, is essential to Dasein also, the call of Dasein's Self back to its Self. It is this conscience that tells us that we are guilty, for conscience is the call of Care, and Care is our Being as Being-in-the-world, and our Being-in-the-world is a matter of concerned dealing with the world, and that is a matter of choices and freedom. All this is already there in our situation.

When Heidegger says that we are guilty because we have "fallen" into the world, into the "they", this amounts to exactly the same thing. The way in which we fall into the world is to allow our choices to be made for us, to lack possibilities in just the way we lack them even when existing authentically because we cannot choose them all. So Dasein is responsible for what he does choose and guilty because of what he does not (BT.332-333).

"Resolution" is the "reticent self-projection upon one's ownmost Being-guilty, in which one is ready for anxiety" (BT.343). This is the condition of authentic existence. Resolution is "authentic Being-one's-

Self" (BT.344). What does this mean? Heidegger is not at his clearest here, but it would appear that this is his version of Sartre's "choosing to be oneself". Dasein must make the "resolve" to want to listen to the call of his conscience and Dasein must be "resolute" in adhering to himself if he wants to exist authentically. This decision "to be myself" does not detach me from the world or let me become a "free-floating "I"" (BT.344). On the contrary it permits me to exist in my true Being, which is Being-in-the-world. "They" are irresolute, "they" never choose, somehow everything has already been chosen by "them". When I submit to "their" choice I am doubly inauthentic - I have not chosen, and no identifiable one of "them" has chosen either.

Two final points. "Authentic resoluteness", we are told, "resolves to keep on repeating itself". Authentic existence is not merely achieved once for all, it is a permanent state of effort. Secondly, "resoluteness is authentically and wholly what it can be, only as anticipatory resoluteness" (BT.355-6). From what we learnt of anticipation and waiting in the last section it will be apparent that resoluteness is an essential part of authentic Being-towards-death, itself a condition of authentic existence.

Here we have an example of two of Heidegger's concepts that apply usefully to Beckett because of the profound level at which the philosopher is talking. Beckett's characters, for instance, seem to be endlessly self-punishing and never able to say that it is unfair or that they are "not guilty". I would propose that to associate their torments with, say, those of Dante's damned, is a genuine exercise in literary criticism but does not go far enough in the direction of explanation. After all, Beckett's cosmology is not Dante's; Dante intended his vision to be taken on several levels of meaning, no doubt, but first among them was something very like a literal meaning. This cannot be true of Beckett.



As we shall see in the final chapter, Beckett is not devoid of an interest in religion, but he is certainly not an orthodox Christian.

If we want an explanation of the pervading guilt and punishment themes we are likely to do a lot better with Heidegger's ontological versions.

In a sense this point can stand without examples. After all, there is no question but that Beckett's characters are punished for a profound guilt and that his entire oeuvre is created in a sort of grey light in which bitter suffering is universal and, because never complained of as such, curiously assumed to be fair. However, there is a clarity to be obtained from some of the specific points at which Beckett's characters talk about their guilt.

Malone, for instance, adopts the metaphor of the "sin of having been born" and is specific that there is nothing unmerited about the punishment which follows such a sin.

And without knowing exactly what his sin was he felt full well that living was not a sufficient atonement for it or that this atonement was in itself a sin, calling for more atonement, and so on, as if there could be anything but life, for the living. And no doubt he would have wondered if it was really necessary to be guilty in order to be punished but for the memory, more and more galling, of his having consented to live in his mother, than to leave her (T.240).

Later, pondering on his stories, Malone wonders if he is talking about the right Macmann. But he comforts himself with the reflection that "So long as it is what is called a living being you can't go wrong, you have the guilty one" (T.260).

The intimate relationship between this basic guilt and life is further stressed by the Unnamable who not only talks about "signing" Worm's "life-warrant" but even says that "My crime is my punishment" (T.372).

In other words the "crime" in Beckett, creating the "guilt", is life and the "punishment" is life. "The inestimable gift of life". As Heidegger says, "Dasein as such is guilty".

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Zeit. "Time".

Early in Being and Time Heidegger promises to "point to" temporality as "the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call "Dasein""(BT.38). He points to one or two places where thinking about time has not been very clear. We are accustomed for instance, to make a distinction between what is "in time" and what is "eternal" (BT.39) and we are baffled, as Kant was, because "the decisive connexion between time and "I think" (is) shrouded in darkness" (BT.45). But we must try to see what is really meant by these distinctions and connexions if we are to understand Dasein.

The second part of Being and Time, as it stands, is entitled "Dasein and Temporality". To some extent it is a recapitulation of the first part with the dimension of time added. It enables Heidegger to introduce authentic Being, that is, Being-a-whole and Being-towards-death. He does this in the first three sections of this part (2,1-2,3). In the remaining three sections (2,4 - 2,6) temporality and historicity are directly considered.

It may have been noticed that there is now an apparent rivalry for the status of "the meaning of Dasein's Being". We have just learnt that this is "temporality", but in discussing "care", above, we defined care in exactly this way too. This is deliberate. "Temporality" is yet another of the equiprimordial elements of Dasein's existence and it is care. "Temporality reveals itself as the meaning of authentic care" (BT.374). The unity of the structure of care lies in temporality. Thus,

"Existenz" relates to the future, I project myself existentially into my possibilities ahead-of-myself. Facticity, on the other hand is the past, the given, the "already" into which I find myself "thrown". Resolute Dasein calls itself back from the factual "they" and the possible "then", from the past and the future, into the "there" of Da-sein, Being-there, that is, into the present of choice and freedom. Resolute Dasein gives, and listens to, the conscientious call of care, brings its Self back to the authentic present (BT.375 ff.).

In other words we have now put together all the equiprimordial aspects of Dasein's Being. If we select any one of them we find that it brings all the others with it, but this is only clear once one has added time to the other elements. There is no need here for us to rehearse all the categories so far discussed in the light of time, as Heidegger does. It must suffice simply to point out that everything that we have met so far takes on a new intelligibility in the light of time. "Understanding", for instance, relates to the Future, while one's "state of mind" relates to the Past, "Being-in-the-world" is only possible because Dasein can "temporalize" - indeed, just as there are only "worlds" because of Dasein, so there is only time because of Dasein. And so on.

When Heidegger comes to discuss time itself, in isolation from his other concepts, he makes the point that time is not, as we so easily imagine, a "succession" of discrete instants. Only Dasein is temporal, and Dasein is the "between" of the phrase "between birth and death" (BT.425-6). And only for Dasein is there history - Dasein itself is the primary stuff of history, the ready-to-hand is only secondary historicity as we can see if we consider a museum exhibit which is, "in nature", no "older" than the glass of the case that exhibits it but which is "old" to us by virtue of the defunct "world" it connotes.



that is, by virtue of past Dasein.

We do not experience time as an "infinite" succession of "nows" as per the Aristotelian definition. Time is always "datable" and always has a "span". That is, "now" always means "now, when.....", for instance, "now, when I am eating lunch". And this "date", this "reference", is never to a theoretical, infinitesimal "now", it is to a "span" of time, however brief; lunch takes time to eat (BT.461-2). Heidegger develops this at some length, but enough has now been said to relate this to Beckett's unusual handling of time.

First we can see that Beckett is conscious of the paradoxical traditional handling of time. In the second Text for Nothing we read "And now here, what now here, one enormous second, as in Paradise....." (NK.78) where the equation is made between the infinite divisibility of time and the Eternal Present of God. In the eighth Text the narrator exclaims "there will be no more time, till I get out of here" (NK.108) which makes us realize how much of Beckett's work is set in a timeless limbo. Endgame, for instance, is full of endings (there are no more pain-killers or bicycle wheels, the rat and the flea are killed, Nell dies) but this only underlines the situation of Hamm, whose play it is, and who is somehow hanging on, beyond time, after all the other deaths, waiting in timelessness for nothing. The exiguous leaves sprouted by the tree in Godot serve the same function, they are a parody of a development, of a moving time that is mocked by the stasis of the play's action. The only sort of positive time in Beckett is just that condition of authentic temporality stressed by Heidegger, as we have already seen, Being-towards-death. But in Beckett it is no cause for rejoicing. The whole matter is summed up in Pozzo's celebrated outburst towards the end of Godot.

Have you not done tormenting me  
 with your accursed time! It's  
 abominable! When! When! One  
 day, is that not enough for you,  
 one day like any other day, one  
 day he went dumb, one day I  
 went blind, one day we'll go  
 deaf, one day we were born,  
 one day we shall die, the  
 same day, the same second,  
 is that not enough for you?  
 (Calmer.) They give birth astride  
 of a grave, the light gleams  
 an instant, then it's night once  
 more (WFG.89).

Here are all the elements. Sub specie aeternitatis time is nothing, being either infinite or infinitesimal, so Pozzo can say that life adds up to one second, the "enormous second" of the Texts for Nothing. (This is the same point as the one Beckett makes in Breath where the two cries separate one breath, representing minimal life, and the title seems to be an amalgam of "birth" and "death"). On the other hand Pozzo is also aware of the Heideggerian thesis that time for Dasein depends on finitude, Being-towards-an-end, so his examples of "whens", of "days", are all examples of endings - the ending of speech, sight, hearing. This is just Beckett's usual addition to Heidegger - the conditions, even of authentic existence, are hell.

It seems true, however, to say that Beckett's most frequent use of time-elements is as a parody of the Aristotelian paradox. In Mercier et Camier, for instance, we learn that there are days when one is being born all the time and will never die (MC.50). In Malone Dies we have to make something of the opinion that a month is not much "compared to a whole second of childishness", just "a drop in a bucket" (T.233). The Unnamable adds his expected twist: "It was one second they should have schooled me to endure, after that I would have held out for all eternity" (T.325).

So Beckett rejects, by parodying it, the traditional view of time,

just as Heidegger does. Further, we have seen that he stresses the Being-towards-death (Being-towards-the-end) component in Dasein's temporalizing, again, as in Heidegger. But it is perhaps worth mentioning in conclusion that there are several non-Heideggerian aspects of Beckett's treatment of time.

There is, for instance the "passing the time" motif which appears for instance in Malone Dies ("I divided, by 60. That passed the time" T.202) and frequently in Godot. Then there is the "piling-up-of-time" motif represented in Happy Days, in the "millet grains" of Endgame and in The Unnamable: "Time....piles up all about you... thicker and thicker" (T.393). Then there is the whole discussion of Proustian time in the essay on A la recherche du temps perdu.

I mention these to show how, as we leave Heidegger's first analysis of Dasein behind, and move into his considerations about temporality, we start to find fewer instructive parallels with Beckett. This is therefore where we should stop. However, there are two elements in Beckett's work which, although not expounded systematically by Heidegger, are sufficiently present at various points in Being and Time to merit attention. Thus the two remaining sections of this comparison, besides the Conclusion, do not carry Heideggerian concepts as titles but have Beckettian themes instead.

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#### Language and Silence.

When the narrators of the trilogy lose the thread of the story they are telling, or despair of it, they find themselves left with words. The words, language covering sheets of paper, appear to be compulsory, and they are undeniable, they have a sort of certainty which the stories do not. Not far behind this comes a yearning to be done with words and



to lapse into silence.

Similarly, when the reader finds himself adrift on the sea of Beckett's prose he tends at least to anchor himself in the hard fact of the words in front of him; Beckett may build castles and destroy them but the stones are there on the pages of his works. He wants to lapse into silence, it seems, to stop writing, and there is an undeniable sense of relief for the reader when silence at last falls at the end of The Unnamable. Thus a tension between language and silence is an ever-present element in Beckett and in our response to Beckett.

A sufficiently clear example of this appears early in the trilogy where Molloy is unable to make a definitive choice between language and silence. When the man "A" (if it is "A") speaks to him he says "I believe him, I know it's my only chance to - my only chance, I believe all I'm told, I've disbelieved only too much in my long life, now I swallow everything, greedily. What I need now is stories....." (T.13). But then "A" leaves him and he is "free", if that means anything, and his monologue reaches one of its occasional climaxes as he wonders what he is "free" for: he is free "to know", but to know "that you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery" (T.13). In a dozen lines he moves from being greedy for stories to proposing the abolition of words, from language to silence. To reinforce the point he immediately observes that the trouble lies in other people and in thinking about other people; as soon as he "returns in spirit" to "A" he finds that "the murmurs begin again". Which leads to the further observation that "To restore silence is the role of objects" (T.13-14). Much later Moran refers to "the silence of which

the universe is made" (T.122). Beckett's world is polarized by the hell of language and the speechless misery of silence.

Before relating this to Heidegger it is worth considering an essay on Nihilism in J.M. Edie's collection New Essays in Phenomenology (Edie,1) by Stanley Rosen. This remarkable essay establishes a most interesting relationship between Ontologists and Language Philosophers which we can adopt to clarify the relevance of Language Philosophy to Beckett's obsession with language.

Rosen adopts the position that for Language Philosophy language is identical with Being, which, however, cannot be taken to mean that objects simply are words. Wittgenstein himself stresses that propositions can only say how things are and not what they are (cf. Tractatus, 3.221), which at least implies that propositions are not things. On the other hand the limits of my speech are the limits of my world, and the Being of my world is revealed in my speech. This is an appropriate way into Beckett. The Unnamable says that he is "made of words" (T.390). There is a sense in which all Beckett's work is self-consciously a word-castle, the only possible way of Being, yet a sort of counterfeit Being. It may be hopelessly unsatisfactory, but words are as close as Beckett is ever going to get to Being.

That is the approach suggested by Language Philosophy. Rosen is more concerned, however, with the Ontological alternative, and here he could be speaking of either Heidegger or Beckett.

The goal of ontological speech is not discourse about beings, but the revelation of Being. Since speech is itself an emanation of, rather than...identical with, Being - i.e. since speech, as discursive, necessarily "runs through" or is bound to the disjunctive multiplicity of things - speech necessarily separates us from Being (Edie,1, 154).



This is exactly the opposite of Wittgenstein's point of view (unless we assume that there is something at the top of his famous ladder). but it sums up Molloy's (and Beckett's) dilemma exactly - speech, language, words are the only way we have of capturing Being, they are certainly all that an author or narrator has to use, and at the same time they are exactly what separates us from Being - whence the simultaneous talking and yearning after silence. "The ontologist discerns more or less that it is silence he yearns for. The linguistic analyst struggles to keep talking" (Edie, 1, 154). Beckett and his narrators, then, are both these things.

Rosen's subject is Nihilism and, since Beckett can easily appear nihilistic, we can profitably follow Rosen's move from this discussion of language and silence to his treatment of Nihilism. Nihilism, he says, contends that there is no significance in the universe, that nothing, not even human life, has a final meaning. Nihilism therefore holds that "it makes no difference what we say, because "difference" is internal to speech and speech cannot speak about its own sense or significance" (Edie, 1, 155). However, there is always the possibility that there exists a "sense or significance" in the universe that is outside the limits of speech. So true Nihilism must maintain that "everything is sayable" in order to dispose of any possible extra-linguistic "meaning". Beckett's narrators seem to go on in their effort to "get it all said" as a sort of test of this proposition. Only when all that is sayable has been said can we get to the silence beyond and see if there is any "further" meaning. This, incidentally, is the burden of a good deal of discussion of Wittgenstein; the matter of "mysticism" and of "totalities" about which only silence is possible is brought up as an unsolved problem at the end of Russell's introduction to the Tractatus.

When Rosen talks of "Ontologists" he cannot help meaning, or



including, Heidegger. It is Heidegger who is concerned that man should be open to the call of Being and our job must now be to see what his Ontology makes of language in the light of this concern.

Heidegger has turned increasingly, since Being and Time, towards poetry and the presocratic philosophers in his search for Being. He claims that the Presocratics were open to Being and that they fulfilled the thinker's task which is to reveal Being. Since their time philosophy has tended to conceal Being. Poets, on the other hand, have remained open to it, and Heidegger has apparently devoted a good deal of attention to Hölderlin's poetry in particular. J. Glenn Gray, making this point in his essay "Poets and Thinkers" (in Lee and Mandelbaum, 1), quotes Heidegger's adoption of Hölderlin's motto that language is the "most dangerous of possessions" (Lee and Mandelbaum, 1, 104) and also Heidegger's development of this in which he says that language possesses man and masters him. "When a person is genuinely concerned with speaking rather than merely chattering, he does not really determine what he says, but his speech is determined for him by being, by the innermost essence of things." This is a paraphrase of a passage from Heidegger's Brief über den Humanismus in which language is named "the house of Being". (Lee and Mandelbaum, 1, 106) So here we have added a new dimension. "Chattering" may conceal Being, but "genuine" speaking is Being itself talking.

Macquarrie associates Heidegger's treatment of language with his treatment of truth. Truth, in Being and Time, is related back to its Greek root "a-letheia" which is translated literally as "unhiddenness". The true is simply the un-hidden, the discovered nature of reality. Similarly, language which is genuine lights up, discovers Being-in-the-World and Being-with-others. Inauthentic talk is "they" - talk which simply passes on received opinion without illuminating the world.

(Macquarrie, 1, 112-3) So here we have "comedown to earth" a little. Language, on the highest level, may either conceal or reveal Being, but on this "truth" level it either conceals or reveals the world. On this second level we find a comparison with Beckett's habit of suddenly revealing the second-hand nature of his characters' speech. "I say it as I hear it" repeats the Unnamable endlessly, revealing his speech to be "they"-talk and thus inauthentic. Beckett attempts constantly to speak authentically but never feels that he succeeds.

Walter Kaufmann, in a curious essay entitled "Heidegger's Castle" in From Shakespeare to Existentialism claims that Heidegger is trapped by his own words into meaninglessness. "He thinks that unlike all previous thinkers since the early Greeks he is on the traces of Being itself, but it is language that has her sport with him." (Kaufmann, 1, 277) This is not adequately substantiated in Kaufmann's essay, but I think it is interesting that it applies rather well to Beckett. He is on the traces of the Self, of course, and knows very well that language has her sport with him; he perhaps demonstrates the necessity of trying to capture philosophical goals in words, however inadequate words may be.

What does Heidegger himself say about language and silence? First, he considers that language is founded in "discourse" which is equiprimordial with "states of mind" and "understanding" which are themselves "the fundamental existentialia which constitute the Being of the "there", the disclosedness of Being-in-the-World". (BT.203) He demonstrates this by observing that "hearing" and "keeping silent" are modes of "discourse" and the Dasein that is in a "state-of-mind" and "understanding" the world is naturally orientated towards the world and Others in one of these modes, or in language. Here we find an ontologist attributing the same sort of position to language that Language Philosophy does. Language is Dasein's "truth", the articulation of Dasein's "disclosedness". "Discourse is existentially language, because that entity whose disclosedness it



articulates according to significations, has, as its kind of Being, Being-in-the-world." (BT.204) In other words, language is Dasein's way of "Being-in-the-world". Dasein is "made of words" as the Unnamable says.

We have seen that "keeping silent" is another possible mode of discourse for Dasein. But this in no way alters the contention that language is Dasein's way of Being-in-the-world. On the contrary, Dasein can only "keep silent" because his Being is such that he is able to speak. We cannot say of a man born dumb that he is "keeping silent". (BT.208) Keeping silent, then, is not a haven of innocence for Heidegger any more than it is for Beckett. For both, and for Wittgenstein, the mystic silence would be a perfect consummation, but unless, like Victor in Eleuthéria, we can be dead, and see ourselves dead, we cannot achieve this. Life is words. But keeping silent may achieve more than talking a lot. Babbling away is most often "Gerede", "idle talk" which instead of disclosing things covers them up. "Idle talk" is gossip, it "passes along" things it has learnt and it believes what it is told on authority; thus it is never in contact with the truth at all. It is the voice of the "they". (BT.211-213) On the other hand, "if anyone is genuinely "on the scent" of anything he does not speak about it". (BT.218)

This connects with what we have learnt of conscience. Conscience, the call of Care, the call of the authentic Self to the "they-Self", discourses "Solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent". (BT.318) So, the silence is the condition of authentic existence. Man will only find his Self after the silence has set in, which is surely one of the clearest messages of Beckett's fiction.

We have already mentioned the frequency of the pronoun "I" in Beckett, especially in The Unnamable. We are now in a position to



quote Heidegger's last word on the subject of language and silence; it is a summary that could be put at the end of Beckett's trilogy; the emphases are Heidegger's.

Dasein is authentically itself in the primordial individualization of the reticent resoluteness which exacts anxiety of itself. As something that keeps silent, authentic Being-one's-Self is just the sort of thing that does not keep on Saying "I".  
(BT.369-70)

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### The Self.

"Once a certain degree of insight has been reached", says Wylie to Neary in Murphy, "all men talk, when talk they must, the same tripe." (M.44) Thus, or perhaps in the less direct tones of Heidegger as quoted at the end of the last section, we opt for silence. But Beckett refuses, notoriously, to be silent. After Breath came Not I. Why? Because when his silence falls, he has not yet attained his Self. Here lies the extra twist that Beckett gives to a Heideggerian proposition - he agrees that silence is the condition of authentic existence, but how can we fall silent, especially when silence is still a "mode of discourse"? Beckett, or rather his narrator, puts it thus in the eighth Text for Nothing:

I say no matter what, hoping to wear out a voice, to wear out a head, or without hope, without reason, no matter what, without reason. But it will end, a desinence will come, or the breath fail better still, I'll be silence, I'll know I'm silence, no, in the silence you can't know, I'll never know anything.  
(NK.108)

The mystic silence that is more than just a "keeping silent" is unavailable to our "knowing" because it is by definition a cessation of Being, of discourse, of language. So we are left with words. They are the bar to whatever ultimate reality the silence represents, but they are also the only means towards it.

It is quite clear that in Beckett this "ultimate reality" is, at least in one aspect, the Self. Throughout his work, and indeed on the very same page of Texts for Nothing from which I have just quoted, there is a desperate scrabbling to get to "me", to say "I" to be "in my midst" to "win to me" and so on. In Text for Nothing number eight we read "Me, here, if they could open, those little words, open and swallow me up, perhaps that is what has happened." (NK.108) The tension here is between the incomprehensibility of words (perhaps I have already managed to say "me") and their obvious uselessness (if only "me" was me). In some mystical way the true silence may be "me". Meanwhile there are only the words, and they are not me. Are they? We have seen what Heidegger has to say about the silence; we can now consider what he has to say about the Self, about "me".

Heidegger starts his enquiry about Being by interrogating Dasein because Dasein already has "a vague average understanding of Being". (BT.25) Furthermore, Dasein also has an understanding of itself, it "always understands itself in terms of its existence". (BT.33) This looks promising. Heidegger at least may get somewhere in his definition of the Self, we shall see.

Whatever Dasein's Self is it is not definable in Dualist terms. Heidegger refers scornfully to "the naive supposition that man is, in the first instance, a spiritual thing which subsequently gets misplaced "into" a space". (BT.83) He insists that man is a whole, a unity. We feel a little insecure later when he says that "the world and Dasein and entities within-the-world are the ontologically constitutive states which are closest to us" (BT.134) where "us" perhaps refers to some Self other than Dasein, which would be to import an inconsistent Dualism again. However, when we come to the section entitled "An Approach to the Existential Question of the "who" of Dasein". (BT.150ff) our fears are dispelled; Heidegger unambiguously equates Dasein with



the Self. "Dasein is an entity which is in each case I myself... The question of the "who" answers itself in terms of the "I" itself, the "subject", the "Self". (BT.150)

So, Dasein is always "Self", but Heidegger makes quite sure that, having made this point, we cannot rest comfortably on our Cartesian assumptions. He subjects the "Self", the "I" to a rigorous examination (BT.150-152) the burden of which is as follows.

"I" cannot be, and must not be treated as, just another present-at-hand object within the world. "I" is Dasein, so its existence precedes its essence; we must examine it existentially. This means that "I" can only be exhibited by exhibiting one of the definite kinds of Being of Dasein, for example Being-with-others or Being-in-the-world. I am not "I" in isolation. If we use the word "I" in isolation it is merely a "formal indicator" rather than a substantive.<sup>7</sup> As a "formal indicator" "I" does not disclose Dasein at all. So Dasein is "I", but it is useless to examine this "I" with a view to finding out "who" Dasein is. What we must examine is Dasein's existentiality - the ways of Being of man - to answer this question "who?"

Dasein's existence is a Being-with. An "I" that has meaning is an "I" already in a situation already with-Others, in-the-world. Is this the limit of our discussion? Far from it. We have yet to consider the implications of authenticity. We saw that "inauthentic existence" is dominated by the "they" and that the "authentic Self" (existence and Self are interchangeable here) is "the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way". (BT.167) Both of these must be taken existentially - the "they-Self" in action is the one whose possibilities have been taken over by the "they", the authentic Self is the one that projects itself into its own possibilities. Both of them "really are" the Self - "the not-I" is by no means tantamount to an



entity which essentially lacks "I-hood"." (BT.152) Knowledge of the Self "is not a matter of perceptually tracking down and inspecting a point called the "Self", but rather one of seizing on the full disclosedness of Being-in-the-world throughout all the constitutive items which are essential to it." (BT.187) Heidegger's emphasis makes my point here - the Self is to be sought as much in inauthenticity as in authenticity. After all the "they" is defined as belonging "to Dasein's positive constitution" (BT.167) So it is a "constitutive item" of Dasein and as such relevant to "knowledge of the Self". Even though I am "proximally and for the most part" my "they-Self", it is my existence, authentic or inauthentic that defines, creates, is my Self.

For Beckett this suggests that his characters are "themselves", or have "found" their Selves, already and in spite of what they say. The novels and plays represent the "existence" of their people, so they reveal their Selves constantly as they act and talk. The same may be said of the narrators who tell their stories and of Beckett who invents them all. This is Heidegger's cutting of the Gordian knot - "what I do is me", as Hopkins put it, so there is no need to search further for my Self.

This common-sense approach certainly applies to Beckett up to a point. We do feel an automatic "superior" knowledge as readers or as audience. We can see what Hamm is, we can talk objectively about Moran. We can observe their doings and so observe "them". But this is, not, surely, a sufficient interpretation of Beckett. We cannot say that all his work is simply a demonstration of a delusion and that the Self is quite obvious all along. This can be only one aspect of the truth, and indeed it is not Heidegger's last word on the subject.

There appears to be a contradiction between this first stage of

"all is Self" and the stress laid on the importance of my "own" Self, my authenticity. It is as if Heidegger moves from an "empirical Ego" position (I am my desires, my body, my Bank account) to a "transcendental Ego" position. The purely existential Self is very like the empirical Ego, it is all my actions and possibilities bound together by a "formal" "I". But the "ownness" of my "authentic" Self seems to imply something transcendent. Is this so?

We saw, in discussing Conscience, above, that Conscience calls Dasein back from the "they-Self" to its "own Self". (BT.317) Conscience says "nothing" to the Self and by "keeping silent" it calls us out of "concernful Being-with-Others" into our "potentiality" for Being our Selves. And "the call comes from me and yet from beyond me". (BT.318-320) The caller, we learn, is "Dasein in its uncanniness". (BT.321) It sounds like an "alien" voice to everyday Dasein, it even sounds like the voice of God, all this in a highly Beckettian manner, as we have seen. But it is guaranteed to be the voice of the authentic Self because whenever we interpret it, or attribute it to anything beyond ourselves we at once find that we have turned away from it and back towards the "they". For example, if I interpret the call of conscience as "universal conscience" I find I have merely defined the voice of the "they". Only in meeting the ineffable spirit can I match up to it and become myself.

This new level proposes, thus, some sort of transcendent self. It is even more Beckettian than our earlier empirical self; it is my "ownmost" potentiality for Being, about which I must talk and think, but it is exactly that self-relationship that starts where words leave off.

Heidegger returns to these points in the second half of Being and Time. He analyzes Kant's position on the Self and concludes that his "I" is still an object present-at-hand within the world. Kant has



not broken the traditional ontological mould. Heidegger does this as follows. Dasein is a unity that has some understanding of its own Being, and it is a unity that is always "mine". Dasein's unity is "held together" by the "I". (BT.365) This "I" is "harboured" by Care - obviously the condition of Care is to be a subject, "Care for oneself" is a tautology - Dasein is existentially Care by being Self and Self by being Care. When Dasein's "I" expresses Being-in-the-world or Being under the dominion of the "they", it "fails to see itself in relation to the kind of Being of that entity which it is itself". (BT.368) By this point it is apparent that Heidegger is moving towards a position in which, in spite of earlier statements, he must acknowledge that there is a sort of selfhood in the authentic Self that is lacking in the everyday Self. And, sure enough, "Selfhood is to be discerned existentially only in one's authentic potentiality-for-Being-one's-Self - that is to say, in the authenticity of Dasein's Being as care." (BT.369) Once he has reached this point Heidegger finds that clarification follows naturally - the "constancy of the Self" is now seen to depend on authentic existence and we find a satisfaction in realizing that we have, long since, defined inauthentic, irresolute "falling" into the world. So Heidegger at last chooses to unify the Self with authentic existence, which leaves us open to our most Beckettian gloss to date. We have seen that authentic existence depends on the call of conscience from the Self to the "they-Self" and we have found this to be a call that operates in the mode of keeping silence. I would propose that this silent call is the voice of the "little world" that calls Murphy, the silent summons of Mr Knott that brings Watt to his house and the goad or god that prods the narrators of the trilogy and the characters of the plays into further "existence". It is the voice



that prompts the three questions that open The Unnamable and it is the compulsion that dictates that novels' conclusion. It calls to the "they-Self", the inauthentic Self that has been "dispersed" and "disconnected" (BT.441) and it prompts Beckett's dreadful struggles for unity. In Heidegger this unity is held out as a possibility - it can grasp itself as a whole that exists between thrownness and death. In Beckett this "loyalty of existence to its own Self" (BT.443) is never achieved.

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### Conclusion

Heidegger warns us of the dangers of accepting tradition instead of confronting Being for ourselves and speaks of the necessity of arriving at the "primordial experiences" of Being that we had before philosophy. (BT.44) It is as if, like Wittgenstein, Heidegger reaches a position from which he can see that his labours to arrive there are a little beside the point. True, he proposes that philosophy, like poetry, can reveal Being, but the non-conclusion of Being and Time and the oracular nature of his later work indicate an impatience with systematic analysis, however profound, as a tool to bring man into contact with Being.

Arne Naess in his summary of this point concludes that Heidegger means man to approach Being but warns that man, to do this, will have to learn to "exist in the nameless". (Naess, 1, 242) I would propose that Beckett's work is an attempt to describe this "nameless" existence. The final results of this attempts will be examined in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

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Notes to Chapter Three

1. O'Hara, 1, 143. Cf. above, Chapter 1, p.4.
2. Heidegger is an "ontologist", that is, a student of that branch of metaphysics that deals with Being. He equates "ontology" and "metaphysics" in his lecture What is Metaphysics? of 1929. My point here is that Heidegger has not produced the part of Being and Time that deals with "beyond man", only the part that deals with man, and I am using "metaphysics" in its colloquial sense to denote this "beyond". I am fully aware that this colloquial usage is based on a mistake as to the meaning of Aristotle's title The Metaphysics.
3. Cf. the chapter on "Philosophy and Poetry" and the chapter on "Heidegger's Castle" in Kaufmann's From Shakespeare to Existentialism (Kaufmann, 2).
4. Most of the characters in Beckett's fiction are in quest of something - Murphy, like Belacqua, is searching for Nirvana, so, perhaps, is Watt; Molloy is in quest of his mother, Moran in quest of Molloy. All of them are in quest of themselves.
5. The concept of Habit in Existentialist thought is dealt with in Macquarrie's book Existentialism (Macquarrie, 1, 145-146).
6. Heidegger's own notes make it clear that he adopts Kierkegaard's usage of Angst more or less in toto. Cf. BT.235.n.IV and BT.278.n.VI.
7. Cf. the section on Being-one's-Self, above.

CHAPTER FOUR Sartre's Being and Nothingness and Beckett.Introductory.

Sartre's Being and Nothingness owes something to Hegel, something to Husserl, and a great deal to the Heidegger of Being and Time. Several of the concepts Sartre deals with are taken with little or no alteration from Heidegger, for example "Angst" as the state-of-mind of man in the face of freedom. Or, again, the "human reality" used by Sartre is a term equivalent to "Dasein". But more important than these points of close resemblance is the general point of structure. Sartre works within Heidegger's frame-work. There are differences in emphasis, and plenty of original developments, but there are almost no ideas in the French work that do not correspond in some way with similar ideas in the German. Thus both philosophers picture man as "there", already aware of himself, already free, already aware of a world, of Others, of facticity and so on. This means that some of this chapter will overlap with some of the preceding one. As far as Beckett is concerned, some of Sartre's amplifications of Heidegger bring him closer to our subject and I shall concentrate on these. Where Sartre either repeats Heidegger or develops him away from Beckett I shall be briefer.

It is more difficult to write about Being and Nothingness than about its German predecessor. Sartre's argument does not progress from point to point as Heidegger's does, his concepts are more closely woven together (in his presentation of them; not, of course, as a picture of man and the world.) Thus "nothingness", for instance, appears in his discussions of Freedom, the Self, Consciousness, Angst and so on rather than being dealt with once for all. Because of this I shall first give a rapid summary of the argument of the book, putting



the salient concepts into their places in Sartre's argument, and then deal with each concept in turn showing how it affects Beckett.

As with Heidegger, "Being" is the question at issue. As with Hegel, there is a dialectical necessity of opposing "Nothing" to "Being". Sartre grasps this nettle of "Nothing" much more firmly than either of the Germans. "Nothing" for him, is human consciousness. This does not mean that the human mind is nothing. "Being" is made up of two sorts of thing, "real" objects and our mental pictures of those objects when we imagine them. To both these sorts of "Being" we oppose our consciousness - I am conscious of my neighbour's house when I look at it, and then I am conscious of it when I imagine it with my eyes closed. In each case there is a clearly definable object of consciousness (the house; my mental image of it) but my consciousness itself is not an object. So what is it that I "oppose" to "Being"? Sartre says it is "Nothing". Consciousness is a "hole" in the solidity of "Being", it "decompresses" the otherwise total pressure of it.

"Human reality" is "pour-soi". We are "for-ourselves" while all objects are "en-soi", "in themselves". (I shall henceforth treat pour-soi and en-soi as English words.) This reflects Heidegger's thesis that Dasein already has an understanding of its own Being. In short, I know that I am me.

Knowledge is the "presence" of a thing to consciousness. Things cannot be "present" to the en-soi; we can remember here Heidegger's expression when he says that the table "cannot touch" the wall. What is "present" to my consciousness is, precisely, not me. So, as pour-soi, I "negate" the en-soi, I am the "Nothing" to its "Being". Only the known is a being, the knower is "not apprehensible", he is nothing. Thus there is "nothing" to separate the knower from the known.

The known, being, the en-soi, is solid ("massif") and contingent.

"Uncreated, without reason for being, with any connexion with another being, being-in-itself is de trop for eternity." (BN.xlii) Being and Nothingness is Sartre's attempt to do better than either Idealism or Realism in holding together the mutually-exclusive regions of the en-soi and the pour-soi. That is, it is an attempt to explain man in the world.

Freedom is a fundamental part of this explanation. "I" can always choose what I shall do even after account has been taken of all "my" motives and desires. "I" am free, even of "me". There is nothing to justify my choices but I do choose; the en-soi is brute contingency but I choose what values it is to have. Values "spring up like partridges" when I act. My value-conferring freedom, as in Kierkegaard and Heidegger, breeds "Angst". I am inclined to flee from the "Angst" and to reduce my freedom, choices and responsibility; in short I am tempted into inauthentic existence. This is like Heidegger's flight into "das Man" but, in Sartre, stress is laid on the fact that I am responsible for becoming inauthentic, it is "I" who lies to "me" when I am in "bad faith". Man, however, is always in "bad faith", for the opposite, "sincerity", means being what you are, and how can I ever be sad or happy? I can act sadly or happily but as for being - we have already seen that I am nothing. So all human action is in bad faith.

"Human reality" is thrown into a world and abandoned in a "situation". It can never reduce itself to en-soi, in which case it would be a definable something, but it does aspire to the "impossible synthesis" of the for-itself with the in-itself where a "real" self would emerge. As things are, the self is the foundation of values. My choices confer value. How close all this is to Heidegger is made



clear by Sartre's summary of his arguments which he gives at the end of the first chapter of the second part of Being and Nothingness (p.105). There he lists the topics he has treated: man "negates" things by "not being" them; his existence is always inauthentic in that he can never be himself; Descartes' cogito is not enough; man is being for-itself not in-itself; man gives rise to values and possibilities. Still Heideggerian, he goes on to say that now we must study time (the cogito has instantaneity but possibilities need time) to settle the main question - that of "the original relation of consciousness to being". (BN.105)

On the matter of time Sartre repeats Heidegger on the non-historical non-temporal quality of the en-soi; man gives time to the universe. On the other hand he adds the idea that my past is that en-soi which I am - an idea he explains by observing that the past makes me what I am "from behind". The pour-soi alone is present and the present alone is pour-soi. Pour-soi projects into the future. So we have here the familiar Heideggerian trio - the past is facticity, the present is man, Dasein, pour-soi, and the future is possibility.

The world is my world. It is only "an ideal limitation - by nothing - of a collection of thises". (BN.183) Space, like time, "is not". It comes into the world because of pour-soi.

Where Sartre develops Heidegger most successfully is in his treatment of Others. His concrete examples of the existence of others, connected with shame and similar emotions, force him to develop a third category of existence. Man exists pour-soi in a world of en-soi, but he recognizes the existence of other pour-soi beings and realizes that he exists for them. Consequently man exists "pour-autrui"; for others. Sartre discusses this and its implications at length, as we shall have to do with Beckett in mind.

The discussion of Others leads Sartre on to discussions of the



body, and love. Then a section is devoted to freedom, although this concept has been much in evidence before. Now, of course, it takes into consideration the expanded view of Others. Some of Sartre's most inspired writing appears here as he deals with the possibilities that confront pour-soi and the relationship of these possibilities to the world and to the limitations of facticity. One of the essential points of Existentialist freedom and choice is made here - that man has freedom of choice that may or may not coincide with his freedom of obtaining. The importance of this freedom of choice appears again and again - it illuminates spatiality (Japan only becomes distant if I choose to go there), temporality (even the past can be modified by present choices as for instance in the change in the value of the events of 1789 in 1917) and it illuminates Others (when I choose I always discover that meanings have already been implanted into the world by the choices of Others.)

Death is treated differently by Heidegger and Sartre. For the latter death, so far from being my ownmost possibility, is not a possibility at all. All my genuine choices imply finitude - I will do X, not Y, and I will finish doing it within a certain time. But death, although it is finitude in one sense, is an "unrealizable", infinite state for which I can have no responsibility. This leads into a discussion of man's responsibility within his lifetime which involves an Existentialist psychoanalysis according to which men do not have given characters or characteristics but choose themselves. Sartre offers a short conclusion to Being and Nothingness in which he considers the metaphysical and ethical implications of his philosophy. The first of these will find its place in the final chapter of this thesis.

### Consciousness.

It will be apparent from the above summary of the main theses of Being and Nothingness that Sartre, like Descartes, finds he must lean heavily on a clarification of what "I" means. His starting point, and the place around which he circles and to which he frequently returns, is consciousness. The same may be said of Beckett.

But can "I" and "consciousness" be equated? This is the question that Sartre tackled in his first published work, The Transcendence of the Ego (1936). This essay is a development of Husserl's theory of intentional consciousness. Husserl, according to Sartre, refreshed philosophy by claiming that even such apparently purely "mental" phenomena as mathematics and chimeras are objects of consciousness and thus not really "mental" at all. This enabled philosophy to describe all things, from tables to hallucinations, as objects in their own right. Sartre concurs with this. But Husserl goes on to describe the "other side" of the business of perception in terms that Sartre finds unsatisfactory. Husserl adopts a neo-Cartesian position which proposes a split between the subjective and objective worlds; on the subjective side of the split we have consciousness and an Ego presiding over consciousness. To bring subjective and objective together we must "bracket out" the question of whether the objective exists or not and rely on the marriage implied in the concept of intentionality - consciousness "intends" its objects.

In Sartre's version this is simplified. There is no Ego "behind" or "in" consciousness. Intentionality is consciousness. The "bracketing out" of the question of the existence of objects becomes redundant because there is no real dualism here. It is impossible to "stop" in the passage from consciousness to its object and ask "does the object exist?" because there is no passage, no gap between consciousness and its object. Thus Sartre, like Heidegger, cuts Descartes' Gordian knot -

consciousness is always consciousness of something, cogito, ergo est.

To be fair, Sartre does not reject the Ego's existence, only its transcendence. Husserl proposed the Ego as a transcendent "pole" which unified experience. Sartre sees another, less mystical, definition of the Ego. For him it is another object of consciousness, like the world. When I say "I am undecided" what I mean is that my Ego appears to my consciousness to be in the psychic state of indecision. This Ego, therefore, is an object of consciousness, not "behind" consciousness as a subject. The Ego is not an abstract something that has the mission of unifying mental events, it is all those events put together, the "infinite totality of states and actions which never lets itself be reduced to one action or to one state" (Sartre, 1, 57, my translation here and hereafter.) Sartre compares the Ego to the world - the world is not a transcendent unity of things, merely their totality.

The implications of this constitute some of Sartre's most characteristic doctrines. If the Ego is merely a non-transcendent totality of psychic states it follows that there is no "real me", no given Ego that is the absolute "me" to which I must or can or should conform. Similarly there can be no "unconscious", no hidden pool of my "real" desires and "thoughts". Only when I turn the light of consciousness onto my state of mind (or any other object) and grasp it as mine can it be me or part of me.

Sartre claims here to have liberated and purified the "transcendental field". All that is left in it is consciousness, which is the only absolute in that it is "nothing", merely being an "intention" towards objects. Consciousness, alone, is inaccessible. My mental states, love for example, are as objective as chairs. There is no longer anything impenetrable about others except, by definition, their consciousnesses. Perhaps rather dangerously, considering that he is engaged in a rejection of Husserlian and Cartesian dualism, Sartre



sums up his propositions by describing two spheres, the "transcendental" sphere of consciousness, and the "Ego-sphere" accessible to psychology, the sphere of mental states, actions, qualities. The latter is the object of the former.

Transcendental consciousness is an "impersonal spontaneousness" which "determines its existence at every moment without our being able to conceive of anything before it. Thus every instant of our conscious life reveals to us a creation ex nihilo". (Sartre, 1, 79) This consciousness is a monster: if at every moment it creates a new world, how can there be any unity or continuity in conscious life? "A phenomenological description of the spontaneousness (of consciousness) would, indeed, show that it renders impossible all ideas about the freedom of the will." (Sartre, 1, 82) Thus an Ego is needed to give a coherent object to consciousness. If consciousness suddenly appears on the plane of pure reflexion ("I am I") then we are seized by a fear of ourselves and an "absolute anguish". This last is not an intellectual process, but a daily event.

Consciousness as a monster defeated by the Ego, consciousness as anguish (an anguish that "we cannot avoid,") this is the price of our humanity and the agony of Samuel Beckett.

In spite of the celebrated dualism of Murphy, Beckett's early work shows some concern with these Sartrean problems. Subject and object are much canvassed in the essay on Proust and Beckett comes to the conclusion that direct contact between them is impossible "Because they are automatically separated by the subject's consciousness of perception". (PTD.74) This both states Sartrean negation (I know I am not what I am conscious of) and, paradoxically, implies the unity of perception with what is perceived (I am not separated from objects by perception, indeed, I am what I perceive, but I am separated by

by my consciousness of that perception.)

Even in Murphy some of the philosophical fireworks bring the characters who indulge in them close to Sartre's position in The Transcendence of the Ego. When Wylie, for instance, proposes that the world is a closed system (like "the horse leech's daughter" its "quantum of wantum cannot vary") Neary sees why Berkeley wanted to find some escape from this static hell, "He had no alternative... Immaterialize or bust. The sleep of sheer terror." (M.43) This is reminiscent of Sartre's "absolute anguish" in the face of his escape from the closed system, consciousness. It is also possible to put an Existentialist interpretation on the well-known point made in Chapter Six of Murphy that in the third and final zone of his mind "he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom". (M.79) Here the "absolute" is specifically not him but could be something like consciousness in which his Ego is an object, a mote in the absolute light.

In Watt Beckett is struggling with other problems than those of consciousness, but even here there are Sartrean elements in some passages. The picture on the wall of Erskine's room (W.126-127) of a circle and its centre, perhaps in search of one another, can be taken as an illustration of the problem of the Ego. If the circle represents the limit of everything that is "me" (my feet, my dreams, my bank account) then the question, as tackled by Sartre in The Transcendence of the Ego is, what is the centre? Is the centre a given, something recognizable that we must put into position at the heart of our lives, an identifiable Ego? Or is the dot in Erskine's picture not going to become the centre of this given circle? In which case is it merely a "mote in the dark of absolute freedom"? In this latter case we find ourselves faced with the dangerous "new" dualism described above in the discussion of Sartre's "two spheres", consciousness and the rest. The dot is consciousness, the circle "the rest". The dot does not belong



as the centre of the circle because transcendental consciousness is "impersonal".

Some other examples could be given from Watt but it is Beckett's later work that is in more need of elucidation. Before turning to it we must see what Being and Nothingness has to say about consciousness.

Our time spent on The Transcendence of the Ego has not been wasted in that Sartre clearly incorporated its ideas into Being and Nothingness.<sup>1</sup> Sartre's development of his views on consciousness in the later work is excellently summarized in Hesla's The Shape of Chaos, discussed in Chapter One above. Hesla reduces Sartre on consciousness to five propositions: consciousness is "nothing", "intentionality", "reflexivity", "freedom" and "not in-itself". (Hesla, 1, 186) All of these we can now understand, with the possible exception of "reflexivity". This is Sartre's term for the fact that consciousness can have itself as an object, it "reflects" itself. Indeed, consciousness only exists as both consciousness of an object and consciousness of that consciousness.

It may be pointed out here that of these two consciousnesses one at least must be the Ego. Or, better, when, instead of being conscious of being conscious of an object, I am in the state of "absolute anguish" of being conscious that I am conscious of myself ("I am I") surely one of these must be the Ego. But we know that this is precisely what Sartre is trying to avoid, and in Being and Nothingness he points out that the Ego (the "self" here) can have a sort of theoretical existence "between" consciousness and consciousness. This is not a contradiction of the thesis of The Transcendence of the Ego for it establishes this Ego as, precisely, nothing. "The self... represents an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to himself, a way of not being his own coincidence, a way of escaping identity while positing it as unity." (BN.77) Thus there is a "nothingness" that divides me from myself, a "nothingness" that is necessary to my



identity.

So, consciousness is a "nothing" opposed to "being", and, within this nothing, the self is the nothing that divides me from myself in reflexive consciousness.

All this seems to me to be a most satisfactory gloss on the passage in The Unnamable where "I" suggests

perhaps that's what I feel, an outside  
and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps  
that's what I am, the thing that divides  
the world in two, on the one side the  
outside, on the other the inside, that  
can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one  
side nor the other, I'm in the middle,  
I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and  
no thickness... (T.386)

What is so appropriate about this as a parallel for Sartre is the fact that not only is this narrator the "ideal distance" between consciousnesses (that is, no distance, "nothing") but these consciousnesses are described as "outside", "inside" and "surfaces". Now these three concepts, technically, add up to zero. The "outside" of something has no depth, it is another "nothing", as is the "inside" or the "surface" of something. This "nothing" is just what Sartre says that consciousness is.

Beckett has frequently worked on the idea of consciousness confronting itself. In some of the novels and plays he finds a sort of objective correlative for this by confronting characters with their own pasts. We cannot understand this fully until we have considered the Sartrean conception of time but for the moment it is illuminating to think of Krapp in Krapp's Last Tape, or Henry in Embers, as people face to face with themselves, consciousness to consciousness. Similarly the two halves of Molloy could be considered in this way.

Most important for Beckett, however, is the Sartrean stress on the different positions of consciousness. All through the trilogy,

the Texts for Nothing and How It Is there is a tension between the narrator and his "vice-existers". It is immensely complicated. Who narrates Molloy? Is it Moran? Who is the Unnamable? Who are the scribes in How It Is? These questions seem finally to lead us to think of all Beckett's characters and narrators, and Beckett himself, as being one and the same person. This is made possible and comprehensible by Sartre's view of consciousness. At the first level I have a "non-thetic", "non-positional", "pre-reflexive" consciousness, to borrow the terms used in The Transcendence of the Ego and Being and Nothingness, passim. Then there is my consciousness of that consciousness, and then there is the possibility that the objects of these two sorts of consciousness may coincide and I become conscious of being conscious of myself. Sartre avoids "infinite regress" here but leaves us with enough of a Chinese puzzle to help clarify Beckett. As an example we can consider the first of the Texts for Nothing.

Suddenly, no, at last, long last, I couldn't  
any more, I couldn't go on. Someone said,  
You can't stay here. I couldn't stay there  
and I couldn't go on. I'll describe the place...  
How can I go on, I shouldn't have begun, no, -  
I had to begin. Someone said, perhaps the  
same, What possessed you to come?...It's simple,  
I can do nothing any more, that's what you  
think. (NK.71)

This opens with a tension immediately established between "I" and "someone". It is our Sartrean point that these two are the same. After a dozen lines "someone" is again quoted and Beckett says that this someone is "perhaps the same" as the first, and indeed it is, but time has elapsed, casting doubt (consciousness "determines its existence at every moment without our being able to conceive of anything before it."). But all the "someones" are the narrator. "It's simple" he says, "I can do nothing any more" and continues, with only a comma intervening, "that's what you think". (NK.71) The "I" and



the "you" are both him - his consciousness bifurcated as we have seen. And this consciousness is not a physical or a mental thing, but distant from and different from either of these:

I say to the body, Up with you now, and  
I can feel it struggling... I say to the  
head, Leave it alone, stay quiet... I am  
far from all that wrangle. (NK.71)

So the "I" is the pure subject, opposed both to the objective world and objective images of that world, as in Sartre. And it is not the Ego. "It's not me" says the narrator when asked why he is there. (NK.73)

But of course "pre-reflexive", immediate consciousness is indissolubly linked with the object that it "intends". So, "the cold is eating me, the wet too", he says. But he goes on "at least-I-- presume so, I'm far." He is at once far and near, at once "pre-reflexive" consciousness of the cold and wet and consciousness of that consciousness:

Eye ravening patient in the haggard, vulture  
face, perhaps its carrion time. I'm up  
there are I'm down here, under my gaze,  
foundered, eyes closed...we're of one mind,  
all of one mind... (NK.73)

Indeed, the two consciousnesses are "of one mind", they are "up there" and "down here" and they are both "I".

We have thus looked at three of Heidegger's Sartrean categories that describe consciousness. The two remaining are "freedom" and the fact that consciousness is pour-soi not en-soi.

Freedom might appear to be the one thing that Beckettian consciousness is not. "I can do nothing" says the narrator of our first Text for Nothing, "I can't go on" says the Unnamable. But this is to miss the point about Existentialist freedom - it is freedom to project. Now the one thing that we are left with, after the amputations, the paralyses, the reductions, the isolation, the darkness, the silence and the mud of Beckett's mature fiction is the babble of



of a freely-projecting consciousness. Even when, in How It Is, we have to account for the scribes and for the constant repetition of "I say it as I hear it" we find we are merely pushed back one stage further - the scribe is Beckett, the voice heard his voice. Beckett is free to will, to project; his fictions are entirely his own. Beckett expresses Sartre's insight - man is condemned to freedom. This will be dealt with at greater length in the two sections on freedom, below.

As for the fact that consciousness is pour-soi and not en-soi this is as clear in Beckett as anywhere else and hardly needs exemplification. But, to make the point, we can consider the following, again from the first of the Texts for Nothing:

I need nothing - neither to go on nor to stay where I am, it's truly all one to me, I should turn away from it all...  
(NK.71)

The word "one" in "it's truly all one to me" denotes the en-soi, "massif", solid, indifferent, away from which consciousness "should" turn - feels it can turn. But consciousness, although absolutely other than being, other than en-soi, "exists" in its nothingness only because being "is". There is no possible gap between consciousness and the objects of consciousness. "Let them cease" says our narrator, referring to the body and the head, but answers himself, "I can't, it's I would have to cease." (NK.71)

\* \* \*

### Nothingness.

Consciousness is nothingness, it is the nothingness that man sets over against Being. This may puzzle us if we remember what Hegel said about Being - it is an "emptiness", it is what is left when all the essences of an object have been subtracted, while for his French

successor it is the opposite of "nothing". The point is that Hegel's Being is the first (or, if we prefer, last) quality or essence in a hierarchy of such concepts whereas in Sartre Being is everything including all qualities, essences and, as we have seen, even dreams, hallucinations and feelings as intangible as boredom. So in Hegel two simultaneous announcements start (or finish) his system - the announcement that Being is and the simultaneous announcement that nothing is. Being is nothing. This includes everything is a general sort of way - there is nothing in heaven or on earth that is not included under these first categories. But this means that nothingness here acquires an existence, it is one of two equiprimordial existents. Meanwhile in Sartre Being and nothingness far from being a pair of vast brackets that include everything, respectively are everything and nothing. Being is the solid mass of all that is, nothingness is human consciousness set over against Being. They never become merged into one another (in Hegel they join forces in the synthesis of "Becoming") but are opposites - although if Being vanished we would not be left with nothing, nothing would vanish too, before Being there was not nothing either. This last point is not reversible, Being is not dependent on nothing in the way that nothing is dependent on Being. Being can be completely and satisfactorily described without any recourse to the concept "nothing". As Sartre puts it, nothingness merely "haunts being". (BN.16)

This anti-Hegelian phase of Sartre's argument has some light to throw on Beckett. Sometimes the word "nothing" appears in Beckett in a context that seems to need Sartre's stricture on Hegel that "before Being" there could not have been "nothing". For instance in Watt the narrator tells us that in Mr Knott's establishment "nothing changed...because nothing remained". (W.130) With Sartre on Hegel in mind we can gloss this as: "We must find a new conception of nothingness

if we want to talk about what "remains" when "nothing remains" because, surely, when we say that nothing remains we are thinking about the remaining which implies some sort of Being for the entity which remains." In other words, one aspect of Mr Knott's negativity makes the Hegelian mistake of attributing some sort of Being to nothing and Watt feels an inadequacy in the words and concepts at his disposal for the correction of this mistake.

Similarly in The End the narrator says, first, that he can see "nothing except... the grey light of the shed", and comments, "To see nothing at all, no, that's too much". (NK.64) Here is a perfect example of those entirely Beckettian moments of wordplay that so often cry out for a philosophical gloss. Because of the "grey light" we can take "nothing at all" on a purely physical level. But how can that explain "no, that's too much"? This forces us to move from questions of vision to the next nearest possible interpretation: perhaps it's "too much" to hope that oblivion ("nothing at all") will be granted, say after death. But, although "nothing" here may have a visual (ie physical) meaning and a post-mortem meaning, we are still troubled by the apparent oxymoron of "to see nothing at all". This is where we find ourselves plunging into a philosophical reading whether we will or no. With Sartre on Hegel once again in mind we can bring out the full irony of "nothing" being "too much", for, if we cast aside Being and gaze upon the "nothing at all" as a Hegelian object we will become aware, with Sartre, that it is not "nothing" that we are looking at, but something. "Nothing" is "too much" as an expression for what is there when nothing is there, for "real" nothing is that of which nothing can be affirmed, not even that it "is" nothing.

Having improved on Hegel, Sartre moves on to improve on Heidegger.



He quotes with approval Heidegger's theses about man's Angst in the face of nothingness and about the absolute negativity of nothingness, "Das Nichts nichtet", nothing "nihilates" itself, it is not. But he perceives an inconsistency in Heidegger's development of this. When Dasein "negates" the world it does so by saying what it is that it is negating - "I am not the world". Thus for Heidegger nothingness "carries being in its heart". (BN.18) Sartre prefers the opposite possibility, that "Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being - like a worm". (BN.21) Apart from the obvious coincidence of the name Worm in The Unnamable we can associate this with Beckett by quoting Sartre's own example - that of distance. Put simply, Sartre establishes that even in something with such positive being as the statement that "the distance from A to B is X" there is a core of negativity. For either we must say that this statement means that A is not in proximity to B by X amount, or, if we see the distance as a positive length (X is a line a yard long), we must say that the line X extends to A in one direction and to B in the other direction and that beyond A and B there is not any more distance. As Spinoza says, omnis determinatio est negatio.

In general this principle of negation applies to Beckett in his handling of beginnings and endings. In Endgame, for instance, there are numerous ambiguities about what constitutes a start and what a finish. "The end is in the beginning", says Hamm, "and yet you go on." (E.44) And Hamm's story goes on and on and, like the two acts of Godot, seems infinitely repeatable. There is a theme in the play of things piling up, the millet-grains of "that old Greek" and the constituent parts of the "little heap, the impossible heap." The point of all this is that until the end is reached nothing is known. Unless the line X has end-points we cannot conceive what distance X is. When will grains of sand, or of millet, get to the point that we

can say, "now there is a heap of sand"?

I would associate this paradoxical element in Endgame (which is present passim in Beckett as the last words of Molloy and of The Unnamable show) with Beckett's desire to reach the end, the nothing. Once the end really comes, once all has been said, once it has "mounted up to a life" (E.45) we have found a negation, and that means a determination, which is to say knowledge and understanding. Here is another recipe for hell in Beckett: only when the end of something comes can we understand it.

After these discussions of Hegelian and Heideggerian nothingness, Sartre poses the question now laid bare, "where does Nothingness come from?" (BN.22) His answer is that man brings nothingness into the world, that man, as *pour-soi*, consciousness, finds that he opposes a nothing to the Being of the world. This matter is dealt with in the last section, above. But, once he has established consciousness as the "origin of negation", Sartre follows Heidegger in discussing the results of this in terms of freedom (a concept which involves a consideration of Angst), the Self, man's responsibility and the creation of values by choice.

\* \* \*

Freedom.      Angst.      The Self.

Man brings nothingness into the world by being conscious. Man is free, by virtue of his consciousness, but this freedom is not a quality he possesses, it is him. "There is no difference between the being of man and his being-free." (BN.25) Following Kierkegaard and Heidegger Sartre says that man can "fear" beings in the world but feels "anguish", Angst, in the face of himself. "Angst is fear plus "vertigo" (Sartre uses the same word as Kierkegaard) dizziness at the prospect of my own freedom to will. This is clarified by



Sartre's explanation that there are no motives in consciousness, only for consciousness. Thus I am not "in anguish" on account of my motives, which are objective to me, not subjective, but on account of the freedom I have, as a conscious being, to disregard even my strongest motives. He gives the example of the man on the cliff path. In spite of all motives towards safety and caution, the man can walk too close to the edge, deliberately throw himself off even. The possibility is always open at any rate.

This is important for Beckett, not directly but as it leads into Sartre on the Self. If we say that "I" choose between "my" possibilities, even to the extent that I can choose to disregard all motives and act gratuitously, jump off the cliff, then we have a useful way of looking at the idea that "I" make "myself". If the motive determined the action I would not be free. (We may presume that this is the situation for at least some animals - the hungry dog will always eat the food, in response to his motive of hunger, unless a stronger motive supervenes.) As pour-soi I can choose between my motives, I can decide what I am going to be. If I am offered an alcoholic drink, I can accept it, or ask for a non-alcoholic drink, or have no drink at all. Not only can "I" choose between these possibilities, I must choose between them. This example shows what Sartre means by pour-soi deciding what it is going to be. When I choose between these drinking alternatives I am "making myself" in that I am defining myself along such possible lines as: being thought a sociable fellow, becoming an alcoholic, being prepared to make a fuss to get what I want, making an ostentatious display of my teetotalism, and so on. Now Sartre, speaking of this process of choice, says that "Freedom... is characterized by a constantly renewed obligation to remake the Self which constitutes the free



being." (BN.34-35) The emphasis on "Self" is Sartre's, but is, just where I want it too. It emphasises the point that, if we can use "dualism" of Sartre, the division in his dualism is between consciousness on the one hand and the Self on the other. We have seen that this Self is not transcendental, it is me and yet it is an object for me. It is my "essence" and yet I am always separated from it by a "nothing", for, given all my motives, there is still an "I" to choose freely between them. My essence, my Self, is everything of which I can say "that is" about myself. My essence explains my action but the action itself is beyond such explanation. Since my consciousness is nothing, my Self is what constitutes my "free being" "I" exist as other than "me". My Angst, which is my peering into the abyss of my freedom, "appears as an apprehension of self inasmuch as it exists in the perpetual mode of detachment from what is." (BN.35)

I have dealt with this point at some length because I think that here we are approaching something like Beckett's view of the Self. His early work is haunted by an absolute dualism of the older, Cartesian, sort. I would suggest that his later work shows evidence that his thinking has moved towards a dualism of the Sartrean type.

For a start, Sartre's thesis depends on the notion that consciousness is absolutely subject. "I" speak out of my absolute subjectivity in such a way that I can never turn round and look at my "I". What I would see, were I able to do so, would be consciousness, that is, nothing. This explains the lack of success of Beckett's quest for the Self - there is any amount of stuff in his narrators' worlds that qualifies as "mine" but none of it is "I"; there is plenty of objective Self but it is always "Not I". As the Unnamable reaches the climax of his last page his desperation takes a form that bears this out; "perhaps it is I" he says, "perhaps somewhere or other it was I",

but then, "it's not I" and then, "it will be I." (T.418) However, in principle, he can never say "I" and thus will never be done.

Which means that we have two points to consider in Beckett, the freedom that arises from the radical detachment of "I" from "me", and the question of the content of the objective Self.

In discussing consciousness, above, we came to the conclusion that Beckett expresses Sartre's insight that man is condemned to freedom. We can now see more exactly why this is so. Man must choose; he can never relinquish responsibility and relax in a determinism where all is done for him. This is the almost constant condition of Beckettian man. "You must go on" even when you can't; even choosing not to choose is choosing. Beckettian man wants to stop choosing, to stop being free. The narrator of From an Abandoned Work expresses well one reason why this is so: "I have never in my life been on my way anywhere, but simply on my way." (NK.36-40) This states both of Sartre's points - I am "on my way" because I must "go on", I must go on choosing, but there is no guide, no direction to go in, I am free. So what do I choose to do? How do I find out where to go? In The Expelled there is one of many possible examples of this. The "hero" is walking in the streets of what seems to be Dublin. He enters a cab ("of my own free will") and is forced by the driver into saying where it is that he wants to go. The sheer contingency of the world and the hopeless results of total freedom appear in his answer: he must say something, so he says "To the Zoo" and adds "It is rare for a capital to be without a Zoo." (NK.16-17) In other words he chooses because he must but chooses completely at random, he has no desire to go to the Zoo. But even if he had a desire, his choosing to fulfil it would be free and unconditioned. Thus when he decides to eat, a little later in this text, it comes



as a surprise to us that he expresses a desire, and no details of the meal are given, it surprises us less to realize that perhaps he ate nothing. Similarly, that night, our "hero" is "seized, then abandoned, by the desire to set fire to the stable" in which he is sleeping. (NK.23) We notice in these examples that desires seem to come to him from outside, (they "seize" him) and that he, his conscious "I", is untouched by them, as in Sartre. On another level the same thing is taking place. Beckett the author, or perhaps the narrator himself, interjects, "No reason for this to end or go on. Then let it end." (NK.16) Indeed, there is finally no reason for conscious beings to choose one course of action rather than another. The greatest possible number of motives and desires do not add up to necessity.

Our second point for consideration is the content of the objective Self. In Sartre this can be summed up as being all that "I" recognizes as "me", with the rider that "I" is free to determine what "me" shall be like, within the limits of the factual. Take the following passage from The End:

To know I had a being, however faint  
and false, outside of me, had once had  
the power to stir my heart... (NK.64)

So his consciousness recognizes his "being" as an objective Self. He describes himself "shitting" in the boat he has turned into his refuge and, when he has criticized himself for this, he comments, as if in answer to an objection, "The excrements were me too, I know, I know, but all the same." (NK.65). So his being "outside of" him includes his excrement. And it includes his body as we can see from the last clauses of that highly physical text, From An Abandoned Work:

You could lie there for weeks and no one  
hear you, I often thought of that up in



the mountains, no, that is a foolish thing to say, just went on, my body doing its best without me. (NK.149. My italics)

The body and its products are far from the free, absolute realm within which consciousness is doomed to babble alone, its babble becoming objective even as it is conceived and thus bringing the babbler no closer to himself. But not the body only, even the will is something other than the "I", as this from The Calmative makes clear:

I said, Stay where you are till day breaks, wait sleeping till the lamps go out and the streets come to life. But I stood up and moved off.

This "hero" chooses, as he freely can, to do exactly the opposite of what he has just decided to do - as Sartre says, no amount of past willing can make me act now. "At each instant we are thrust into the world and engaged there." (BN.37-38)

I hugged the walls, famished for shadow. To think that in a moment all will be said, all to do again. And the city clocks, what was wrong with them, whose great chill clang even in my wood fell on me from the air? What else? Ah yes, my spoils. I tried to think of Pauline, but she eluded me, gleamed an instant and was gone, like the young woman in the street. So I went in the atrocious brightness, bedded in my old flesh, straining towards an issue and passing them by to left and right and my mind panting after this and that and always flung back to where there was nothing. (NK.40-41)

Here again the body is part of the objective Self, "I", the subjective Self is "bedded in my old flesh". The voice of consciousness, of "I", interjects the sentence "To think that in a moment all will be said...", and also the question "What else?" The burden of these is that the "I" is coming to the end of his babble (as indeed he is; The Calmative finishes a page later) and he is making sure that he has said all he has got to say. So, he has dealt with an incident, told a story, accounted for his body, now what else is there in his objective Self

to be mentioned? Ah yes, his "spoils". The mention of his "thought" of "Pauline" makes it clear that these spoils are memories. Thoughts and memories are like lights that gleam an instant as consciousness "intends" them and then vanish. My mental life, (for example my memory of Pauline) here as in Sartre, is an object of my perception just as a "real" young woman whom I see in the street is an object of my perception. And the "I" in this text is trying to get out of this, to escape from "this hell of stories" back into his impossible Self, the subjective absolute. He is "straining towards an issue" in which his "mind" (objective) will catch up with his Self (subjective) but, as we realize must happen since the "I" is nothingness, he is always flung back to "where there is nothing". The ambiguity here between objective and subjective exactly reflects Sartre's thesis about reflective consciousness. When "I" has looked at world, at body and at mind and found itself lacking it tries to look at itself. But in doing so it reduces itself to an object, so it is no longer looking at itself, and even if it were looking at itself it would be looking at nothing.

Only with this sort of an interpretation in mind can we make any sense of the last page of The Calmative. The "hero" falls down but says "I didn't lose consciousness, when I lose consciousness it will not be to recover it." When the crowd leaves him, soon after this, the daylight comes back but he states, "I had no need to raise my head from the ground to know I was back in the same blinding void as before". (NK.42) Consciousness, in Sartre and Beckett, is the inescapable absolute that is nothing.

\* \* \*

Freedom. Choice. Responsibility.

All that we have said so far about freedom is based on the first



chapter of Being and Nothingness. Before leaving the subject we must look at the substantial section of that work (Part Four, Chapter One) entitled "Being and Doing: Freedom". Early in this chapter Sartre offers a resumé of what he has so far said about freedom in his work. This is the point at which his famous dictum "I am condemned to be free" appears, but there are two other dicta here that are of as much interest to us in our search for light to throw on Beckett.

First, Sartre summarizes a paradox, for Beckett a torment, that we have come across before: freedom is the negative, the "nihilation", the nothing of consciousness; as such, when I talk about it I am not really talking about it. "It is through this (negativity) that the for-itself escapes its being as its essence; it is through this that the for-itself is always something other than what can be said of it." (B.439. Sartre's emphasis.) This explains the difficulty of Beckett's task; in trying to say his "I" he is attempting the impossible. As he says, there is "nothing to express", the "nothing" is his consciousness. How is he to express this which is in principle inexpressible?

Second, Sartre defines the pour-soi, the for-itself, as "the one which is already beyond the name which is given to it." (BN.439) He intends this is the sense that conscious "human reality" has no fixed essence, is forever creating itself anew, cannot be pinned down, cannot be labelled and given a name. Whence, perhaps, Beckett's final abandoning of names in the trilogy, culminating in the "unnamable" hero of the third volume. This is reinforced by the namelessness of the being who writes Texts for Nothing and by the random and empty nomenclature of How It Is.

Besides this summary, most of Part Four, Chapter One deals with



choice and responsibility. On the matter of choice Sartre offers a solution to the problem that has been with us since we looked at Heidegger on this subject, the problem of the limits of choice, the problem of whether I have the freedom, for example, to choose the impossible. It is amusing that the test-case that Sartre chooses to employ in this context concerns bicycles. Rather like Molloy or Moran, Sartre proposes to consider the project of arriving "on my bicycle as quickly as possible at the next town". (BN.504) This whole discussion reads very like another view of Beckett's world. The projected bicycle ride "involves my personal ends, the appreciation of my place and of the distance from my place to the town... But I have a flat tyre, the sun is too hot, the wind is blowing against me, etc., all phenomena which I had not foreseen: these are the environment." (BN.504-505) Later, Sartre defines my awareness of the environment as being determined by the latter's "coefficient of adversity".

But a puncture does not really reveal the limits of my freedom. After all, again like Molloy and the others, my "fundamental project" to be myself still holds good, whatever obstacles impede secondary projects. (That is, I still choose to be the sort of person who would make that journey.) And then, it is up to me freely to renounce a task even when its accomplishment has become impossible - I could go blindly on trying to achieve it for ever without any hope of success. Then again, "freedom's very project is in general to do in a resisting world by means of a victory over the world's resistances." (BN.507) These considerations are intended by Sartre to be quite impartial, neutral descriptions of some of the characteristics of choice, and their slightly pessimistic tone must not mislead us. Sartre is describing the world; it is not a fault of

the bias of his mind that our world is made up of things that we first encounter as resistances or obstacles. In this he improves on Heidegger. After all, Heidegger's neutral examples of the world as "Zeug", for instance that of the clouds "meaning" rain, also relate back to a situation of adversity. The clouds "mean" rain to the farmer because the farmer needs to grow crops; he needs to grow crops because, ultimately, some Dasein somewhere feels the uncomfortable sensation of hunger. The world is to be battled with. This is implicit in Heidegger, explicit in Sartre, and a nightmare reality in Beckett.

With choice comes responsibility. "I am absolutely free and absolutely responsible for my situation." (BN.509) Sartre's explanation of this responsibility reads so like a description of the situation of Beckettian man that examples from the latter are hardly necessary. Here is Sartre:

We are taking the word "responsibility" in its ordinary sense as "consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or of an object." In this sense the responsibility of the for-itself is overwhelming since he is the one by whom it happens that there is a world; since he is also the one he makes himself to be, then whatever may be the situation in which he finds himself, the for-itself must wholly assume this situation with its peculiar coefficient of adversity, even though it be insupportable...this absolute responsibility is not resignation; it is simply the logical requirement of the consequences of our freedom. What happens to me happens through me, and I can neither affect myself with it not revolt against it nor resign myself to it...  
[BN.553-554]

We can fit this to Beckett stage by stage. There is no doubt that his novels and texts are pervaded by "responsibility" in that there is a permanent consciousness of authorship, in both senses of the word. We are not allowed to forget for very long that there is a writer writing these words that we are reading, but in Sartre's sense,



too, there is a consciousness of authorship. Beckett's characters create their worlds. Not in the early novels, perhaps, where the "big" world has its own ways of bursting in upon and tormenting people. But from Molloy onwards we are aware that the world that rises up under the pencil of the narrator does so at his bidding. Thus there are two levels - Malone is in bed and dying because Beckett has put him there, and we know it, and Saposcat, for instance, comes into existence because Malone bids him appear. At times the two levels coincide, as when we come across the interjection "What tedium" which could be the view of both Beckett and Malone. This means that sometimes, although we must attribute authorship either to novelist or narrator, it is "contestable" which of the two is actually the author. But there is never any question that we are seeing a world being created by a consciousness. "There is" a world for Saposcat because Malone invents it (or "intends" it), for Malone because Beckett does likewise.

But, Sartre goes on, man, pour-soi, does not simply make the world, he makes himself too. Here we find Beckett at his most Sartrean. All through the trilogy and the later works the narrators are engaged on making themselves. Sartre proposes, in the passage quoted, that because of this self-construction man is also responsible for his situation: "the for-itself must wholly assume this situation." And so it is for Beckett. The Unnamable is really doing nothing other than making himself and his world, revealing his responsibility for it by continuing to talk about it, "going on", even when it is "insupportable", even when "you can't go on". By talking about himself and his world he is making them both in that the literary medium is "made of words" (thus the Unnamable says, "I'm made of words" - T.350) and in that, if we follow Wittgenstein, language is man's way of existing.



It is some slight encouragement to our task of fitting this passage from Sartre to Beckett to realize that the "resignation" rejected by the former is not present in the latter either. "This absolute responsibility is not resignation." Indeed, Beckett's people are never exactly "resigned"; that is not an epithet that we ever think of applying seriously, even to the tramps in Godot who "do not move" according to the famous stage-direction. Their attitude shows that they see their situation to be inescapable and they are somehow quite determined to go on waiting, but they could hardly be called "resigned".

The last sentence of our quotation from Sartre brings us yet closer to Beckett. It provides an explanation for some of the more mysterious inabilities that afflict Beckett's characters. Let me first stress that Sartre is here talking on an ontological level. Thus, when he says that man cannot "revolt" against what happens to him he does not mean that I cannot choose to object to what I dislike. Of course I can. But I cannot choose that X should happen to me and that X should not happen to me simultaneously. If we bear this in mind we can perhaps answer the following questions that arise in Beckett more clearly: Why does Hamm, at a crucial point in the development of Endgame, exclaim "I was never there...it all happened without me" (E.47)? Why do the tramps in Godot not succeed in hanging themselves? Whence the imperatives that force Molloy on to his destination, Moran on in his pursuit of Molloy? Why does Watt go to the house of Mr. Knott? Why does Malone keep on writing? Why does Clov obey Hamm?

All these can be taken on various non-ontological levels; thus: the tramps just aren't efficient and decisive enough to do anything, Hamm and Clov are Master and Slave, and so on. But I would propose

that we are missing an essential element in their meaning if we exclude the possibility of an ontological level at which these questions are partial or complete parables.

Thus, Hamm is isolated from even his own most intimate experience, from "all" that has "happened", because he is free. He cannot "affect" himself with "what happens" because "what happens" is what he makes happen, it is him, and yet, as a conscious nothingness, he knows himself to be radically "other" than the world he creates. What I do is me, but "I" am nothing, "I" can never be "there" where it is happening, "I" am "here", in the indefinable silence of the subjective. Because of this, incidentally, it is really all the same whether I have "real" experiences or whether I invent them. Hamm's story is every bit as "real" a part of the play as Clov's boots.

The tramps in Godot cannot hang themselves. This is a parable to illustrate man's condemnation to freedom. Vladimir and Estragon cannot "revolt against" the world created by their choices. Death would presumably represent choiceless oblivion - but that is not for man, and these two are "all mankind", as we know. (WFG.79) We must always choose, even in the emptiness of the world of Godot, and we can choose anything except not to choose, because that is a choice too. Of course, this does not work on a natural, non-ontological level. In a "natural" situation, man can, by making the unique choice of suicide, choose to stop choosing, the significance of which is the burden of that most perfect of Existentialist writings, The Myth of Sisyphus, but surely nobody supposes that Godot is concerned with literal suicide, it is not a play that can be satisfactorily interpreted with a phrase such as "Let's kill ourselves" taken at simple face-value.



The imperatives that drive on Molloy, Moran, Malone and the other narrators are an expression of their inability to "revolt against", or to "resign" themselves to, themselves. Again, there is the natural, sociological level on which Youdi is "the boss", Gaber his factotum and Moran his employee; and there is the psychological level on which Molloy has an Oedipus complex that drives him towards his mother's bed. But there is also the level of the ontological parable. On this level there is a condemnation to responsibility seen in the imperatives, a condemnation that becomes clearer and clearer as Beckett progressively strips his characters. They are sloughing off the world at a fair rate between More Pricks Than Kicks and The Unnamable but we do not feel that they slough off so much as an ounce of responsibility. On the contrary, as the world retreats it becomes more and more apparent that all that they are and have depends upon themselves; they become less and less resigned (on the natural level; ontologically they cannot be in this state on principle) and, quite amazingly all things considered, they almost never revolt.

This last point proves a great deal. If Beckett were the "natural" pessimist he is sometimes taken to be, and if we read him as a prophet of gloom, his hellish universe would be full of flaring revolts against the "human condition". There are some, especially in Clov's moments of violence, but not many. The mud-creatures of How It Is, for all their horror and violence, hold nothing against the scribes, the "they", whoever it is that has flung them into the depths. This is because The Unnamable and How It Is cannot be read (cannot only be read, anyway) at a "natural" level. The absence of revolt makes full sense only when we take their situations as ontological parables and see them as



trapped in their own worlds for which, in principle, they can only "blame" themselves. Clov obeys Hamm because Clov chooses to as much as because Hamm chooses to, a point specifically made in the play in the exchange, incomprehensible without our reading, in which Hamm thanks Clov for his services and the latter turns on him "sharply" and insists "Ah pardon, it's I am obliged to you." (E.51)

Hamm and Clov, by being towards each other, being together, choose that each should be a component of the other's "coefficient of adversity". As Sartre puts it, "our freedom itself creates the obstacles from which we suffer." (BN.495) This is brought home to us time and again as the refrain "There are no more..." mounts up through the play. The lack of bicycle wheels only becomes an obstacle because Hamm wants two of them. The lack has no existence until this moment. The pain-killers only start to be missing when it is time for them; Clov, quite logically, does not even hint at their absence until they are part of Hamm's present project, then he says that there are no more. "My possible is a certain structure of my subjectivity." (BN.478)

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### The Self.

We have said a good deal about the Self, the Ego, consciousness and so on in the course of the preceding sections, but it is necessary to mention the highly Beckettian "circuit of selfness" that is Sartre's summary of his general views as expressed in The Transcendence of the Ego and Being and Nothingness.

Both in Sartre and in Beckett the *pour-soi*, man, is chasing its (his) "lack", its Self. Sartre likens this to the ass which pulls a cart forwards because it has a carrot dangled before it. Because the

carrot is moved forward by the ass's own motion, it can never be caught up with. He explains his simile thus:

We run towards ourselves and we are - due to this very fact - the being which cannot be reunited with itself. In one sense the running is void of meaning since the goal is never given but invented and projected proportionately as we run towards it. In another sense we cannot refuse to it that meaning which it rejects since in spite of everything possibility is the meaning of the for-itself. Thus there is and there is not meaning in the flight.  
(BN.202-203)

This image, and its gloss, apply directly to Beckett. They explain the impossibility of his narrator's attempts to "say" themselves, the hopelessness of the quest for Self. At the same time they give the world just the meaning that it has in Beckett - the meaning that arises from my meaning that there should be meaning. "The world appears inside the circuit of selfness." (BN.198) is just exactly what the Unnamable finds. We are separated from ourselves by a world and only "nothing" could be the result of our attempts to catch up with ourselves.

So, of course, we cannot be anything. As we have already seen, Beckett reduces this to the dictum that his narrator has never been on his way to anywhere, but always on his way. We are always pursuing, never reaching, always travelling towards that from which we are shut off by consciousness. If we ever arrived, we should become en-soi or, in simpler terms, if we were ever able to define ourselves as "this" we would not be free to be other, we would cease to be human, time would stop and the hole in Being that is consciousness would fill up. "What the for-itself lacks is the self - or itself as in-itself." (BN.89) This strikes me as being an excellent rendering of the Beckettian pursuit of the Self.

This pursuit, in Sartre explicitly and in Beckett perhaps, gives

rise to value. We shall consider value as one Sartrean equivalent of an absolute in the last chapter of this.

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### Bad Faith.

Sartre adopts Heidegger's thesis about "inauthentic" existence and develops it into his famous concept of "bad faith". In Being and Time Heidegger discusses man's flight into the "they"; man ceases to be what he authentically is and becomes dominated by others; the "they" start to make his choices for him and his existence becomes inauthentic. In Sartre there is this same flight from oneself, similarly motivated by a desire to escape from the Angst engendered by one's own absolute freedom to be oneself. But Sartre takes the matter further than simply positing these two possibilities (being oneself, being one's "they"-Self) and asks what man must be like if he can both be himself and not himself. "Bad faith" is the perfect example of this and is selected primarily as an example. In bad faith I am simultaneously one thing and another; how is this possible?

Bad faith is different from lying. The liar goes through a simple conscious process—he knows one thing to be the case, sees the advantage of concealing this fact and so states the opposite. He deceives you and me, but he does not deceive himself. In bad faith I deceive myself.

It is easy to make the mistake of putting an ethical interpretation on Sartre's discussion of this point. As in the case of Heidegger on inauthentic existence it would be wrong to do so. Bad faith is only an example in Sartre, it is not being held up as a bad thing. It is a phenomenon that he investigates and, indeed, he finds it to be a universal, inescapable phenomenon that occurs not by choice or by chance but as the inherent structure of the pour-soi. This is important to us because the bad faith in Beckett is also devoid of ethical content



and is also presented in its ontological significance.

The *pour-soi* must be in bad faith because it cannot be what it is. For me to be angry I must know that I am angry, I must be conscious of it. If I am conscious of something I am not it.. Therefore for me to be angry I cannot be angry. The *en-soi* is what it is, it coincides with itself entirely. Thus if I were to be "sincere" I would have to become what I am, I would have to become *en-soi*, and of course I can never be *en-soi* in principle. So I can never be "sincere" or "angry"; so I am forever in bad faith.

Popularly, Sartre's famous example of the cafe waiter's bad faith (BN.59ff) is thought to hold up the waiter as a bad thing because he acts his job and is not sincerely himself. This is quite wrong. There is no way in which the man can cross from being what he is ("I am") to being what he does ("a waiter"). If, then, we remember that the cafe waiter is an ontological parable, and that bad faith is an example, we can turn our attention to the meaning of this parable and the significance of this example.

The waiter illustrates bad faith and bad faith illustrates that man's being is such that he is not what he is. This is so because man is conscious and consciousness is a sort of inverting mirror in which everything is stood on its head. When consciousness appears, the principle of identity that works for the *en-soi*, which is what it is, breaks down and everything becomes for consciousness what it is not. This, and not anything to do with bad faith itself, it what Sartre is here claiming and demonstrating.

Which brings us to Beckett rather quickly. Here we have a convincing gloss on Beckett's most constant and most mysterious theme, the inability to be.

I have already quoted Beckett's view of Proust that applies here. Direct contact between subject and object, he says, is impossible

"because they are automatically separated by the subject's consciousness of perception." (PTD.74) This basic idea, developed as necessary, reappears frequently in the later work with an ever-increasingly Sartrean intention. In general, none of the later "heroes", not even Watt, can be what they are, certainly they are all separated from themselves. We can now see why.

Watt, for instance, makes "the distressing discovery" that of himself too "he could no longer affirm anything that did not seem as false as if he had affirmed it of a stone." (W.79) Indeed, on the Sartrean principle, anything that we say we are, we are not. Thus the "programme" established at the beginning of The Unnamable is to "proceed" by "affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered". (T.293) In Watt, too, it is Mr Knott, the principle of negativity, who is the centre of the circle that is the world of his house and garden. He is the nothing of consciousness that, according to Sartre, cannot be anything, and indeed he is nothing at all, he is indefinable, ineffable. It is Mr Knott's influence that stands Watt's mind on its head - after contact with that negativity Watt walks and talks backwards, at least at times, playing "being" to Knott's "consciousness".

Hesla relates this Sartrean point to Endgame. He observes first the necessity for language: if I were something, say "suffering", I would not have to express it, to weep and cry out. It is because I am not "suffering" that I need to express it, need to play at it, to act out the experience that is mine but not me. So here we have an explanation of the frequency with which we are reminded that Beckett's actors are acting, the equivalent of the reminders that his narrators are writing. Hamm is a ham actor, as we all know, or Hamlet, or anything but himself. Even when he veils his face at the end of the play the act goes on: "an act... whose purpose is to keep my suffering



alive by exhibiting it to others, including myself as reflecting on myself as suffering." (Hesla, 1, 190). And certainly, Hamm is incomprehensible unless we see him this way, or at least hopelessly ambiguous, for we can see that he "is suffering" in the usual sense of those words (there is blood on the "old stancher"; we, too, are horrified by the lack of pain-killers) but we are puzzled by his need to act, to overact, his sufferings. "can there be misery - he yawns -loftier than mine?" I would suggest that this makes sense best if we regard it as an ontological parable along Sartrean lines. Hamm cannot be what he is, he must act, he must be in bad faith; that is the message.

It is just possible that the concept of bad faith can explain the mysterious object that appears at the end of All That Fall. Little Jerry runs after Mr and Mrs Rooney from the station to give Mr Rooney something he has dropped. Of it Mr Rooney, in answer to questions, says "Perhaps it is not mine at all" and "It is a thing I carry about with me." Mrs Rooney says "It looks like a kind of ball. And yet it is not a ball." (ATF.40) This object could represent all objects, the objective in short. As the objective it is Mr Rooney's world, vaguely conceived as a ball, and yet, the objective not being what it is, perhaps it is not "mine" and perhaps it is not a ball. How would the subject know? And yet the objective is always and inevitably there with us wherever we go. It is something, as Mr Rooney violently repeats, that we carry about with us. Mr Rooney leaves it behind at the station and enters the fantasy world in which he accounts for the train having stopped without reference to the objective facts. This is reinforced by his rather oddly asking Mrs Rooney if she does not believe his account. If this throws suspicion on him as having perhaps been responsible for the child's



death it only makes it more probable that his account of the train stopping is a fantasy. But the objective world is inescapable - Jerry brings it back to him both in the shape of the mysterious object and in his explanation of the little child's death beneath the wheels.

More important than these individual puzzles, however, is the general explanation to be found in Sartre on bad faith for the inability of Beckett's characters to coincide with themselves. None of them ever achieves the goal of silence, the goal of rendering themselves en-soi, finishing, because it is in principle impossible. The nearest they can get to this dubious Nirvana is expressed in The Calmative where the narrator realizes that he can at least objectify himself by talking of the present as though it were past:

Yesterday indeed is recent, but not enough.  
For what I tell this evening is passing this  
evening, at this passing hour... I'll tell  
my story in the past nonetheless, as though  
it were a myth, or an old fable, for this  
evening I need another age, that age to  
become another age in which I became what  
I was. (NK.26. My italics.)

. . .

### Others.

One of the most important developments that Sartre makes of a Heideggerian thesis concerns others. Heidegger principally establishes that, insofar as we are, we "are with" others; Sartre devotes considerable space to explaining how we are with others. For him, others are of enormous importance in existence, even more so than for Heidegger. In Being and Time, we will remember, there are really only two ontological categories, besides Being itself; there is Dasein's "existenz", conditioned by facticity, made of

possibility, already in a world, already with others; and there is the Being possessed by what is not Dasein, the "vorhanden" and the "zuhanden". Sartre roughly adopts Dasein's "existenz" as the pour-soi, and calls objective existents the en-soi, but he adds a third category to these, existence "pour-autrui", existence for others. (I shall henceforth use pour-autrui as an English word.)

The category of pour-autrui arises because pour-soi recognizes that some of the objects in his world are not en-soi but are fellow men, pour-soi like himself, and as he can perceive and judge them so they can perceive and judge him. For Sartre, our bodies "mediate" between our consciousnesses. He makes it clear that he has reached this position by working through and beyond Husserl, Hegel and Heidegger (I give these names in the order that Sartre does).

Husserl, in positing a transcendental Ego, cannot escape solipsism but, by his phenomenological approach, opens the way for Existentialist thinking. Hegel it was who saw that self-conscious being is only real when it recognizes the self-consciousness of others, but he falls into the error of talking of self-consciousnesses as though they were objects, whereas self-consciousness can only be subjective. Heidegger "cuts the Gordian knot" (Sartre's phrase here, BN.244) by simply defining man's being as being-with others. However: "Heidegger's being-with is not the clear and distinct position of an individual confronting another individual." (BN.246) Sartre maintains that even if "being-with" could be proved to be the ontological structure of man's being-in-the-world this would not help us to explain individual, "ontic" relationships such as my relationship with "Pierre" or whoever. Being and Time, it appears, does not escape from solipsism, idealism or realism and, according to Sartre, leaves Dasein "isolated" as always. He now makes his own attempt to establish a satisfactory way of seeing others and offers the



following theory. (BN.250ff)

I have a direct apprehension of others, similar to my direct apprehension of myself. When I see another man I see him as an object, but not only as an object; I also apprehend that, since he is also a subject, he is surrounded by his world as I am by mine. My environment, when he enters it, flees away from me as I know that it is also in relationship with him. His perceptions and projects orientate elements in my world towards himself. For me, he is a kind of "drain hole" in the middle of being. (BN.256)

He, too, presents a nothingness to the solidity of being; objects no longer "group towards" me as they did, but towards him. He has stolen the world from me. Of course, I then re-group my world so that it includes him, but that only re-affirms how thoroughly I have apprehended the other as other.

Now, however, the other looks at me. When he does so, I do not see his eyes at first, I cannot tell what colour they are, or how attractive, that only comes later. Immediately, I am aware of myself as his object. "Beyond any knowledge which I can have, I am this self which another knows. And this self which I am - this I am in a world which the Other has made alien to me." (BN.261)

Sartre emphasizes this creation of a Self by the look of the Other. Previously we discussed the Self exclusively in terms of reflective consciousness, as an object my consciousness creates by reflecting on itself, perceiving that it is conscious. Now we see that even on the unreflective level of immediate consciousness a Self can be created, this time by the consciousness of another being turned on to me. If I am concentrating on something, peering through a keyhole for instance, and I hear footsteps behind me I become "aware of myself" not because of reflective consciousness but in an immediate way.



As a corollary to this we learn the following. The other is unpredictable, (Sartre here refers explicitly to Kafka as the novelist who has explored this fact most thoroughly) and the other makes us "slaves" when we appear to him. (BN.267) We are possible instruments for the purposes of the other and hence "in danger". We cannot know the other because knowledge requires an object and the other is always subject. All my acts imply the existence of others. Consciousness of them reinforces my selfness, not only am I not the en-soi, I am, even more certainly, not the other. When I die I shall no longer have the possibility of revealing myself as subject; others will thenceforth always regard me, that is, my body or their memories of me, as object.

We can relate these points to Beckett in two stages, the two main points first, and then the corollaries.

First, the other "steals" the world from me. We notice at once the tone of Sartre's imagery here - the other is a "drain hole" an "internal haemorrhage" in my world. Is there anything comparable to this Beckettian imagery in Beckett himself? Certainly some of the couples seem to act as owners or destroyers of one another's worlds. Clov's world is stolen by Hamm, Lucky's by Pozzo. In the fiction, the "I" is often invaded, attacked, at least endangered, by another pour-soi. In Enough, for instance, we have a sort of poetry of masochistic submission to a "he". "I did all he desired. I desired it too. For him. Whenever he desired something so did I." (MK.153) Throughout this text "I"'s world is stolen by "him".

Second, we know from Murphy, Film and elsewhere that Beckett has toyed with Berkeleyan idealism - pondered the relationship of esse to percipi. By the time of the Texts For Nothing this interest has taken on a Sartrean flavour; the other "betrays your presence"

and even Beckett's narrator feels that he must sometimes have been "perceived" by others:

I can scarcely have gone unperceived all this time, and yet you wouldn't have thought so, that I didn't go unperceived. I don't refer to the spoken salutation, I'd have been the first to be perturbed by that, almost as much as by the bow, kiss or handshake. But the other signs, irrepressible, with which the fellow-creature unwillingly betrays your presence, the shudders and wry faces, nothing of that nature either it would seem, except possibly on the part of certain hearse-horses, in spite of their blinkers and strict funereal training, but perhaps I flatter myself. Truly, I can't recall a single face, proof positive that I was not there, no, proof of nothing.  
(NK.115)

This narrator knows that he must have been perceived (for he exists and the other is a condition of existence) but his isolation is stressed, correctly, to the point where he can doubt his own existence ("I was not there"). This doubt is based on his inability to conjure up an image of an other recognizing him. The open eyes of an unconscious man are not the other. The "look" that betrays my presence at the keyhole has never betrayed this narrator's presence, so is he present, is he "there"?

On the one hand, Beckett's characters have their worlds "stolen" by other's, and on the other, their "presence" is "betrayed" by the other's look. On the first of these points we can agree that the vice-existers steal the world of the ultimate narrator (the Unnamable? Sam, "I"?) in that we soon learn to give equivalence to all that is said in Beckett's fiction - whoever is telling the story, it is the same to us, Malone's world is metamorphosed into Macmann's and we cannot object. We can only be sure that these others have stolen Beckett's world from him. On the second point we find evidence in the plays that the other's look is important - Hamm needs Nagg to watch him, his dog to look up at him, Clov to listen to him.



Happy Days needs Willie to give Winnie a reality similar to that conferred on the mouth in Not I by the Auditor. But, stepping back a stage as we have just done with the fiction, the plays all depend on the collective look of the audience. Perhaps Beckett is Berkeleyan in all this, but he is also Existentialist.

Besides these two features of Sartre's theory of the existence of others, we listed half a dozen corollaries, subsidiary features that apply directly to Beckett. First, the other is unpredictable, we are before him as Joseph K. is in the face of his trial or his castle, we cannot know what the other will do, he too being a free consciousness. Thus, in Beckett, "the expelled" is flung down some house steps, into the story, for no given reason, and "for once" "they" do not beat him in the street, again with no reason given. Similarly, in Godot, "they" beat Estragon, regularly but for no necessary reason, unless we accept Vladimir's reason, which is that Estragon may have been "not doing anything" in a particular manner that caused the attack. But the matter is as broad as the play itself - Godot is unpredictable in that he says he will come, and he may come, but he doesn't, and Pozzo and Lucky are unpredictable in that if you offer them sympathy you may get a kick on the shins, and if you meet them one day they may be all talk, confidence and aggression while the next they are helpless, blind and dumb. If the tramps are everyman, then Pozzo, Lucky and Godot (or his boy) are others, and what are we able to predict of them except unpredictability?

Second, the other makes me a "slave" when I appear to him. As there are so many obvious parallels to this to be found in Beckett I shall simply say here that we should again remember that Sartre is proposing these points on an ontological level, however immediate and quotidian his discussion of them may appear. His "slave" here is an ontological metaphor and, if we apply it to Beckett then we are



claiming an ontological significance for the master-slave relationship that appears so often in his work. Perhaps, thus, the goad in Act Without Words II could be the other.

Third, I am a possible instrument for the purposes of others and hence "in danger". This fits Beckett in two ways. Some of his characters are subordinated to the purposes of others (Moran to Gaber, Gaber to Youdi, Moran Junior to his father, at least for a while) and all of his characters are subordinates to their superiors in the hierarchy of narration (Worm is there for the Unnamable's purposes, the Unnamable for Beckett's.)

Fourth, the other, as subject, is in principle unknowable. This is a point that Beckett makes frequently but nearly always by implication only. Throughout the Texts For Nothing, for instance, "others" appear: "he", "they", and so on. We are never allowed them in their full value as others, except for an occasional "little canter" always demolished by a contradictory aside. The boundary between the "I" and the others becomes fluid, disintegrates, we do not believe or disbelieve the voice that says "he" any more than we believe or disbelieve the voice that says "I". If pressed to explain this we would say that the voice itself seems dubious as to its certainty or authority on any subject, whether its "I" or its "he" or its "they". In other words, the subject can only talk as subject, and however much it says "he" it can only either miss its mark (the other is unknowable) or engulf its objects in subjectivity. As Beckett says, it's the fault of the pronouns, any old pronoun will do. This incorporates our fifth point - all my acts imply the existence of others - for I cannot avoid saying "he" and "they" any more than I can stop saying. Even the slush of words is churned for somebody, even the Unnamable has an objective existence in the

world of others notwithstanding their unknowability.

Sixth, the look of the other gives me an immediate awareness of me as a Self. This, being of course a partial contradiction to our fourth and fifth points, seems to leave Beckett behind, but perhaps we could claim that, when the system of pronouns has broken down, and we are left with the all-devouring babble of the Unnamable, one of the points towards which Beckett tries to move is the point at which his narrator can posit an "other" to give him back some sort of a self: "it's not me they're calling, not me they're talking about, it's not yet my turn, it's someone else's turn, that's why I can't stir..." (T.416)

Our seventh and last point is that death will finish me as a subject; thenceforth others will treat me only as an object, I will be knowable at last, but only in that I shall be reduced to others' memories of me and my physical components - my body. Beckett's view of the body, like Sartre's, extends beyond the scope of our discussion of others and must be dealt with separately.

\* \* \*

### The Body.

Man wants the security of reducing the other to an object and keeping it objective. Sartre extends this to our consideration of death and our way of loving. When another pour-soi is dead he has no more possibilities, no freedom, no subjectivity. We have "won" over the other when he is dead, reduced him to the captivity of the objective forever. We attempt the same thing in the experience of love - each partner in the affair or the marriage tries to reduce the other to the neutralized, safe state of objectivity. In death always, and in love sometimes, we reduce the other from pour-soi to en-soi.



This makes it sound as though Sartre is resorting to an old-fashioned mind-body dualism, but this is not so. Certainly a dead body is en-soi, but a living body is pour-soi, at least for its possessor. I can treat another's body as en-soi, if, say, I am a cannibal, and I can even treat my own body as en-soi if I imitate the man who treasures his pickled appendix after having it removed. But for me my own body is all pour-soi; further, I am aware of the bodies of others as being pour-soi for them, and I am aware of my body as it falls beneath the look of the other. (cf. BN.303-359 for all these considerations about the body.)

The most important of these points, and the most Beckettian, is the claim that my body is pour-soi not en-soi. Sartre observes that "there is nothing behind the body. But the body is wholly "psychic"." (BN.305) The body is not an en-soi within a pour-soi, it is pour-soi, the pour-soi cannot be "separated" from the body. "The body is lived and not known." (BN.324) Heidegger's worldly series of instruments and signs stops at the body. Thus an author generates the series: "book-to-be-written" - paper - writing-- pen - hand. The series stops with the hand. Consciousness "exists" its body - Sartre gives this verb a transitive usage here - the body is a structure of self-consciousness. Finally, the body exists in contingency, it is the consciousness' experience of contingency, because of the body contingency can "recapture" consciousness. (BN.338) Furthermore the body itself is contingent and, on its account, we "suffer" hate, love, acts and qualities. There is no way out of this - "when no pain, no satisfaction or dissatisfaction is "existed" by consciousness, the for-itself does not cease thereby to project itself beyond a contingency which is pure and... unqualified. Consciousness does not cease "to have" a body. Coenesthetic affectivity is then a pure, non-positional apprehension of a



contingency without colour, a pure apprehension of the self as a factual existence." (BN.338) This apparently neutral state turns out not to be neutral at all - instead it is "nausea."

We can relate these points to Beckett in turn. First, the body is "lived", not "known", is *pour-soi*, not *en-soi*. Certainly Beckett is a highly physical novelist and poet, and even in his plays there is enough eating, drinking, urinating and pain: to keep our attention on the body. In the novels and texts this physicality operates as a kind of disgusted counterpoint to the mental activities of the narrators, a concrete objection to any fanciful notions about the Self. It is as if the body is evily insisting on being taken into consideration in the quest for the Self, knowing that it will be just another spanner in the works. But for all the babble and mentation, the narrators are solidly, hideously there, plunged in flesh, themselves inescapably flesh. They talk often enough of their bodies, their infirmities, but no real distance is ever established between themselves and their bodies. In the Texts For Nothing the narrator tries to "will" himself a body, a head, strength and courage and even seems to succeed in this apparently dualistic undertaking:

There you are now on your feet, I give you my word, I swear they're yours, I swear its mine, get to work with your hands, palp your skull ... then the rest, the lower regions...  
(NK.82)

So far so good, but the project collapses because the narrator is unable to maintain any distance between this physical creation and his "I." "I'll wait for you here" he says to his creation, and follows this with phrases that are most curious without something like a Sartrean gloss: "I'll wait for you here, no, I'm alone, I alone am, this time it's I must go." (NK.82) The point is that without a body to "exist" the "I" is alone, a nothing, a point of subjectivity without existence. So he goes on: "I know how I'll

do it, I'll be a man, there's nothing else for it" (NK.82) which is to say that he must be a body in order to exist.

Second, the worldly series of instruments stops at the body. The pen "refers" to my writing and thus to my hand. My hand when writing is me writing. We cannot go "behind" my hand. In Beckett there is a strict division between the characters' bodies and their instruments - crutches, sticks, stones and bicycles are dispensable, objects for fascinated consideration, clearly means to ends. Meanwhile arms and legs are obsessively, preoccupyingly "me." Thus Molloy's bicycle is highly doubtful in a way his stiff legs are not:

So I got up ... and went down to the road, where I found my bicycle (I didn't know I had one). ... It was a chainless bicycle, with a free wheel, if such a bicycle exists... (T.16)

I shall only add that every hundred yards or so I stopped to rest my legs, the good one as well as the bad, and not only my legs, not only my legs. (T.16-17)

In all of Beckett's work there is remarkably little doubt thrown on the body. The instrumentality of the world, the past, the world itself, others at least as other versions of himself, all are dismissed by the series of narrators. But the body goes marching, crawling, babbling on. Even in How It Is and the latest short texts there are bodies - Pim's body and those of his fellow-creatures have a reality greater than that of their mental activities and the "little body" of Lessness is a sort of inescapable minimum, holding Beckett back from the final plunge into the purely abstract.

Finally we must consider Sartre's point about the body as contingency and nausea. In Beckett the body is frequently addressed by the controlling voice of the narrator as though it were a random possession of his consciousness. We know that this is not true and that Molloy is his legs, the Unnamable is his head and so on, but



pour-soi can always see his body as en-soi, and, when he does, its openness to the contingent is at once apparent. Thus Beckettian "heroes" are subjected to the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, and a few more besides. They never really complain, because their sufferings, being contingent, are inexplicable and somehow distant from them. And, as in Sartre, the body's own emotions, actions and qualities are also contingent, which perhaps explains Beckett's strange tone whereby we are given the impression that there is nothing much to explain his narrators' desires, no way of explaining their actions and a curious indifference to even their own freely-chosen ends. Beckett excludes all necessity, and events in his world are either governed by the fantasy of the person who narrates them or the blind contingency of brute fact.

And nausea - "contingency sickness" - my apprehension of my body even when it is feeling neither pleasure nor pain - surely this is the status quo in all Beckett's work. The great symphony of suffering that makes up All That Fall can stand as a prime example. It is not just that people are blind or ill or murdered, worse still is the permanent undercurrent of nausea, directed, in Maddy Rooney's case at least, at her own vast, vile body.

How can I go on, I cannot, Oh let me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again! A great big slop thick with grit and dust and flies, they would have to scoop me up with a shovel.  
(ATF.9)

\* \* \*

### Conclusion

There is a lot more in Being and Nothingness than the topics we have dealt with here. Some of Sartre's theses are not particularly relevant to Beckett, others we have covered in the chapter on Heidegger. Among these latter, however, are two points that are



worth mentioning, temporality and death.

Sartre echoes Heidegger on temporality more or less point-for-point, insisting that time depends on man, that the past is an aspect of facticity, the future the emptiness of possibility and so on. (BN.107ff) Objects, the en-soi, have no time, and pour-soi becomes en-soi when it has slipped into the past. To this Heideggerian point Sartre adds that what distinguishes pour-soi is that it "has to be" its own past - I am what I have been. This may sound commonplace enough, but it is in fact an almost uniquely Existentialist view in that it is meant to imply that I am nothing other than my past (and my present freedom if you like, but that is a "nothing".) I do not have a given essence or nature to which I can cling, or to which I can appeal. If I have behaved with consistent cruelty, for instance, I cannot set against the history of my cruel actions some claim that I am "really" tender-hearted; I am "really" what I have been, cruel. And this is where Beckett is Existentialist. He claims no fixed nature for any of his major characters; how often do we find one of them claiming any character at all? Which of them seriously proposes himself as finally kind, say, or intelligent, or pertinacious, or boring or even erratic? What could we say, laying our hands on our hearts, about the character of Vladimir or Clov or Malone or Worm? Certainly Pozzo could be defined, perhaps Nagg, the earlier Moran, Saposcat and other lesser types, but the "basic" characters, the reduced people, the remnants whose "story" we are hearing - Molloy, Hamm, the tramps, the Unnamable himself - these defy definition. On the other hand they are clearly made by their pasts, wondering about the connexion between what they were and what they are. But the connexion is Sartre's connexion - they are what they were. For Molloy there seems to be a hiatus between his adventures with bicycles and crutches and his position here and now in his mother's room; and so it seems to all of us, unable as

we are to blend the pour-soi present with the en-soi past; but what does Molloy talk about? What are his concerns? How do we learn to say anything about him at all? The answer to all these lies in his past. What Sartre says of the past applies exactly to the characters who narrate the trilogy and How It Is: "If the past does not determine our actions, at least it is such that we can not take a new decision except in terms of it." (BN.496)

That is Existentialist temporality in Beckett. When Sartre proposes how we can consider time separately, in a non-Existentialist manner, apart from "human reality", he offers a thesis that is also to be found in Beckett. (This is often the case - Beckett plays with a traditional philosophical problem in a way that reveals it as incomprehensible; this puts him into the same position as the Existentialists at least to start with.) Sartre looks at the conventional approach to time thus:

If Time is considered by itself, it immediately dissolves into an absolute multiplicity of instants which considered separately lose all temporal nature and are reduced ... to the total a-temporality of the this.  
(BN.215)

Here we have another statement of the time problem that appears throughout Beckett from the grains of Millet in Endgame to the light which "gleams an instant" in Godot, the "one enormous second" of the Unnamable and Breath. Or, as we have it in the first of the Texts For Nothing, "All mingles, time and tenses, at first I only had been here, now I'm still here, soon I won't be here yet." (NK.74)

Connected with temporality is death. Here Sartre contradicts Heidegger roundly. Death is not my "ownmost" possibility, cannot be the only thing that nobody can do for me. After all, every choice I make is uniquely mine, nobody can do anything for me. Of course, somebody can "stand in" for me, "take my place", but that is quite different from giving up my freedom to another which is an



impossibility. When somebody does something "for" me he does not annihilate me, I remain. So every choice, in Sartre, is my "ownmost" possibility. What is more, it is very hard to develop any "being-towards" death since I cannot know the hour or manner of its arrival.

Thus, for Sartre, death, far from being an end that gives a meaning to life, is absurd. We are like the condemned man who is preparing to give a meaning to his life, to "close the account" satisfactorily, by making "a good showing on the scaffold" and who is then carried off by a 'flu epidemic. (BN.533) What death reveals is the absurdity of every expectation, even the expectation of death itself.

We are always expecting, always waiting; our freedom is a projection towards an end for which we wait, "our life is only a long waiting" (BN.537) and thus we are waiting to wait, "there we have the very structure of selfness: to be oneself is to come to oneself." (BN.538) This waiting implies a final term, death, in which, as in Heidegger and perhaps Christianity, one will "come to oneself" and meaning will arise. Alas, this final term cannot bring with it the meaningfulness Heidegger supposes unless we posit a God who chooses the hour of my death. If there is no such chooser how can meaning arise? One minute more or less of life may perhaps change everything and who is to say exactly when I shall die? If I try to "round off" my life by writing some definitive philosophical work and then committing suicide, I may have a fatal heart attack as I pick up my pen to write the first sentence. Death is arbitrary, the conclusive proof of contingency, absurd. "Death is never that which gives life its meanings; it is, on the contrary, that which on principle removes all meaning from life." (BN.539) Here we can already see a possible reason why Beckett's characters can't come



to the end: the only hope is to keep going, keep trying the possibilities, because the end will only bring about an automatic collapse of all meaning. But to conclude Sartre's exposition.

"Since the for-itself is the being which always lays claim to an "after", there is no place for death in the being which is for-itself."  
(BN.540)

Waiting for death, then, is waiting for what I cannot know or understand, it is "waiting for an undetermined event which would reduce all waiting to the absurd, even including that of death itself." (BN.540) Death is not just not my "ownmost" possibility, it is not even one of my possibilities at all.

Now this applies so obviously to Godot and Endgame that I can be brief. Again we are faced with looking at Beckett's works as ontological parables. Death is impossible for *pour-soi*, and that in the literal sense that it is not one of my possibilities. Godot shows man waiting, waiting for what cannot possibly come to him. If Godot himself is some sort of absolute (God) then he won't come because, as Sartre says, death is not a confrontation with any absolute, it is the opposite, the generator of chaos not of worlds. The tramps fail to kill themselves because death is not one of their possibilities (cf. Sartre on suicide, BN.540). They must be there, they must wait, they wait for further waiting, wait to wait, and meaning never comes, the self never comes. As every theatregoer must at some time have suspected, if Godot came there would not be a joyous revelation of the meaning of the waiting (i.e. of suffering, life). On the contrary, it would only confirm the absurdity of existence.

In Endgame we are watching people waiting for death. It comes in random ways to the flea, the rat, Nagg. It implants no meaning in the world. The play opens with the word "Finished", but it isn't, and it concludes with the word "remain".

Notes to Chapter 4

1. The theses of The Transcendence of the Ego reappear in Being and Nothingness in a limited form that really requires a knowledge of the earlier work. Cf. BN.102-105. What is particularly clarified in the later work is Sartre's conception of "the circuit of selfness," cf. the section entitled "The Self", below.

Surfaces and Depths

What has been offered so far amounts to a case for a philosophical reading of Beckett; what remains is to undertake that reading. Three philosophers have been dealt with at length and in detail with the aim of exposing their worlds, their languages and their methods. In each case, at each turning point in the philosophical argument, I have tried to show how a particular formulation or view fitted into a Beckettian pattern. This has demonstrated that Beckett can be read alongside certain philosophers and that they can throw light into his darker corners. I have tried to establish this unselectively. That is, it has not been simply a question of applying a few individual moments of philosophical insight to Beckett but of applying the main body of three interrelated philosophies, three world-views more or less in toto, to his work.

I have not pursued Hegel, Heidegger or Sartre to their conclusions, even in the three main works discussed. Thus I did not follow Hegel into his historical theses, Heidegger into his time-and-historicity section or Sartre into all of his concepts. However, I have presented the central picture of man's being and existence as it is to be found in these three. In each case the edges of the canvas may have been left dark but the view of the man himself (Hegel's man, Heidegger's, Sartre's) has been clear and complete. We have accounted, in all three cases, for what Heidegger would have called the "equiprimordial existentialia" of man: consciousness, the objects of consciousness, the world, others, and so on.

Beckett can be best understood, and at times only understood, if we see his work as a literary expression or realization of



something that resembles these pictures of man. He shows us what it is like (how it is) in the world of these philosophers if their views are lived through, carried through into consciousness and not merely considered as appropriate only to the study or the library. Beckett's work offers us a horrific world, but it is the world as it exists for philosophy rather than as it exists in "average everydayness". If this is not the case, where does the trouble lie? Beckett seems to be in violent revolt against the nature of this world and it is clearly not something political or psychological that he is revolting against. It is something ontological. In general terms it is la condition humaine that is wrong, there is something wrong at the root of the human situation, something wrong that no amount of love or money-for-hospitals will cure, something wrong ontologically.

In other words I would suggest that Beckett's works are, in one central aspect, ontological parables. A demonstration of this can be found in the self-destructive nature of his fiction. We always know that the narrators' stories are only stories, we have the arbitrary act of invention thrust under our noses at every turn. This forces us to search for stable ground in the quicksands and to give only provisional value to the unstable areas, which is as much as to say that we are thrust back to an ontological level in the end, however much we may have enjoyed the fiction while it was in progress. In principle, once this process of destroying himself or giving himself away has started in an author, all his statements become suspect; but there is an analogy to be drawn, nonetheless, between our going back into Beckett's fundamental concerns (searching for a stable area) and the narrators' emerging from their fictions to talk about themselves. Thus we have one way of getting closer

to the meaning of Beckett's parables if we extrapolate back in the direction: fictions (eg. Macmann) - narrators (eg. Malone) - author (Beckett?). This process leads us towards the concerns of philosophy, as can be shown if we follow up the example of Macmann and Malone.

Although Macmann is so obviously a creation, we can respond to him in a variety of serious ways. We must, after all, be able to suspend our disbelief or fiction would be altogether impossible, and I think that, for example, we are likely to feel pity for him, but in the end Beckett forces us back away from him and we have to realize that we are being asked to respond to something other than his adventures. These adventures, anyway, are inclined to be trivial and inconclusive. Here is an example from the end of Malone Dies.

So...a little later Macmann, having brought back from his walk a hyacinth he had torn up bulb and roots in the hope of being able to keep it a little longer thus than if he had simply plucked it, was fiercely reprimanded by Lemuel who wrenched the pretty flower from his hands and threatened to hand him over to Jack again, no, to Pat again, Jack is a different one.

(T.277)

As the conclusion of this passage shows, we are not allowed to forget the fictional nature of the episode for very long. The episode itself is trivial, meaningless, absurd, unless, perhaps, we take it as an indicator of the general nature of Beckett's world (if the surface is like this we cannot expect the depths to be particularly pleasant.) The mad Macmann makes a sad figure, picking flowers for comfort, flowers which do not last long anyway and which he paradoxically destroys to make them last a little longer; his rather pathetic gesture earns him a fierce rebuke. This is the surface of a world that is perhaps not organized for man's happiness, a fact so obvious in every painful line of the trilogy that we are forced to



interrogate the narrators about this world. They are, in any case, creating a world for their creations to inhabit.

Malone, the dying narrator of the Macmann episodes, gives us some relief by turning back to himself from time to time and discussing his fictions. But his world, the next stratum of literary creation, is as bad as Macmann's. He dismisses his story-telling with "But that is all beside the point, like so many things." He continues:

All is pretext, Sapo and the birds, Moll, the peasants, those who in the towns seek one another out and fly from one another, my doubts which do not interest me, my situation, my possessions, pretext for not coming to the point...

(T.278)

This sort of aside tells us not only that we should read the stories, such as Macmann's; as a special sort of rubbish, but also that we should question Malone's own babble about himself. His "doubts", his "situation", his "possessions" are mere pretexts. Once again we are being forced on: just as Macmann is not "the point" Malone is not the point either. But his stratum of words, although it too is a fiction, is closer to the reality that underlies the novel and drives it on. Thus we are being directed towards that which is "the point", that which is "reality". We are once again given a strong indication that it will not be pleasant, that there is something amiss in the ontological structure of the world; Malone, after all, is dying in stinking confusion, his "horror-worn eyes linger abject on all they have beseeched so long".(T.278)

What next? Macmann has passed us on to Malone and Malone seems to be passing us on to someone or somewhere else where we can read or discover "the point". He says that his eyes have "beseeched



so long" in a "last prayer, the true prayer at last, the one that asks for nothing". (T.278) We might agree to stop here and abandon ourselves to oblivion or to mysticism but someone will not let us (it is still Malone, nominally at least):

And it is then a little breath of fulfilment  
revives the dead longings and a murmur is  
born in the silent world...

(T.278)

With that "murmur" we are off again:

The last word in the way of viaticum.  
Let us try it another way. The pure plateau.  
Try and go on. The pure plateau air.  
Yes, it was a plateau, Moll had not lied....

(T.278)

This takes us back in the direction we have come from, back to the stories about Moll and Macmann. In the matter of getting through to reality we want to go beyond Malone rather than back to the surface of transparent invention. Malone may hint that the way to reality (to the "true prayer at last") is through further fictional invention, but there is no sign of it in Macmann's story which, anyway, is also explicitly intended as a time-filler.

I have chosen this example from the end of Malone Dies because here, more clearly than elsewhere, we are actually given another stratum "beyond" Malone, the stratum of The Unnamable. In the opening pages of The Unnamable the "I" speaks of Malone objectively and is clearly further down, further away from the surface, than his previous narrators. "Is Malone the culprit?" he can ask. (T.298) Then, in the same way as Malone discussed himself after talking about Macmann, "I" now talks about himself after mentioning Malone. What he says about himself takes us deeper into the real concerns that we feel to be underlying the trilogy, the concerns that are apparent in its very first lines where Molloy asks how he has got to where he is. The Unnamable comments:

It would help me, since to me too I must attribute a beginning, if I could relate it to that of my abode. Did I wait somewhere for this place to be ready to receive me? Or did it wait for me to come and people it? By far the better of these hypotheses, from the point of view of usefulness, is the former, and I shall often have occasion to fall back on it. But both are distasteful. I shall say therefore that our beginnings coincide, that this place was made for me, and I for it, at the same instant.

(T.298)

Here, having sloughed off the surface fantasies of Macmann and the "vice-existence" of Malone, an unnamable "I" turns to himself, poses a question and suggests an answer, that are rendered intelligible only if we take them ontologically. Beckett is a creative artist and as such is speaking to our emotions as well as our intellects but surely it is not enough to say of this passage that it offers us the generalized sense of anguish of a being lost in an incomprehensible world without going on and specifying what that anguish is, why that being feels it and how he can conceive of the world as incomprehensible? If we are thrust from the surface to the depths, if we feel we are being taken closer to the fundamental vision, the basic quest, of the author then our wits need to be sharper not duller as we descend. The surface level offers us pain, farce and doubt and, although self-consciously a mere creation, it is, ipso facto, a vision of the world, but if that is true of the random creations such as Sapo or Macmann it is surely at least as true of the deeper levels.

Our idea of surface and depth is, of course, metaphorical. I have adopted it here for clarity and because Beckett employs it both within the trilogy and in his oeuvre as a whole. Our reading of this oeuvre now needs to take an overall view which will make



some sense, in a large scale, of the claim that we need to see Beckett as a creator of ontological parables in order fully to understand him.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Beckett's Development

I would offer two premisses for the discussion of Beckett's development. First, he starts on the surface and moves towards the depths, and, second, his work is a whole, a unified and self-consistent statement about existence which explores the same vision of the world from increasingly profound viewpoints.

The first of these is intended only as a diagrammatic and summary aid to understanding, a metaphor to show where Beckett takes us. In general the amount of naturalistic description of the quotidian world decreases between More Pricks Than Kicks and, say, Breath. Earlier Beckett characters tend to be individualized, human, treated as odd examples of normal people; later Beckett characters tend to be nameless, inhuman and extraordinary. You might meet and recognize Murphy in Hyde Park, you will not meet one of the "Lost Ones". What is wrong with the earlier characters could conceivably be alleviated by sociological or psychological attentions: Belacqua Shua and Murphy want things within the world, attainment of which brings or could bring some satisfaction; what is wrong later in Beckett is incurable. He moves from an agonized playing on the naturalistic surface of life to an agonized grasping of its ontological foundations. He himself suggests the metaphor of depth when he casts his creatures in How It Is into the mud and has them remember life "up there" in the normal daylight world. As an alternative he employs deserts, cylinders, darkness and other forms of isolation to emphasize the



distance that exists, in his later work, between his settings and the normal surface of reality.

Our second premiss, that Beckett's work is a self-consistent whole, can hardly be summarized in the same way. Beckett's vision of the world remains steady but its perceptiveness increases so that the world is laid ever more bare under his gaze and we are shown the depths, the ontological realities that underpin the surface realities with which he was at first concerned. Perhaps we can see Beckett as a sort of bird circling his prey; the prey remains the same and is the centre of each circle he describes, each circle being equally necessary. As the bird comes closer and closer the prey is more and more clearly described. Perhaps the analogy with Dante that springs to mind here is not accidental, the descent is certainly into the depths of a kind of hell.

Naturally Beckett does not fit either of these schemes exactly. In the early work there are moments as profound, and as much in need of philosophical explanation, as anything in How It Is and the later texts. Furthermore, in the later work there are moments that call for a psychological response rather than a philosophical one - in Not I, for instance, where the mouth seems to belong to a paranoiac personality as well as to an ontologically representative entity. But the general scheme is helpful and it shows us where to apply our philosophical exegesis at the same time as hinting that the series of ontological parables we read into Beckett may in the end resolve themselves into one unified statement.

Beckett's work falls roughly into three periods: the pre-war, the post-war and the "residual" (to borrow a word of Beckett's own.)

In terms of our philosophical parallels the first period (the period of More Pricks Than Kicks and Murphy) is the one best illuminated by the conventional critical technique of glossing and discussing Beckett's references to philosophers. This is his Cartesian period, the period in which he plays with early modern philosophy and is inclined to wear his learning on his sleeve. Here, where conventional criticism is most fruitful, the need for ontological interpretation is least evident.

The second period (the period of Godot, Endgame and the trilogy) plumbs greater depths. Where Belacqua, for instance, appears in the first period (in More Pricks Than Kicks) a gloss on his name is more or less an adequate explanation of its adoption. But where "Belacqua or Sordello" appear early in the trilogy the same gloss seems inadequate - for a start, Beckett can no longer remember which of them it is he wishes to refer to and he soon abandons them. I have concentrated on this second period in selecting examples in the three previous chapters, above. In this chapter I shall deal with the later work as well.

Watt acts as a sort of turning-point between these first two periods. It starts in the style of Murphy with the hilarious Mr Hackett who lives in the "big" world of policemen and billiard tables and friends but, once Watt himself comes on the scene, the novel moves rapidly into a world that is at once more obscure and more profound. Dialogue and policemen disappear from the novel (although Watt emerges into the surface-world again at the end) and all certainties, including the reader's, crumble in the house of Mr Knott. The turning-point within the novel, the arrival of Watt at Mr Knott's house, is marked by one of Beckett's most sustained excursions into



the profounder reality underlying his work, Arsene's speech at the end of Part One. This speech will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

To illustrate the development in Beckett between his first and second periods there are plenty of examples. Here are two. In Murphy the Occasionalist philosopher Geulincx appears in order to be complimented on his "beautiful Belgo-Latin" (M.124) and one or two parallels can be drawn between elements in the novel and the solution adopted by Geulincx to the Cartesian mind-body problem; notably this solution appears funny to us and is wryly treated by Beckett at least in implication. In Molloy, however, from the second period under discussion, we find Geulincx treated differently. There is still a touch of humour but we feel he is being used more seriously, more passionately and less cerebrally:

I who had loved the image of old Geulincx,  
dead young, who left me free, on the black  
boat of Ulysses, to crawl towards the East,  
along the deck. That is a great measure  
of freedom, for him who has not the pione-  
ering spirit. And from the poop, poring  
upon the wave, a sadly rejoicing slave, I  
follow with my eyes the proud and futile  
wake.

(T.51)

The reference to Geulincx's theory of freedom, which amounts to the theory that we have very little freedom, is closer to Beckett's own range of serious problems than the solution to the mind-body problem referred to in Murphy. The narrator of this passage identifies himself with the slave of Geulincx's example and rises to poetic heights in the process. We are out of the realm of the learned joke and into a more serious confrontation with the issues of philosophy. It is worth noting here, too, that Beckett and his narrator employ the past tense, "I who had loved." He is leaving behind him the



dubious consolations of academic philosophy.

Another example concerns two presocratic philosophers. In Murphy we are asked to consider the undignified end of "Hippasos the Akousmatic" who drowned in a puddle. Here there is nothing to be gained beyond the immediate reference and the response it conjures up: laughter perhaps and a certain pleasant puzzlement. In Endgame, however, from Beckett's second period, the philosopher Zeno appears for the sake of his paradox and here we are asked to take him seriously just as Geulincx became serious in Molloy. Hamm, towards the end of one of his more terrifying monologues, considers time:

Moment upon moment, pattering down, like  
the millet grains of...(he hesitates)...  
that old Greek, and all life long you  
wait for that to mount up to a life.  
(Pause. He opens his mouth to continue,  
renounces.) Ah let's get it over!

(E.45)

The puzzlement engendered by Zeno's paradox is not really a laughing matter at all, there is a deadly earnest about Hamm's agonized fight with time and about Clov's "nearly finished".

Conventional interpretation, then, is still of some use in the second period of Beckett's writing (we still have to know who Geulincx and Zeno were) but we feel that we are being taken further and that we are going to be obliged to take seriously the issues raised and not merely to regard them as an intellectual game. When we get to the third period it seems to me that conventional interpretation breaks down altogether and that, unless one has squarely faced the philosophical issues inherent in the second period and is prepared to look at the third period in an ontological light, one is in danger of finding it partially incomprehensible.

This third period extends from How It Is (1960) to Beckett's most recent work. It includes the texts Enough, The Lost Ones, Ping, Lessness and Imagination Dead Imagine as well as the plays Come and Go, Eh Joe, Breath, Not I and Footfalls, to mention only these. The plays, generally, lag behind the fiction in the history of Beckett's development. Thus, Krapp's Last Tape, although composed in 1958 is clearly akin to Malone Dies, composed in French as early as 1948. With this as a precedent it seems reasonable to exclude from our third period some of the plays written after 1960 which belong rather obviously to the earlier period, notably Happy Days and Play (1961 and 1962 respectively).<sup>1</sup>

Beckett himself has described his work of this period, the "shorts" since How It is, as "residua" (in the Preface to No's Knife.) He glossed this, in reply to a query by Brian Finney, "they are residual...in relation to whole body of previous work". (sic. Finney, 1, 10). This would seem to support the contention that Beckett's work is in some way a unified whole - it is as if he has been quarrying his work from the same rock-face and these are the chippings. Certainly it is hard to imagine what these "residua" would seem like if they had appeared without the earlier work behind them.

Just as Watt acts as a turning-point between the first period and the second, How It Is acts as the connexion between the end of the trilogy and Texts for Nothing on the one hand and the exiguous productions of Beckett's later years on the other.

How It Is comes as something of a shock after the trilogy - one wonders how there can be any more to say and one is surprised by the sudden indulgence in such experimental prose. But the quarry of being is infinite. Beckett in his attempts to "get it all said",



having taken one prose style to its limits, is bound to adopt another method and press on rather than relapse into the impossible silence. "I'll go on".

How It Is inaugurates our third period in that it has the characteristics of coldness, inhumanity and a certain abstraction, that are going to become more pronounced in the later "residua". But Beckett's work is a whole, How It Is is working the same, the same inevitable ground, as the trilogy. These sections, for instance, rehearse themes familiar to us from Malone Dies and elsewhere:

then on my elbow I quote I see me prop me  
up thrust in my arm in the sack we're  
talking of the sack thrust it in count the  
tins impossible with one hand keep trying  
one day it will be possible

(H.8)

something wrong there

(H.9)

Here we find the usual "I" and "me", the one seeing the other as in Malone's "All my senses are trained full one me, me". (T.186) This narrator, too, is encumbered by and obsessed with his possessions, here his sack, and he makes asides ("something wrong there") that parallel Malone's "This is awful". As Beckett goes deeper into the "mess" of existence he has new methods but no new matter: consciousness and its ambivalent relationship with its world are still the core of the problem, still the monolith he must quarry from. His work is an attempt to find an objective correlative for being - a parable that will somehow manage to "say" the ontological nature of the world.

Although How It Is develops (in my view, inevitably) the same concerns as are manifested in the trilogy, it begins to show the sort of dehumanizing schematism that is the characteristic of



Beckett's third period. The creatures crawling about in the mud have a few touches of "reality" in the shape of tin-openers and memories, but their present existence is in many ways as unrealistic as possible. If we apply realist or naturalist criteria we come up with such obviously banal questions as "How do these people breathe with their faces in the mud?" and "How do they know which direction to go in?" and "Where are they?" and "What happens when the sardines run out?" and "Where do the sardines come from?" Clearly we are in a non-naturalistic world here, a world in which such questions do not matter. Beckett has excluded the possibility of realistic interpretation as far as he can by, for instance, employing meaningless, dehumanized names, "Bom", "Pim" and so on.

This can be seen as the next stage in the process that has taken Beckett from names such as Celia and Lady Pedal to such brutalized appellations as Saposcat and Worm. What names are possible after The Unnamable? Now, in his third period, Beckett is going to dispense with names altogether and with all naturalistic conventions as he moves closer to the core of his concerns, the heart of the problem which is seen at last to be inherent not in the surface mess of everyday life (Ibsen and Dickens faced that problem) but in the basic structure of the world, beyond or behind mere names or the suffering of individuals. That this is the case, that these are Beckett's "real" concerns and that we are not forcing an interpretation arbitrarily upon him can, I think, be established from those pregnant snippets of criticism, the Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit which appeared in transition No.5 in 1949.<sup>2</sup> In a way it would be appropriate to quote the whole of the second of these dialogues, the dialogue on Masson. I shall attempt a summary, however. What we shall find is Beckett's statement that Masson, for

all his talk about the void, is not really attempting to paint some sort of ultimate reality and that Beckett is searching for such an art, impossible though it may be. The relevance of this to my thesis about Beckett himself is obvious: he is in quest of an art that will express an ultimate depth - an absolute. "B" speaks first and he makes this gnomic utterance:

In search of the difficulty rather than in its clutch. The disquiet of him who lacks an adversary.

"D" replies:

That is perhaps why he speaks so often nowadays of painting the void, "in fear and trembling".

Masson has no "adversary", nothing to paint, no problem to solve within the realms of normal painting. As "D" says, it is not a matter of not being able to paint something, it is a matter of painting nothing - "the void". Once, "D" continues, Masson wanted to paint a mythology, then he wanted to paint man in society, now he wants to paint "inner emptiness". He suffers from "the need to come to rest, i.e. to establish the data of the problem to be solved, the Problem at last". The capital letter on the second "Problem" here is revealing. Of the earlier "problems" (man in society for instance) "B" says that they have "by the mere fact of their solubility....lost for him their legitimacy". Now Masson wants to "reduce their maladies...to nothing" but he still wants to paint something and, "D" points out, if "B" is going to object to all painting in which "the object remains sovereign" how can Masson "be expected to paint the void?"

"B" replies that this is a mistake. Wanting to paint the void is "on the same plane" as wanting to paint something, the void of Masson is "perhaps simply the obliteration of an unbearable presence"



and this is not really the void at all. The trouble is that even Masson suffers from "possessiveness". Although he tries to avoid the sort of painting that is the mere "capture of objects" he is still, according to Beckett, doing what others have done in the way of painting things. "B" finishes by asking "D" to forgive him for relapsing "into my dream of an art unresentful of its insuperable indigence and too proud for the farce of giving and receiving". When "D" tries to make an emotional appeal on behalf of painting that paints things ("the things and creatures of spring, resplendent with desire and affirmation") it is too much for "B", whose thinking is moving in so exactly the opposite direction, and the dialogue concludes "B - (Exit weeping)".

I think the key point here is that Masson goes some way towards Beckett's ideal, he rejects the surface questions as illegitimate because of their "solubility", but in trying to go further he goes wrong because he will not admit the "insuperable indigence" of art and goes on trying to approach the depths as if they were on the same plane as the surface.

If we apply this to Beckett we can easily see that "the farce of giving and receiving", the surface element in art, is still uncomfortably present in his earlier work where his naturalistic method does the literary equivalent of capturing objects. In his later work he is too "proud" for this, he becomes cold, aloof, inhuman, and his writing approaches an equivalence with that totally abstract art that confesses its "insuperable indigence". The overall impression gained is that Beckett is asking here for an art that will confront ultimate reality, an art that will correspond not to the sociological or "natural" structure of the world, but to its



ultimate structure, its ontology.

This demand is not colourless and unbiassed. Inherent in it there is already a statement as to the nature of this ultimate reality. "D" offers what might be called a positive, optimistic version; defending Masson's inability to move on to another plane he asks two questions to both of which "B's" implied answer is "Yes". They are these:

But must we really deplore the painting that admits "the things and creatures of spring, resplendent with desire and affirmation, ephemeral no doubt, but immortally reiterant", not in order to benefit by them, not in order to enjoy them, but in order that what is tolerable and radiant in the world may continue? Are we really to deplore the painting that is a rallying, among the things of time that pass and hurry us away, towards a time that endures and gives increase?

It is this that drives "B" out, weeping. Here we have an encapsulation of a misty, sub-religious attitude that affects a confrontation with the nature of the world of a sort that "B" finds even more appalling than failure to come to terms with "the void". "D" employs a language that is highly revealing. There are biblical echoes in "creatures", "the things of time that pass" and "gives increase", and a general tone of pulpit-like exhortation and encouragement in the two long rhetorical questions with their repetitions ("not in order...not in order...in order") and in the optimistic vocabulary: "resplendent", "immortally reiterant", "radiant", "rallying", "endures" and "gives increase".

It is quite clear that this is not "B's" conception of the world; it drives him out weeping. More significantly, this cannot be his conception of the world on principle. Masson, the dialogue claims, cannot get off the plane of the "feasible" (to borrow a term from the third of these dialogues) and on to a plane where he

could face "the Problem at last". Stuck on the plane of mere "problems" the only defence for him, in spite of his promising moves towards "inner emptiness" and so on, is along the lines of the normal defence of normal art: it is good for us. All this, all daily religion, all "possessive" art, all positive views of man's world belong to the plane of the feasible and Beckett here will have none of it.

To conclude this discussion it seems appropriate to quote, once again, "B's" view as expressed in the third of these dialogues, that concerning Bram Van Velde. Here it is quite clear how thorough Beckett's rejection of the plane of the normal is: on this plane there are mere "predicaments" but Beckett wants an art that will face an absolute beyond these, a "Problem" beyond mere "problems":

But let us, for once, be foolish enough  
not to turn tail. All have turned  
wisely tail, before the ultimate penury,  
back to the mere misery where destitute  
virtuous mothers may steal bread for their  
starving brats. There is more than a dif-  
ference of degree between being short,  
short of the world, short of self, and  
being without these esteemed commodities.  
The one is a predicament, the other not.

(PTD.122)

Thus, in mid-career, Beckett states clearly enough that he is looking for an art that will be able to work on the absolute plane and not "turn tail" back to the relative plane of the everyday. In Heidegger's terms we can think of an art that, not content with the merely ontical, is able to work with the ontological.

If we look at the development in Beckett's drama we find a general pattern that is the same as that to be found in the prose. Le Kid is an early satirical sketch of 1931; thereafter it seems that Beckett considered a play about Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale whose



interest lay, for him, in Johnson's physical sufferings and hypochondria and in the (unconsummated) sexual aspect of their relationship.<sup>3</sup> These are the themes of More Pricks Than Kicks and are very much themes belonging to the surface world, everyday reality and the ontical: Corneille, Johnson, historical periods, specific diseases, this is the stuff of the normal world of a disease-prone intellectual. Eleuthéria of 1947, as we have seen,<sup>4</sup> floats profounder concerns but still in a sociological and psychological matrix: Victor is recognizably an angry young man, a rebel against parents and their values and against certain social norms as represented, for instance, by his fiancée. With Godot the "surface" reality of Beckett's drama is drastically and famously reduced. "A country road. A tree. Evening" is all we are given by way of information. Already we find ourselves faced with an art which is finding a way of making ontological statements without resorting to the lecture. Endgame is another step in the same direction: we have come to the end of the normal world, the end of the surface realities; there are no more people, no more sugar-plums, no more pain-killers, no more bicycle-wheels. All that Fall, also written in 1956, may seem a step backwards but it was written in English as a radio play, two factors which quite reasonably encouraged Beckett to attempt a more naturalistic surface (whence all the different noises in the play, from cows mooing to the arrival of a train) and to write with rather more "style" than he does in French (whence Maddy's rather extraordinary use of the English Language.) Krapp's Last Tape works in something of the same way - although here again we find the Endgame motif of jettisoning the past, the surface, and coming to an end, giving up "all that."



Happy Days, written in 1961, bring us up to the date of How It Is and the parallels between the play and the novel are inescapable. The "surface", ontical world is reduced to the contents of Winnie's bag, and Willie's newspaper, and she is stuck, increasingly stuck, in a mound of sand that is equivalent to the mud of How It Is. She too exists according to a pattern, the pattern of her days is the equivalent of the patterns of movement in the novel. Here is a play that may still have a "surface" element in, say, Winnie's psychology, but whose main thrust is clearly elsewhere: Winnie's problem can only be our problem if we take it on a philosophical level. Play works in something of the same way; people are trapped in a post-mortal limbo chewing the dry bones of a mutual memory, unable to communicate directly, forced to utter, unable to be silent. To take Play only as concerned with marriage, personal relationships, the eternal triangle, is surely to be unable to see the wood for the trees. The whole play, with its significant title, is about what all plays and fiction tend to be about, a man, a woman, another person. That is normal enough, banal enough, but to imagine that this normal level is the only level on which the creator of Godot and The Unnamable is working must be based on a mistaken perspective. This is not to deny that Play exists on the level of the everyday - all literature does that, there is no alternative, and indeed this is Beckett's problem, how to find a way of saying the ontological with such pre-eminently ontical tools as fiction and drama. Thus, as we watch Play we are busy working out the relationships between the characters, thinking about affairs and marriages, but we cannot stay at this level. Who, after all, is the "eye" of the spotlight, why is it "playing" with them? Again we must ask why the first woman opens with, and frequently echoes, the lines,

Yes, strange, darkness best,  
 and the darker the worse,  
 till all dark, then all well,  
 for the time, but it will  
 come, the time will come  
 the thing is there, you'll see it  
 (PL.9)

The point here is that Play is a picture of a sort of Limbo where all is over and consigned to the past and to memory, but the darkness has not taken over completely, that darkness in which, paradoxically, you will be able to see "the thing" that is "there". We tend to try to make this pattern fit on the naturalistic level by associating it with the end of the love-affairs of the play: after they are over all is suffering, and darkness seems desirable although it is not a darkness of total despair; perhaps he will come back, perhaps next time the paradise of real love will be offered. But the end of the affair is a parable just as my reference to Limbo is a metaphor. The referent of this parable and this metaphor must await our examination until it can be related to the ontological concerns of Beckett's work as a whole.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have proposed a tripartite division of Beckett's work and I have offered some account of its first two periods. These periods terminate in How It Is (written in 1960) in the fiction, which seems to represent a turning point, a plunge further into the depths, or in Happy Days and Play (1961, 1962) which in some ways offer a dramatic equivalent to How It Is.

In discussing the third period (which, borrowing the title of Finney's book, we might call "Since How It Is") the position reached so far in this chapter must be related to the chapters on Hegel on Heidegger and on Sartre that precede it and offer a synthesis that



will constitute a preliminary overall reading of Beckett.

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Ontological Parables. 1-Sartre

Altogether, Beckett's work represents an attempt to escape from the toils of mere facticity and to take possession of the freedom of the now. The factual is the given, what is, how we find ourselves placed, and it appears in Beckett as the surface world, the given situation. It is not only painful and unpleasant, as witness the uncomfortable world of More Pricks Than Kicks and Murphy, but it is unsatisfactory in principle. Man exists in time and is always projecting forward into the empty future and he can never rest content in the factual even if he should wish to do so. The future, however, is the Angst-engendering abyss of freedom - man can choose anything.

Belacqua Shua is well and truly entrapped in the factual but he struggles for ways out, preferring voyeurism to participation in sex, attempting suicide and so on. Victor in Eleuthéria wants to be "nothing". Murphy seeks escape through trances, mind-deadening work, and takes other routes towards Nirvana. Watt seeks for Nirvana in the negativity of Mr Knott's house. All of these are trying to escape from the commotion and "hugger-mugger" of the worlds into which they are thrown and to find release in the bosom of some absolute.

That Beckett is himself moving in the same direction is demonstrated by his progressive abandonment of interest in the personality of his heroes and his reduction of their factual environments. Thus we can say that just as Murphy goes from London to a lunatic asylum and from a lunatic asylum to the isolated room in which he finds peace in his rocking-chair, and from there to the big silence of death,



Beckett goes from the bustle of his Dublin stories into the increasingly isolated and interior world of his later work. This movement, as the vocabulary I have chosen indicates, reflects the position of Sartrean man and it can be fairly claimed that Beckett's work is a parable encapsulating in literary terms Sartre's theory of the factual and man's freedom. This has been discussed in some detail in Chapter 4 and the task now is to impose some general pattern on the relationship between the philosopher and Beckett, especially in terms of Beckett's third period. The problem for both of them can be stated in the same way: if man is free, if man can be defined as an entity that is always projecting into the future from a present swamped with the inert data of the past (this applies as much to the narrators of the trilogy as to Sartrean man) why is he so profoundly dissatisfied? What, in broad terms, is wrong with man's position?

For Sartre, as we saw, objects exist "in themselves" (en-soi) and man's consciousness exists "for itself" (pour soi); the known, the object, is a being and the knower, consciousness, is a nothing. At its heart, then, human reality is a nothingness "apprehending itself as excluded from being and perpetually beyond being, in commerce with nothing." (BN. 181) Sartre argues that consciousness is a "lack", it wants the fulfilment of being, of being in the manner that factual objects are, but it wants to remain conscious, of course; it wants to remain free. Man's project, then, is to become an "en-soi-pour-soi" whereby, without losing the freedom of consciousness, he can lay claim to objective being: "I am this and this." His project is impossible, freedom is precisely the freedom to project anew, to choose to be otherwise than one has been, to deny being "this and this." Only God would be an "en-soi-pour-soi", and man's "fundamental value" is to become God, it is

the ideal of a consciousness which would be the foundation of its own being-in-itself by the pure consciousness which it would have of itself. It is this ideal which can be called God.

(BN.566)

Man is a "lack" that yearns for a totality that will be no lack, this is why he is inevitably dissatisfied. Man, condemned to be free, condemned to bad faith, lives by acting a role for the benefit of his own consciousness in an unendable quest for permanence. Man is always trying to catch up with being and always failing. The last sentences of the main section of Being and Nothingness run:

The passion of man is the reverse of that of Christ, for man loses himself as man in order that God may be born. But the idea of God is contradictory and we lose ourselves in vain. Man is a useless passion."

(BN.615)

In an addendum entitled "Metaphysical Implications" Sartre stresses that the root of all this lies in the absolute disjunction between pour-soi and en-soi, between consciousness and its objects, between man and his world. Total reality, made up of both pour-soi and en-soi, is an "ideal" that is never attained, it is "an abortive effort to attain to the dignity of a self-cause." (BN.623) Objects are brought into being, made a world for man, by man's consciousness. Man's consciousness is made possible by the existence of things for him to be conscious of. The two sides are mutually dependent but radically separated.<sup>5</sup> Sartre's summary of this is perfectly applicable to Beckett:

Everything happens therefore as if the in-itself and the for-itself were presented in a state of disintegration in relation to an ideal synthesis. Not that the integration has ever taken place but on the contrary precisely because it is always indicated and always impossible

(BN.623)



"Always indicated and always impossible" sounds like a formal version of Beckett's constant paradox: "You must go on, I can't go on." (T.418)

This, then, is one of the versions of reality for which Beckett's work is a parable. His narrators and he himself are consciousnesses, radically separated from their worlds, hopelessly trying to catch up with them so that they can attain some sort of being and "find me... say me." (T.418) Beckett strives constantly for a reduction in the en-soi component in his work, and constantly fails. He gets rid of great heaps of factual environment, cutting out surface realities as he goes, trying to "say" the being of consciousness, which is, by definition, not among them. But consciousness is "nothing" and as the only way it can be spoken of is in terms of being, the speaking is never accurate. The passion is useless and, as the etymology of "passion" indicates, this is, in itself, a process of suffering for which disease and pain are Beckettian metaphors.

This offer of an ontological basis for Beckett as a whole can be applied specifically to his third period with illuminating results. If my picture of his development is accurate we should find that in this period Beckett is least involved with surface reality, most clearly looking for objective correlatives for philosophical insights, with least regard for naturalist criteria and at his most abstract. This indeed seems to be the case. First, by way of an introduction to a discussion of some texts, there is a metaphor that seems appropriate.

Life in More Pricks than Kicks and Murphy is purgatory, thoroughly unsatisfactory in every aspect, including the intellectual. It generates a strong desire for escape into some kind of heaven, and man employs to this end, though we may doubt their efficacy, the



revolver, the bicycle and the rocking-chair. In the early stages of the trilogy life is still purgatorial and death still seems a possible relief. But Malone dies and the voice goes on. The Unnamable finds that, having escaped from purgatory, he is in hell. How It Is and most of the subsequent work explore this hell. Now Beckett is influenced here by Dante, mentioned by name in The Lost Ones (LO.14) and a well-known influence from undergraduate days.<sup>6</sup> Dante conceived the tortures of the damned with horrific clarity and captured marvellously the most significant aspect of hell (and the one which separates it most radically from purgatory) namely that there is no exit from hell and no end to its tortures. These tortures, furthermore, are repetitive and, necessarily, futile.

The purgatory of early Beckett, then, is "mere" suffering. The hell of the later work is interminable futile suffering. This corresponds to our view of the later work as being more directly concerned with the ontological. There is no escape from the radical dissatisfaction diagnosed by Sartre as man's condition. Man is perpetually "condemned to be free" in the famous phrase, it is in principle that man's approach to being is a Sisyphean task. For Murphy, as for the soul in purgatory, there is a way out. For the Unnamable and, a fortiori for the creatures of How It Is and the later texts, there is no exit.

The twin texts Imagination Dead Imagine (completed 1965) and The Lost Ones (completed 1966) gain considerably if they are viewed as experiments in the depiction of a Sartrean hell. Both are post-mortem visions in which we are aware of a narrator looking in on an abstract world distantly taken from Dante.

The first sentence of Imagination runs:

No trace anywhere of life  
 You say, pah no difficulty  
 there, imagination not dead  
 yet, yes, dead, good, imagination  
 dead imagine.

(IM.7)

Sartrean consciousness is set against being, responsible for the creation of its world. Merely by being conscious man inescapably creates his world, there is no alternative. So it is with the narrator here. He starts with the hypothesis of emptiness, the blank page perhaps, where there is "no trace...of life." The narrator is consciousness aware equally, as in Sartre, of objective facts outside himself ("life") and of objective facts inside himself ("imagination".) With a disgusted eye ("pah") he watches the latter at work inventing the former. He has been tempted, perhaps, to think that he has coincided with the void already. If there is no life and no imagination perhaps he is free at last. But the very act of becoming conscious generates a world, either outside or inside the head. Although imagination is "dead" consciousness, condemned to freedom, must invent more imagination: "imagination dead imagine."

Anything perceived, as we have seen in our discussion of bad faith, is immediately alienated from us by our consciousness of the perception. Hence the text continues

Islands, water, azure, verdure, one  
 glimpse and vanished, endlessly, omit.

(IM.7)

Both in the case of real vision and in the case of an imagined scene, after the first glimpse what is perceived vanishes as we try to grasp it by grasping ourselves so that the object of consciousness is no longer the island but my perception of it. This elusiveness of the object is the permanent condition of perception, hence the "endlessly",



but it compromises the status of objects which must then be "omitted" as the conscious mind moves on, as minds always must, to another round of perception and disillusion. The narrator recapitulates Beckett's entire development here. All through his oeuvre he is attempting to "omit", to "discard" and to "have done", in the words of Hamm. So here, having "omitted" a vision, an imagining, the narrator makes a bid for the void, "Till all white." Can he stop here? "White" would seem as blank a place as any other, but imagination, driven by consciousness, cannot stop and it goes on with a movement of thought something like "Where is the white? Like all imagined objects it is in my head." So the sentence runs

Till all white in the whiteness  
the rotunda.

(IM.7)

We may feel that the rotunda is a skull, into which we are being taken by the narrator as he tries to home in on himself; like Murphy's mind it is a hollow sphere. Equally it could be the world. The usefulness of a Sartrean interpretation here is that it makes little difference whether we choose one of these possibilities or whether we insist that Beckett is simply talking about a rotunda of certain colour and dimensions. Here is a way to cut the Gordian knot of Beckett's ambiguity. The narrator is certainly at least a consciousness, a subject; all the other elements in the text are objects which depend on this consciousness and it hardly matters whether they are aspects of his empirical self (his imagination for example), physical objects or imaginary objects. There is no real way of identifying the status of much of the material of a Beckett text, but the ontological statement remains the same: the hell is the hell of consciousness, the hell of being conscious; the problem is not in the



construction of rotundas or in the literal plight of their inhabitants, it lies in the nature of the pour-soi.

To summarize this in terms of our discussion of man as useless passion trying to catch up with being: whatever the status of the rotunda it has being over against the nothingness of the narrator's consciousness. It "fills" him with words but never becomes him.

The main part of Imagination Dead Imagine consists of a description of what is inside the rotunda. It is a glimpse of hell and it is an analogue of the human condition for, needless to say, all this talk of purgatory and hell is mere metaphor, the Sartrean sufferer is always, precisely, in the here and now.

In the rotunda the rhythms of life are reduced to an almost abstract pattern: the temperature rises as the light does and falls as darkness sets in. These patterns follow varying but definite rhythms paralleling the differing passage of the days and the years. In the rotunda the rhythm works in seconds rather than hours or months but the parallel holds, I think, if we consider Beckett's extraordinary difficulties with the apprehension of time exemplified in Pozzo's outburst in the second act of Godot where "they give birth astride of a grave." In Imagination Dead Imagine there are two bodies in the whiteness with their eyes sometimes open and sometimes closed. Man is almost abstractly portrayed, in a minimal version of his world.

The text concludes:

Leave them there, sweating and icy,  
there is better elsewhere. No, life  
ends and no, there is nothing elsewhere,  
and no question now of ever finding again  
that white speck lost in whiteness, to  
see if they still lie still in the stress

of that storm, or of a worse storm, or  
 in the black dark for good, or the great  
 whiteness unchanging, and if not what  
 they are doing.

(IM.14)

Here we find that the narrator, as consciousness aspiring to being, realizes that there is nothing besides being, here represented by the rotunda, and no chance ever again of catching up with his creation. Besides this, we find that "life ends" and then there is nothing, "nothing elsewhere." Man's aspiration to be God, to be being, would be satisfied by heaven, at least in that definition whereby the soul (pour-soi) becomes one with God, that is, absorbed into the reality of the en-soi, while retaining its identity. But this heaven, the en-soi-pour-soi, is the impossible ideal, the unattainable. Finally, the interest in the last sentence is as much in the "human realities" inhabiting the rotunda as in the narrator and his enterprise. Here it is significant that although they seem completely trapped in their horrific facticity they are in fact offered a hint of freedom in that they could now be either in the storm or in the dark or in the light, or, possibly, doing something else. Night and day may come and go, but mankind is free and, so, unpredictable.

The Lost Ones is a simpler text to deal with. Most of its sixty-three pages are devoted to a description of the existence of some two-hundred people existing in a "cylinder." Most of them spend most of their time seeking a way out, climbing ladders, exploring the "niches" in the walls of the cylinder, wondering if the way out may not be above them, in just that part of the cylinder they cannot reach.

That this text is metaphorical, a parable, can hardly be in doubt. It certainly attacks the imagination on a literal level in its



claustrophobia and in the horror of its physical detail, but that is the way parables work. And this parable works at a number of levels. Here is a circle of Dante's hell again, here is man seeking meaning and creating futile patterns, here is consciousness imprisoned once more in a skull or a world. Dante, as we have seen, is mentioned by name: the "non-searchers" in the cylinder, sitting in the Belacqua position presumably, are

in the attitude which wrung from Dante  
one of his rare wan smiles.

(LO.14)

Later we learn of two schools of thought among the searchers, one which swears by the niches in the wall of the cylinder as the means of escape and another which

dreams of a trap-door hidden in the hub  
of the ceiling giving access to a flue  
at the end of which the sun and other  
stars would still be shining.

(LO.18)

This mention of "the sun and other stars" is again Dantean echoing as it does the line at the end of the Paradiso.

L'amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle.  
(Paradiso xxxiii, 145)

There is perhaps also a hint in this context of the line that ends the Inferno where Dante and Virgil emerge from hell to see the stars again.

Inside this hell, with its "sensation of yellow...not to say of sulphur in view of the associations" (LO.36) which is described in terms suitable for a present or past experience, humanity seeks for a way out until it gives up hope and collapses into immobility, "vanquished." This will be the "last state" of all the dwellers in the cylinder and any faint hint of hope is specifically contradicted by the narrator.



And far from being able to imagine their last state when every body will be still and every eye vacant they will come to it unwitting and be so unawares. Then light and climate will be changed in a way impossible to foretell. But the former may be imagined extinguished as purposeless and the latter fixed not far from freezing point.

(LO.15)

There is a hint of hope here in the word "changed", with its connotations of the end of the world and the last trumpet, and in the rather sonorous words "in a way impossible to foretell", but Beckett does foretell what the "last state" of the cylinder will be both here and at the end of the text. The seekers will not find any way out and the situation in the cylinder will not change until they are all "vacant" and "unwitting"; especially, the light will not stop until it is "purposeless." Here we learn that this world, a world of perpetually hopeless ambition and futile search, is dependent on its inhabitants. Without them the light and warmth vanish. This "last state" is the "unthinkable end" towards which existence in the cylinder proceeds "infinitely." The whole business started "in some unthinkable past." Altogether the suggestion that this is a parable about human existence seems inescapable here; the hint is that The Lost Ones are the whole race, trapped in a finite world, overcrowded, suffering, going from an uncomprehended beginning to an incomprehensible end. But the process is identical for the individual consciousness too, going from a birth of which he knows nothing, through the ontological horror of his impossible quest to a death that will annihilate the world. Beckett's hell, like Sartre's, is here and now.

Beckett's work, I am suggesting, can be read as a metaphor for a Sartrean universe, not exclusively but with some profitable results.

• In the metaphor the voice goes on talking, projecting, feeling itself obliged to fill the void before it and creating worlds that reflect the world in which it exists. In the Sartrean reality to which this corresponds consciousness is confronted with the freedom of the future into which it must project and it creates its world as it goes, always dissatisfied with the past and always aspiring to a future in which it can catch up with itself and come to rest. Without something very like this Sartrean parallel what can we make of a passage such as the following from the Texts for Nothing?

I know it's not<sup>me</sup> me, but it's too late now, too late to deny it...what matter how you describe yourself, here or elsewhere, fixed or mobile, without form or oblong like a man, in the dark or the light of heavens, I don't know... and if I went back to where all went out and on from there, no, that would lead nowhere...

(NK.82-83)

What the narrator has said is him is not him (it cannot be him, it can only be an element in his factual past) but it seems hopeless to try to get to him. He mentions two possibilities, however, which are: "describing" himself and going "back to where all went out." The first of these is clearly the kind of project undertaken in texts such as Imagination Dead Imagine and The Lost Ones where sometimes people are "fixed" (Imagination) and sometimes they are "mobile" (Lost Ones), where there is a tension between the formlessness of abstraction and the forms of representation ("oblong like a man") and where the light and the dark alternate endlessly. The second possibility is to go back "to where all went out", which is the position of return to the narrator, of Beckett again before the blank page, back to the blank point of the consciousness, the nothing into which all vanishes, Sartre's "drain-hole in the solidity of being".



## Ontological Parables - 2. Heidegger

For Heidegger, too, Beckett's work acts as a parable. In Chapter 3 this was looked at in some detail, here it can be examined first in terms of Beckett's overall direction and then in terms of the third period of his work.

Taken as a whole, Beckett's work is making much the same attempt as that of his narrators. He moves toward a method for dealing with ontological reality in art, looking for an objective correlative for the way things are on the most fundamental level. There is a strong parallel between this undertaking and Heidegger's own development. Being and Time is an assault on Being (the object of any ontological effort) that fails; similarly Beckett's trilogy is an assault on the way things are. In both cases the writer, having failed in the grand attempt, has gone on to offer further pieces from the same quarry, more ways of approaching the same fundamental problem.

Being and Time opens with the statement that man has forgotten Being and offers to go on the trail of Being in what follows. Much is revealed in the published chapters, especially about the difficulty of confronting Being, but the great work is never finished. Subsequently a number of much shorter works by Heidegger have appeared, increasingly oracular in nature, in which the approach to Being is rehearsed, redirected and made, for example, through the poetry of Holderlin and the fragments of the presocratic philosophers.

Beckett's trilogy opens with the problem expressed more mundanely. How did Molloy "get there"? How did he come to be where he is? The question, which in a sense generates the whole word-mountain, is never answered. Indeed, it becomes reaffirmed as the central



question in, for instance, the opening line of The Unnamable. By the end of the trilogy we are aware of a certain relief, that the art-work in our hands is finished, but the parable it contains states clearly enough that the quest is not over: "I'll go on" are the final words. Subsequently a number of shorter works by Beckett have appeared, increasingly gnomic in nature, in which the fundamental question is rehearsed and redirected but never answered.

This comparison may appear to be largely formal, based on the publishing-history of two writers, but I do not think it is mere coincidence. The "going on" of Heidegger and Beckett is not chosen for superficial or aesthetic reasons, it is inherent in the nature of their undertaking. To catch up with Being is going to take until death (Heidegger on Sein-zum-Tode) or even further (Beckett's parables set in hell.) The project of each writer is the same and it is doomed to the same failure.

In summarizing Heidegger's equiprimordial aspects of man's existence towards the end of Chapter 3 we found facticity and "existence" defined in terms that were later taken over by Sartre and which were discussed at the end of the last section. "Resolute Dasein", for Heidegger, calls itself back from the factual "they", from inauthentic existence, to the "being-there" of the present. This call is the call of "care" that brings Dasein's self back to the authentic now. All this is made possible by time: only Dasein has temporality and thus is the "between" of the phrase "between birth and death" (BT 426)

This "between" is strongly present in Beckett, incidentally, in his tendency to keep in mind beginnings and ends. The trilogy moves from Molloy's mother to Malone's death, The Lost Ones offers

the full life-span of the creatures in the cylinder, Breath offers a cry to be taken as a life between the poles offered by the words "birth" and "death", conflated into "breath." In Chapter 3 I discussed Heidegger's other equiprimordial concepts in some detail and in every case found Beckett to have offered some literary equivalent. Now we are working on a more basic level. Care, time and so on are the equiprimordial existentialia of Dasein, but Heidegger's fundamental project, having "interrogated" Dasein much as Beckett has put his "vice-existers" through their paces, is to approach Being. We feel that "behind" or "beyond" Heidegger's discussion there is an unresolved question and I would propose that the same applies to Beckett: what will remain when he has got it all said?

One of Heidegger's exiguous steps in the direction of Being is the essay The Way Back Into the Ground of Metaphysics of 1949. This claims that "metaphysics", is like the roots of a tree. It is a science that deals with beings (Seinden). But what of the ground in which those roots are planted? That must be Being (Sein). The approach to Being is behind or beyond or above all the considerations of metaphysics. Not only this; Heidegger cuts the ground from under his own feet by observing that the approach to Being is beyond ontology and theology as well (Heidegger, 4, 219.) These "sciences" also deal with beings, he says, and not with Being.

Once more the parallel with Beckett appears. There is a self-destructive element in both our writers, they both deny themselves the only available tools for the pursuit of their goals. Yet the goals remain and the pursuit must go on and here Heidegger has light to shed on Beckett for he explains why it must go on. The explanation is not the sort that would satisfy a court of law, but



at this level of "fundamental ontology", or whatever we are still permitted to call it, the criteria governing the value of statements change so that the radical denial of the existence of the problem, for instance, can be an acceptable solution. Thus in The Way Back Heidegger answers the question as to why Dasein should pursue the goal of Being by defining Dasein itself as "the location of the truth of Being." (p.213) This, of course, is just the burden of some of the opening remarks of Being and Time. Discussing the question of "the meaning of Being" Heidegger states that Dasein is

"that entity which already comports itself, in its Being, towards what we are asking about when we ask this question (the question of the meaning of Being). But in that case the question of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself - the pre-ontological understanding of Being."

(BT.35)<sup>7</sup>

This should assist us with Beckett. His project, and that of his narrators, is not a wilful plunging into difficult terrain in a place where mankind has a perfectly good road to go along, it is a confrontation of what is already and inescapably there. Thus the Unnamable says

I'll recognise it, in the end  
I'll recognise it, the story of the  
silence that he never left, that I  
should never have left, that I may  
never find again, that I may find  
again...

(T.417)

This is one among many examples of narrators in the trilogy referring to some absolute which, while beyond them, is their own. The Unnamable will "recognize" the absolute ("the story of the silence"), it was once his, otherwise how could he talk about leaving it or finding it again? Now it is not present to him, but its absence is



his agony. Clearly the problem is within him, he is already the problem, he already has an understanding of Being that is not enough of an understanding to yield Being itself up to him but which will not let him rest content without it.

Heidegger's view of Dasein as being an entity which already comports itself towards Being is an excellent way of seeing why Beckett's characters, "thrown" on to the page or on to the stage, seem to have some understanding of their ontological environment, seem already to be orientated towards an inescapable but mysterious basis for existence. Thus the tramps in Godot are orientated towards (waiting for) Godot. "Waiting" seems an appropriate metaphor for Dasein's comportment towards Being. Waiting is a condition which does not necessarily effect one's daily projects but which underlies all of them. While performing one's job or gardening or even while asleep one could be described as "waiting", for instance, waiting to get married or waiting for a pay-rise. Waiting can underlie or mingle with all one's consciousnesses or conditions.

Paul Tillich has an exalted view of waiting that may perhaps make this parallel seem less far-fetched. In a sermon actually entitled "Waiting" he has this to say:

Both the Old and the New Testaments describe our existence in relation to God as one of waiting...Waiting means not having and having at the same time. For we have not what we wait for...The condition of man's relation to God is first of all one of not having, not seeing, not knowing and not grasping.

(Tillich, 1, 151)

The tramps, explicitly, do not have Godot, do not grasp his intentions, do not know him, and yet they are conditioned by him and orientated towards him. The parable seems obviously to work if Godot is taken as God but it can operate with any absolute and it is hardly a great step

from this to Heidegger's Being which calls to man and towards which he is already orientated but which he fails finally to apprehend.

Tillich emphasizes the "nots" in his sermon. Waiting is "not having" and so on. This negative aspect of waiting relates to Heidegger's further discussion, in The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics, concerning Being and Nothing. If Being is not a being, he asks, is it then Nothing? This sort of question is based on a misconception, he claims; only a metaphysics (in his acceptation of the term) which deals with mere beings can see non-being as either Being or Nothing indifferently. A more fundamental ontology must hold these separate.

In An Introduction to Metaphysics of 1935, reworked in 1953, Heidegger takes these questions further. He claims that Western man has forgotten Being and that our philosophical language has become devalued. He therefore approaches Being linguistically, analysing the etymology and grammar of the word to see what it will yield. (Heidegger, 3, 43-61). The result of this is that we are left with the Aristotelian-Hegelian position that Being is merely an emptiness. But if Being is empty and indeterminate we are easily able to distinguish it from non-being, so Being becomes a paradoxical entity entitled the "determinate indeterminate." We are thrust back to language once again, for Being is essential to language: if we were to subtract the verb "to be" there could be no language at all.<sup>8</sup>

In What Is Philosophy? of 1955 Heidegger reiterates that man, as Dasein, is always already in correspondence with Being, that this is man's very nature, but that man does not always listen to "the appeal of Being." (Heidegger, 2, 75) Philosophy has an inherent direction, it is always pointed towards Being, and "astonishment" is the condition of philosophizing. "Astonishment is disposition in and for which the



Being of being unfolds" (ibid, p.85). This astonishment is the astonishment of the poet; the poet and the philosopher are linked in that both are at the service of language, they work at extracting the truth of Being from words, they do not seek words to express the truth. Language is the house of Being.

I have summarized these central points from Heidegger's later essays to give an impression of the general drift of his thought after Being and Time. The point of this is that it puts us in a position to see the deep similarities between his thinking and Beckett's.

First of all, Beckett chooses to continue; he responds, through his characters and narrators, to the "appeal of Being". It is as if he were constantly trying to clear away the debris that separates man from Being, and certainly he is using the tools Heidegger recommends - words. His words are a house for Being, an attempt to "get it all said" and to confront the silence of Being.

Then, the relationship between language and Being is taken further by both Heidegger and Beckett, and in the same direction. Language is the house of Being but it is not Being as such. Dasein's capacity for language is identical with Dasein's orientation towards Being. Olga Bernal has said that, for Beckett "le langage est la condition nécessaire du Je (Bernal, 1, 15) and if this "Je" is taken as Dasein the parallel is very close: "Je", or Dasein, only arises through language (Beckett's narrators create themselves by narrating) and through language it confronts Being, but Being cannot come to be by being said. To quote Bernal again, Beckett's work is "une oeuvre qui cherche une autre lumière que celle du Verbe, la lumière de l'indit" (Bernal, 1, 15)



This idea of working through words towards the silence of Being, manifested appropriately by Heidegger himself who, after the word-mountain of Being and Time contracts towards a silent or poetic "astonishment" in the face of the ontological, is clearly applicable to Beckett whose early creations, such as More Pricks Than Kicks or Proust abound in the extravagantly verbal and whose development is towards silence. (Cf. Ihab Hassan's The Literature of Silence. passim)

At the conclusion of Chapter Three, above, I suggested that the Heideggerian call to "exist in the nameless" finds its echo in Beckett, that Beckett's world is striving to be the "nameless" world. This is, of course, a metaphor just as the notion of silence is a metaphor, and here we have, I think, the answer to the facile suggestion that if Beckett wants silence all he has to do is to stop writing. Beckett is not seeking silence as such, he is seeking the Being beyond words for which silence is a metaphor or of which it could become an epithet. His continued creation of worlds is a continuing attempt to find the metaphor, the parable, the objective correlative, for Being. A "nameless" world would be a silent openness to Being and this is what Beckett has been attempting, at least since The Unnamable.

A world full of "names" or "beings" is the world of "mere misery" of the Three Dialogues (PTD, 122), and in this world there is something for the artist (Masson, Beckett) to express. In the silent astonishment that is man's disposition towards Being there is "nothing to express." What metaphors and correlatives does Beckett employ in his self-defeating project of expressing nothing?

Beckett's parables for the Heideggerian approach to Being seem to belong to two types. One is the type that abstracts from beings to Being, that reduces towards the silence. Breath represents this

development at its last gasp. Somehow this type seems logical and comprehensible, an obvious step towards the end proposed. Far more difficult, and therefore more in need-of our attention, is the type of parable, such as Not I, that recreates another fearful world out of the ruins of this one and thus seems to contradict Beckett's fundamental project. This type can perhaps be understood more easily in the light of a comment of Robbe-Grillet (he is discussing the world of conventional fiction and suggesting an alternative):

A la place de cet univers des  
"significations" (psychologiques,  
sociales, fonctionnelles), il faudrait  
donc. essayer de construire un monde  
plus solide, plus immediat.

(Robbe-Grillet, 1, 20)

This appeal for a new novel is a call towards namelessness, towards the construction of solid, immediate and "meaningless" worlds. Is this not precisely what Beckett has achieved in The Lost Ones? In this text we are presented with a world that pulsates before us, solid and immediate enough, but from which all meaning has been excluded. Nowhere in the cylinder can a way out be found.

Lessness (1969) creates another little world, another parable for the ontological position of man. Its first sentence makes explicit that here we have man come home at last, that this is his "true refuge".

Ruins true refuge long last towards  
which so many false time out of mind.  
(LE.7)

By these ruins stands a recognizable human being.

Grey face two pale blue little body  
heart beating only upright.  
(LE.7)

On all sides of the ruin lies "endlessness."

All sides endlessness earth sky as  
one no sound no stir.  
(LE.7)



The ruins are "the same grey" as the ash or grey sand that makes up the environment of the text; the sky and the body that stands by the ruins are grey, too. All other colours have "gone from mind" or are dismissed as "figments" (for instance the white light or the blue sky) with the exception of the often-repeated "two pale blue" (eyes, presumably.) And then, the "four-square" walls are flattened ("over backwards") and the body is the "only upright." So, there were colours, things were once "four-square" although they have now collapsed into ruins, the body ("he") in the ruin dreams of "days and nights made of dreams of other nights better days." (LE.17) The only thing that stands out from the world in the last analysis is human reality. At the final, abstract level, metaphorically represented by monochrome surroundings, man exists alone, alone coloured blue at least in his eyes. But this is his "true refuge" to which "so many" have been "false time out of mind." Here I would suggest that if we take the "true refuge" as being offered to man at the ontological level, it shows him confronted by Being. No longer confronted by beings (all of which are perhaps only figments - "Never but imagined the blue in a wild imagining the blue celeste of poesy." LE.13) and far out in the wastes of silence and namelessness, man, only residually alive and barely recognizable, has an inevitable orientation towards Being and can perhaps take the miraculous "one step" into the absolute:

One step in the ruins in the sand on his  
back in the endlessness he will make it.  
(LE.17)

The man, the "only upright", for whom things were better, happier, for whom things can be all right, need take only one step into the "ruins", the indistinguishable and endless nothingness of his "true refuge" (the Being towards which he is orientated) and things will be real and bright and active as in the old days. Here Beckett offers us the



clue to the colour blue. The man's eyes are blue but so was (and will be) the sky:

On him will rain again as in the blessed  
days of blue the passing cloud.

(LE.15)

Now he is in the greyness, the "flatness", the "endlessness", timelessness and all the other lessnesses. But he is Dasein, the vehicle of Being, the user of the language that is the house of Being and for him (a fortiori for his imagination as for Beckett's imagination or Malone's) there is a world of beings in his past and the possibility of catching up with Being in his future. Lessness offers us man in a world reduced to zero (as the title of the text implies; the French title is Sans) and shows us two perspectives on him: he can only be discussed in terms of past beings (the ruins he faces are only ruins because they were "four square", the grey is only possible because of previous colour) and his return to them (his return, it seems, to himself) lies beyond a step into the absolute (Being) beyond which all will be restored to him ("true refuge long last.")

In reading Lessness we are affected by the imagery, the associations of Beckett's carefully-selected vocabulary, for this is literature and not a scientific report. There is an overall impression of desolation, of man lost in the waste but paradoxically close to his true home, and of other subtler impressions that can be demonstrated by critical analysis. At Beckett's level of abstraction, however, it cannot be adequate to stop at this point, it cannot be enough to say that the reader is given such-and-such an impression. These obviously metaphorical objects (and the text is packed with solid and immediate things) cry out for interpretation. The text itself defies the more superficial interpretations, for instance of psychology, and demands at least the sort of treatment it receives in Brian Finney's Since

How It Is (Finney, 1). Finney at once assumes that a text of this sort is microcosmic and parabolic:

In Lessness, then, the white box (of Ping) has fallen open, the consciousness has been released from its enclosed state of isolation to confront on "all sides endlessness earth sky as one." Man is left confronting infinity, yet still unable to prevent himself from making one more finite gesture.  
(Finney, 1, 21)

This is not uncharacteristic of the criticism of later Beckett, by Finney and others, and it shows a metaphysical reading of Beckett that seems essential. However, my thesis is that after two minutes at this sort of level we start to feel uncomfortable and that our discomfort is founded on the absence of a philosophical matrix within which to understand some of the propositions. Why does Beckett see man's consciousness as being "released from its enclosed state of isolation"? Why is man "unable to prevent himself from making one more finite gesture"? Strictly speaking these questions are unanswerable, unless by Beckett himself, but we can certainly come closer to finding a convincing interpretation for ourselves if we apply ontological pictures to Beckett's picture and take them as far as we can. Heidegger's analysis of Dasein is one such picture.

One thing that emerges from the parallel between Heidegger and Beckett is a narrowing of the gap between the tendency towards silence represented by Breath and the meticulous construction of alternative worlds such as those of Lessness and The Lost Ones. In both cases the aim is to create metaphors. Breath creates a metaphor for an ontological insight by a careful selection of sights and sounds, it is a dramatic literary structure just as real and substantial as King Lear. Lessness selects other materials which, because there can be no sights or sounds on a printed page, consist of a greater number of words, but it too, is an artificial, metaphorical construct which illustrates an



ontological view. In both cases the metaphor is formally self-defeating; in Breath it is at once apparent that the fastest blink of an eye (or, strictly, an infinitesimal moment of time) would have been formally more correct if dramatically less effective. In Lessness it is essential to the subject exposed by the metaphor that the environment of the text is actually invisible, although described, and that in spite of the phrase "he will make it", referring to the "one step", there is "no hold" in the sand. The point is that, given the inadequacy of all metaphors (the impossibility of "expressing") for Beckett's subject-matter, all his failures are failures in the same medium: the ontological parable. That is, they may be beautiful or impressive parables but the ontological reality to which they refer defies successful transposition into art. Thus we have the paradox of complete and satisfying artistic creations for which there is no satisfactory interpretation on principle. To understand this we need the aid of philosophers faced with the same impasse.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Ontological Parables 3 - Hegel

Beckett moves from the surfaces to the depths. He progressively excludes the human, the quotidian and the satiric to produce colder and more abstract pieces whose significance is increasingly to be found at an ontological level. One of the ways in which this happens is that in the exclusion of the surface of reality the existence of the narrator, the presence of the author, are brought into sharper relief. While there are kites and cars, pubs and prostitutes to think about we think about them, but where there is nothing but mud or greyness or breath to think about we are rapidly thrown back to the conceiving mind, the creator.



We have had warning of this, of course, in the constant authorial intrusions into the earlier work such as the opening and closing sentences of Chapter 6 of Murphy where the narrator reveals himself as both present and impatient. Then, more forcefully, we have seen the self-conscious narrator at work in the trilogy where the process of composition is laid bare and the narratives are as much about the narration of narrative as they are about any of the stories narrated. "What tedium", comments Malone, or perhaps Beckett, in Malone Dies. This tendency is radicalized in How It Is with its constant repetition of "I quote" and "I say them as I hear them" where the narrator is obtruding his presence even if only to disclaim responsibility for what he is narrating. This element remains in spite of everything that is thrown away. It appears in different guises; thus in the Texts For Nothing there is a continuing dialectic between "I" and "He" that suggests a breakdown in distinctions which at once raises the question of the status of the narrator. The assumption tends to be that the narrator is "outside" his story, objectifying it just as the reader does, but in the first Text this is disarmingly challenged:

Eye ravening patient in the haggard  
vulture face, perhaps its carrion time.  
I'm up there and I'm down here, under  
my gaze, foundered, eyes closed, ear  
cupped against the sucking peat, we're  
of one mind, all of one mind, always  
were, deep down, we're fond of one  
another, but there it is, there's  
nothing we can do for one another.

(NK.73)

Here, as often in The Unnamable, Beckett offers us a direct paradox, an oxymoron in fact: "I'm up there and I'm down here." "Up there" is the author's position, the writer is "above" his material, controlling it, the "scribe" of How It Is. "Down here" is where the action of fiction takes place, the arena, and the narrator is in both places, he is narrator and narrated, under his own gaze.

In the texts and shorts that make up the third period of Beckett's work, where surface reality is at its least significant, the confusion of identities, the mixing of pronouns and the interest we are consequently forced to take in the narrating self amount to a central issue. Not I offers an emblem of this. On the stage are an illuminated mouth, talking, and a silent auditor, listening. They represent an "I" and a "He" but in no simple manner. The mouth talks, babbling on in a stream of consciousness, interrupted and stimulated by some unheard questioner, but Mouth never utters the word "I". In sharp contrast to so many other Beckett texts, Not I in fact never uses the first person and, indeed, insists that everything narrated happened to "she" not to "I". But the auditor listens, a silent witness, a consciousness too. The "I" is both Mouth and Auditor, both the looker on and the performer, both "up there" and "down here". The Auditor is sorry for Mouth, his gestures being gestures of "helpless compassion". As we saw in the first Text for Nothing 'we're sorry for one another, but there it is, there's nothing we can do for one another.' Not I is about itself.

In a text such as Imagination Dead Imagine the narrator is "inside" the fictional world and explores it with us, proposing ideas and rejecting them like an archaeologist on a dig and even including in the text the "you" whom he is addressing.

No trace anywhere of life, you say,  
pah, no difficulty there....

(IM.7)

In For To End Yet Again the first phrase, which is the same as the title, throws us into consideration of the narrator and of the author. It is Beckett who has ended so often, ended only to recommence; it is the narrating of stories (= living) that seems to go on to an end beyond which, instead of silence, there is the need to end again.



In this text we are once more in the endless lost whiteness of Lessness or Imagination and once more there is the sense of the narrator, again conceived as an eye, looking in on his own creation: "Eagle the eye that shall discern him now" he says of the reduced figure at the centre of this vanishing picture.

What is being offered here is another level of parable. On this level these texts can be read in the light of an approach to the Hegelian Absolute. For Hegel, Being is merely a Scholastic universal rather than the profound mystery it is in Heidegger. The Hegelian system has Being at one extreme and Absolute Idea at the other, and there is a different sort of priority to be given to the concept Absolute Spirit. Absolute Spirit (or Mind, the German is the ambiguous Geist) represents the highest and purest activity of the human spirit, but it is beyond any individual human, an absolute and, as such, identical with Absolute Idea. This is not the place to explain in any detail the logic behind these largest of Hegel's concepts<sup>9</sup> but some glimpse of their mutual structure may be caught in a sentence of Hegel's that orientates us in the right direction for Beckett. It is the last sentence of the last section of the Encyclopaedia.

The eternal Idea, in full fruition of its essence, eternally sets itself to work, engenders and enjoys itself as absolute Mind.

(Hegel, 2, 197)

This describes either God or man. It also describes the process of literary creation so self-consciously engaged in by Beckett and his narrators. Stace's gloss on this part of Hegel is as follows.

To use metaphorical, i.e. religious language, one may say that absolute spirit is nothing less than the spirit of God...and the assertion that absolute spirit is the final phase of the human spirit means no more than that the human spirit is of essentially the same kind as the spirit of God, and that every man is potentially divine.

(Stace, 1, 119)

If we do not use religious language we discover that we are talking about a picture of man in which, finally, a unity is achieved between himself (his consciousness) and some sort of absolute. This unity is strikingly akin to the object of man's "useless passion" according to Sartre. A unity between self-consciousness and the absolute would be the impossible pour-soi/en-soi entity called God. (So we have not been able to stay away from religion for very long.) But this unity is displayed artistically in all its ambiguity in later Beckett who, at his most obscure and paradoxical, seems to me to be struggling to find a parable that will fit the Hegelian view.

Hegel's Phenomenology, which was the subject of Chapter 2, has been described by Richard Kroner as

A modern itinerarium mentis ad Deum,  
 "the journey of the mind to God." The  
 knowledge of God, or the Absolute, is  
 the final goal of this voyage  
 (cf. Hegel, 3, 44)

This progress is somewhat parallel to Beckett's own. He, too, moves towards the absolute, or rather towards an adequate analogy for it, sloughing off surface detail and becoming progressively more abstract as he tries to find the absolute simultaneously entirely outside and entirely inside himself. The Phenomenology concludes with two sections ("Religion" and "Absolute Knowledge") which I said in Chapter 2 that we would have to return to now. These sections are concerned with Absolute Spirit and offer a triad of which this Absolute Spirit can be said to be composed: religion, art and philosophy. What is most striking, from our Beckettian point of view, is that Hegel here proposes an increasingly close identity between individual consciousness and absolute spirit.

The "beautiful soul" is its own  
 knowledge of itself in its pure  
 transparent unity - self-consciousness,  
 which knows this pure knowledge of pure



inwardness to be spirit, is not merely intuition of the divine, but the self-intuition of God Himself.

(Pm.795)

This last embodiment of spirit - spirit which at once gives its complete and true content the form of self, and thereby realizes its notion, and in doing so remains within its own notion - this is Absolute Knowledge.

(PM.797)

This Absolute knowledge, the goal of art, religion and philosophy, depends on a relationship between Self and Spirit, between consciousness and Substance (in Beckettian terms, between "I" and "He") so intimate that even Hegel's dialectical method of showing how antitheses "pass into" one another seems inadequate to describe it. In the end he has to invoke the metaphor of religion - man can achieve not merely an intuition of the divine but also a partaking in the Self-intuition of God himself. This sounds rather too satisfactory, too pleasantly closed a system to be a true parallel with Beckett. More explains it in almost mystical terms:

God creates man's consciousness as an element in his own (God's) self-consciousness and therefore man's consciousness of God is self-consciousness, consciousness of himself as a constituent element of self-conscious God.

(More, 1, 3)

The important thing to remember, however, is that consciousness is radically and in principle separated from its objects, including itself. Thus the final step of union with God is precluded, for all Hegel's attempts at bridging the gap, and we are left with choosing between the proposition that God (the Absolute) is human self-consciousness and nothing more and the proposition that God is still an object for human self-consciousness, in which case he is Other and not "me." For Hegel, paradoxically, man is as much God as it is possible to be without being God. Put another way, human consciousness approaches the absolute and is made of the same stuff as the absolute but remains one step away from

being the absolute.

Here we have a philosophical version of a central problem which Beckett gnaws at in all his work and which appears quite starkly in his third period. Progressively he takes his eyes off the world and tries to confront the Absolute; in Hegel's own way he finds himself bereft of all save himself and having been washed up against that rock (he cannot get rid of himself in order himself to meet the Absolute) he is dragged back like the sea only to form another wave that will uselessly break again against the unforgiving rock. Having "ended" he has never ended and he must end yet again.

In his earlier work Beckett objectifies God in the manner of daily religion. (Hegel sees religion as a stage in the development of spirit, an objective and concrete prototype of the Absolute; at a later stage philosophy, like later Beckett, can try to do without this concretization.) Most of Beckett's references to religion here are satirical, as in the case of Watt and Sam feeling most like God when they are feeding rats to other rats. Sometimes he verges on the mystical, as in the case of Murphy's version of Nirvana or Watt's view of Mr Knott. What is more important for our discussion of this early work, however, is the presence of the author because this, above all, is what will lead on to our Hegelian view; the satirical references to things Christian (and, especially, Catholic) are more to be taken as sallies of wit.

In reading Murphy and Watt we have no difficulty in identifying the author as Mr Beckett. His are the footnotes, the question-marks, the asides to the reader. When we come to the major, post-war work a change is apparent. Godot and Endgame retain a vestige of the old objectification of the divine but it is only superficial and it is



certainly negative; Godot does not come; "the bastard", in Hamm's phrase, "doesn't exist." The point is that by this time Beckett has started to withdraw from the outside world and there is considerable doubt cast on all "off-stage" existence. Similarly, in the trilogy, there is a marked tendency to get rid of the level of existence on which we come across policemen and bicycles and to move inside. What is happening in these plays and novels is happening "in here", that is, on stage, in Malone's mind, within a skull, between the reader's hands. Under these circumstances the presence of the narrator, or Mr Beckett, takes on new significance. At least he, as its creator, is outside the world of the work of art. Of his existence as an external entity there can be no doubt even if everything else is dubious. Thus Beckett moves towards a style of writing in which what he creates is hermetically sealed off from the outside except in so far as the narrator/author acts as a kind of safety-valve.

Beckett gradually shuts the exit-doors and by the time of The Unnamable there is only one door left open - the door to himself as author without which, in a celebrated phrase, nix. This explains why the Texts For Nothing never rose to the status of a novel and were published with less alacrity than the trilogy. They do not represent any advance over the trilogy from the point of view of the process I am describing. One of the Texts even descends to the specificity of "the South-Eastern Railway Terminus" (NK.104), another raises its eyes to "the beauty of the skies" (NK.117). These impurities represent external elements, other ways out, although it must be admitted that in these Texts the "no exit" signs go up often enough, as for instance:

There's a way out there, there's a way  
out somewhere, to know exactly where  
would be a mere matter of time, and  
patience, and sequency of thought, and  
felicity of expression. But the body  
to get there with, where's the body?

(NK.117)

In How It Is, as we have seen, the references to any external possibilities, slender as they are, are undercut by the repetition of "I quote." This is a writer writing the words he hears in his head, what he writes of is a sealed world, a hermetic picture of a perfect, if perfectly monstrous, reality belonging to and depending on an I, an eye, a perceiver.

In this sealed world we are offered lost ones, people and things cut off from the light of the sun and the other stars and illuminated by the only remaining source of light, the only exit, the author's consciousness. This situation is a parable for a Hegelian ontology. In Hegel absolute reality, an all-encompassing concept outside of which there is nothing, is connoted by human consciousness ("I") in Absolute Knowledge. In The Lost Ones there is a complete world with no way in or out, but Beckett (or a narrator) is looking in. Consciousness is essential to the Absolute but radically divorced from it; Beckett's narrative (sometimes "I") is essential to the cylinder of the lost ones, it is the cylinder, but the cylinder is not it.

For To End Yet Again offers a parable for this Hegelian "last state." (The phrase "last state" is frequent in the texts of Beckett's third period and can perhaps be taken as an equivalent to the extreme point in Hegel's dialectic, the arrival of human spirit at Absolute Knowledge.) The world of the text is a world nearly finished and a world still just dimly perceived by an author/narrator represented by a skull. At first the skull is somewhere (in a "dark place") and is bent over a "board" but the place and the board "fade." The skull is the writer, bowed over his table, the place is the world, external reality. This reality fades leaving only "remains", memories, the internal reality of the writer's mind, "remains of the days of the light of day" which are made to "glimmer" so that "all at once or by degrees



there dawns and magic lingers a leaden dawn." The narrative consciousness, like all consciousness, cannot rest at the end, in the darkness; whatever has been jettisoned or has faded the skull will be filled again with images and another text, such as For To End Yet Again, will uncoil its world. Here is the opening section of the text which I have just summarized and interpreted:

For to end yet again skull alone in a  
 dark place pent bowed on a board to  
 begin. Long thus to begin till the  
 place fades followed by the board long  
 after. For to end yet again skull alone  
 in the dark the void no neck no face just  
 the box last place of all in the dark the  
 void. Place of remains where once used  
 to gleam in the dark on and off used to  
 glimmer a remain. Remains of the days of  
 the light of day never light so faint as  
 theirs so pale. Thus then the skull makes  
 to glimmer again in lieu of going out.  
 There in the end all at once or by degrees  
 there dawns and magic lingers a leaden dawn.

(FTEYA.11)

The skull in the void seems an adequate preliminary symbol for consciousness confronting the absolute. And then, from consciousness, because of consciousness, a world emerges; faced with the void man must fill it, or, as Hegel has it, human spirit, aspiring to Absolute Spirit, must connote Absolute Knowledge.

The sense of aloneness, of a flickering speck isolated in the vast dark, is clearly symbolic of consciousness in its own radical subjective isolation. What makes a text such as this so particularly appropriate as a metaphor for a metaphysical view is that the position of consciousness before the Absolute is not only symbolized by the skull in the void and the glimmer in the dark, it is also symbolized by the writer (author, narrator) in the act of creation, he, too, is an isolated moment confronted with the absolute demand of the blank page.

The world of For To End Yet Again, the world created by Beckett, perceived by the skull, is an "ocean of dust" in which "the expelled" stands "stark erect amidst his ruins" (FTEYA, 11 & 12) Here are remains indeed: "the expelled" reminds us of the story of the same name and the dust and the ruins remind us of Lessness and other texts. Into this grey world walk two white dwarfs who carry a litter. They seem to collect "the expelled" and bear him away, a mark of whiteness to be deciphered in all the grey. He falls out of the litter onto his back and the dwarfs, too, collapse and lie still. Their "ruins" are now "marble". The skull is "sepulchral" there is "no fear of your rising again." (FTEYA, 14) Death seems to have overtaken them, but there is still a blue eye open in all the whiteness and greyness, enough consciousness left for the narrator to interpolate the word "hell": this is the "last state" for the "expelled" and for the "dwarfs" and they are buried in the skull, which explains why it is "sepulchral". They have been condemned to the hell within. Now the text ends with a difficult passage. In it we are given a picture of the skull (consciousness) dreaming of a real end (though it is ironic that it is dreaming for that is another form of consciousness and thus no end.) This corresponds to the author/narrator's attempt to "get it all said," to Mr Beckett's desire to be released from his "hell of stories" and to man's hopeless desire for an end to mere knowledge and a union with the absolute.

And dream of a way in a space with neither here nor there where all the footsteps ever fell can never fare nearer to anywhere nor from anywhere further away. No for in the end for to end yet again by degrees or as though swicched on dark falls there again that certain dark that alone certain ashes can.

Through it who knows yet another end beneath a cloudless sky same dark it earth and sky of a last end if ever there had to be another, absolutely had to be.

(FTEYA, 15)



The "space with neither here nor there" is the absolute space (and time) known as infinity. Only when all is absolutely destroyed, in the darkness of the ashes of all knowledge, will it be the end. And if beyond that there is another, if there "absolutely had to be" another, it too would be made of the "same dark", the dark of the "last end."

The aspiration here is not towards literal death. The text is laden with the imagery of death and decay but it is not a literal horror-story. The text is a parable for the anguish of an unfulfilled consciousness, a parable for the last ontological gasp of the Hegelian dialectic.

\* \* \* \* \*

### The Wellhead

If these philosophical analogies work we have perhaps found a useful way of reading Beckett, particularly in his darker moments and particularly in the third period of his work. In addition we have tested the common assumption that Beckett is a special sort of writer connected in some way with philosophy, especially Existentialist philosophy. Having come so far it seems necessary to go a little further and to see if our reading implies a possible religious or mystical interpretation of Beckett. We have been employing concepts such as the Void, Being and the Absolute in a way that is suggestive of another step.

It is well established that Beckett is profoundly conscious of the detail, flavour and mystery of the Christian religion. One of the best recent studies to elaborate on this is Hersh Ziefman's "Religious Imagery in the Plays of Samuel Beckett" (in COHN, 3) written in 1975. This essay extracts all sorts of hidden religious references and undercurrents from several plays making a special tour de force

when considering Embers. The religious texture of this play is often well-hidden, but Ziefman uncovers it suggesting, for instance, that Bolton's name is necessarily associated with Christ's being nailed (or bolted) on to the cross, and that Holloway's name is a reversal of Christ's claim to be the positive "way", in an impressive argument. Similarly Endgame and Godot are combed for their implicit religious content (the explicit content is clear enough) and the results confirm Beckett's near-obsession with the story of Christ, particularly of his death: the tramps support Lucky (Act One) and Pozzo (Act Two) one on each side like the thieves at the crucifixion; Endgame is set in a skull because the crucifixion took place at Golgotha - the place of the skull, and so on. This imagery, Ziefman says, constitutes "a Kyrie eleison of suffering and despair." (Cohn, 3, 93) I quote all this from this recent critic to suggest that Beckett's work is perhaps even more permeated by religious motifs than has been commonly thought, but my main purpose is negative: Ziefman's essay is most interesting but it does not get us much further with an overall interpretation of Beckett's meaning. For that a different sort of approach seems indicated and I would offer as a model for this the approach taken by Richard Coe in his essay "God and Samuel Beckett" of 1965 (in O'Hara, J.D. 1). This opens:

The universe of Samuel Beckett is certainly as complex as that of any other living writer. Yet it is not a dream universe, like that of Jarry or Ionesco. It is a metaphysical vision of ultimate "reality", constructed out of innumerable threads of logic tightly interwoven, out of fragmented arguments from Proust and Descartes, from Geulincx, Malebranche and Schopenhauer, from Dostoievsky, Wittgenstein and Sartre, each seemingly irrefutable, each in its right and proper place, and each rushing headlong towards an inescapable impossibility.

(O'Hara J.D. 1, 91)

It is my contention, too, that Beckett's work is a vision of ultimate



"reality" and it is for this very reason that I have tried to connect him to certain philosophers.

The result of this approach is that the monstrous and cruel God revealed behind Beckett's works when they are read on Ziefman's level of religious imagery now stands a chance of appearing more positive. I believe that it is possible to offer some mitigation of Beckettian pessimism out of Beckett's own mouth and that this depends on a philosophical reading of his work.

The conventional reading of Beckett arises from the assumption, quite correct as far as it goes, that he provokes bitter laughter at the delusory props of religion and then, casting them away as much as he is able to, considering his obsession with Christ crucified, plunges into an ever-darker world. His tone becomes less humorous and more desperate, the mind of his narrator seems to be increasingly near the end of its tether.

This reading is obviously valuable. However, if we go more deeply into the question and try to probe the meaning of Beckett's imaginative constructs we find tentative answers in parallels with certain philosophers, and, where Beckett is at his most obscure particularly, where we feel the need for explanation most acutely, the appropriate philosophical analogues turn out to be surprisingly positive - Heidegger on the trail of Being, Hegel thinking through to the Absolute. It is for this reason that in the last chapter I have dealt with our three philosophers in reverse order, starting with Sartre's Nothing and moving towards the more positive ontologies.

This alternative movement which I am suggesting, a movement that is actually towards a more positive world-view, works beyond the consolations of conventional religion and beyond the comforts of the

sort of philosophy with which Beckett became acquainted academically. Thus normal Christianity is derided and Geulincx, Descartes and the others left behind. Like Heidegger, Beckett is trying to go beyond all that, beyond a world-view based on belief, beyond mere "metaphysics" and beyond reasoning of an Aristotelian sort. But, like Heidegger, he has not thus left philosophy behind (we can think of Heidegger's attempt to achieve a more "fundamental" ontology) and there is always left open the possibility of some profounder view of religion.

The road through and beyond conventional religion and some sorts of philosophy is followed by our three philosophers and by Beckett. Sartre limits himself to the road and nothing but the road - in fact it is towards Nothing that he travels. This Nothing looms large for Beckett but does not seem adequate as a description of his final meaning. As Coe puts it:

Behind "reality" lies the void, the Nothing, "than which naught is more real"; and it is from this concept of the void that Beckett's people start out on their pilgrimage in search of a new and more acceptable version of God.

(O'Hara, J.D. 1, 100)

This takes us beyond Sartre just as we are beyond Christian orthodoxy and Rationalism. Our next stage is Heidegger, who certainly seemed close to Beckett in our discussions of him in this chapter and in chapter 3. Heidegger's view of Being has been adopted, as is well known, by some modern theologians, notably Bultmann (cf. Macquarrie, 2, *passim*.) Beyond this perhaps mystical possibility lies Hegel whose conception of the Absolute, although he himself would reject the label "mystic", must appear mystical to atheistic materialism of the sort with which Beckett is normally credited.



We have left behind the well-known level of Beckett's anti-Christianity and we are trying to learn what is beyond this Sartrean pessimism and how far we can take Beckett into it. What we are trying to discover is, finally, what Beckett means on an ontological level. This is as far as a philosophical reading can take us and, indeed, as far as any reading can take us. In passing I might observe that we need some explanation that will satisfy the paradoxical fact that Beckett's work is often found to be strangely comforting. It is a hideous journey on which he takes us, to the edge of the abyss, and when he reaches the edge (the end, of Endgame perhaps) he plunges over. If there is something Dantesque about this image that is not accidental, but is it merely the dark of Hell beyond the void, or is there light?

Chapter 6 of Murphy, the famous disquisition on Murphy's mind, takes us into a cynical impasse which is the direct result of rationalist dualism. A way out is, however, suggested, and it is a mystical exit at least in tone, in that the third "zone" of Murphy's mind allows Murphy to conceive of himself as "a mote in the dark of absolute freedom." (M.79) This religious-sounding claim is considerably developed and expanded in Watt. In this novel we find traces of mysticism in the visit of the Gall's to Mr Knott's house, in Mr Knott himself, in the picture in Erskine's room of a centre and a circle and in half a dozen briefer references. The earliest trace of the mystical in Watt, however, and also the longest and most convincing, is to be found in Arsene's "short statement" which concludes part one of the novel. This is not the place for an extensive analysis of its twenty-five pages, but the following considerations may help to establish the more positive philosophical and religious view of Beckett that I am attempting.

Arsene's speech is packed with implicit Christian references which are not intended satirically or ironically. Christ crucified is not present here as a source of parody or bitter joking but in a more positive guise; in fact there is no escaping the conclusion that Arsene is talking about Watt (or any other newly-arrived servant of Mr Knott's) as though he, Watt, were Christ.

The man arrives! The dark ways all behind,  
all within, the long dark ways, in his  
head, in his side, in his hands and feet...  
(W.37)

The juxtaposition of these parts of the body reminds one irresistibly of Christ with his crown of thorns, the lance in his side, the nails in his hands and feet. And Beckett offers a background for his picture which suggests some of the details of early Italian paintings of the crucifixion.

The long blue days for his head, for his  
side, and the little paths for his feet,  
and all the brightness to touch and  
gather. Through the grass the little  
mosspaths, bony with old roots, and the  
trees sticking up, and the flowers  
sticking up, and the fruit hanging down...  
(W.37-38)

The trees are perhaps the crosses and the fruit their victims. Arsene remembers when he, too, was the man newly arrived:

How I feel it all again, after so long,  
here, and here, and in my hands, and in  
my eyes, like a face raised, a face  
offered, all trust and innocence and  
candour, all the old soil and fear and  
weakness offered, to be sponged away and  
forgiven.

(W.38)

Surely behind this picture stands an image of Christ, innocent but offering himself so that sin, the "old soil", may be forgiven.

My present purpose is to go beyond this, beyond Beckett's playing with the detail of Christianity, to a more direct confrontation of the absolute, but it is worth reflecting for a moment on the significance



of this passage. Arsene, Watt, and other men, as servants of Mr Knott are specifically likened to the suffering Christ. Beckett's motivation here seems to be an extreme and radical version of Christianity: what is so terrible about the suffering of the Son of Man is that it is undergone not by God but by man. Arsene, however, as we have said, goes beyond this.

The man has arrived at Mr Knott's house, having found the door he has "passed beyond it", Mr Knott's house is the beyond. In this place he is "in his midst at last" and can taste "the long joys of being himself" for here, although he may at first be indignant at having to work, he comes to see that work for Mr Knott is also ("and indeed chiefly") for himself. "Calm and glad" he goes about his work, "calm and glad he witnesses and is witnessed." (W.39-40) But Mr Knott's servants do not rest here; one day something slips. Once they have reached the point where what is "inside" them and what is "outside" them have become indistinguishable, in other words once the Sartrean-Hegelian identity of man with God has been established, a profound feeling of alienation erupts.

My personal system was so distended at the period of which I speak that the distinction between what was inside it and what was outside it was not at all easy to draw. Everything that happened happened inside it, and at the same time everything that happened happened outside it.

(W.41-42)

Here Beckett offers us a man who has become the man - God, the *pour-soi-en-soi*, who has connoted Absolute Knowledge. But he goes beyond this; something changes even in the absolute, something slips. Arsene observes that the old yearning was in fact happiness and that to have arrived at last is not happiness.

The glutton castaway, the drunkard in the desert, the lecher in prison, they are the happy ones.

(W.43)

This could be taken as a symbol of Beckett's whole endeavour: to fall silent in the bosom of God is the goal but no answer, the end but no conclusion.

Arsene feels he has to offer an explanation of the "change" that takes place, and we await his explanation with impatience as it will offer, perhaps, Beckett's conception of what is beyond the absolute, beyond God. Arsene says this:

In my opinion it was not an illusion, as long as it lasted, that presence of what did not exist, that presence without, that presence within.

(W.43)

This conforms to the theme of negativity in Watt; Mr Knott is not; resting in his establishment is only the first step, the second leads man to see that the master for whom he works is absent, but this absence is not a simple absence: beyond man's quotidian conception of God lies an ineffable mystery, a "presence which does not exist." The servants revolve about Mr Knott "in tireless love" (W.61) and they "nest a little while in his branches" (W.56) but there is a problem about him in that he must have had a beginning and he must have an end or else how is time possible? The answer to this is the equivalent of the "change" which offers the "presence which did not exist." Arsene wonders:

Or is there a coming that is not a coming to, a going that is not a going from, a shadow that is not the shadow of purpose, or not?

(W.56)

This speculation is at once in keeping with the mystery of Arsene's "change" and with the sort of paradoxical mysticism in which the mysterium tremendum both is and is not. Later in the novel, in the episode of the Galls father and son, Watt himself experiences the change and he describes it in these same paradoxical terms, terms



expressive of the God beyond God and of the identity between the Void and the Absolute: "a thing that was nothing had happened." (W.73)

After the Second World War, Beckett's work developed and matured as we have seen. One text stands out from this period as exploring further the theme of positive assertion of some exit, some beyond, some hope however empty and paradoxical. This is the significantly-entitled The Calmative written in French in 1946. (NK.25-42)

This text contains the usual Beckettian miseries, which I shall take as read, and the usual uncertainties as to who is writing and whether the events narrated can seriously aspire to the status of existent entities or not. But it is also remarkable for its optimistic elements. The ancient (or dead) narrator enters a town by the Shepherd's Gate (the Good Shepherd's? anyway he sees not "a soul" there, "only the first bats like flying crucifixions") on a Sunday. He sits on a capstan at the waterside and gazes out to sea, but there is no help there (in this "dead haven") and he looks at a flagstone because he has always found that help comes from the earth not from the sky. When he looks up he sees a young boy in biblical rags holding a goat; the boy offers him a sweet but departs before they can converse. When the narrator himself moves on he describes his "getting back" (to where?) as "not...quite empty-handed." He goes into a church, which he prefers to call a cathedral, and he climbs a tower at high speed, coming out into the night. Back in the street he accosts a stranger to ask the time, or something, and he discovers to his surprise that he has "no pain whatever" at this point. He falls asleep on a bench and wakes up to find a man beside him with whom he talks. The man, on discovering that the narrator has no money, seizes him but starts talking kindly to him in a way that generates a moment of optimism:

Between the caressing voice and the fingers  
rowelling my neck the contrast was striking.  
But gradually the two things merged in a  
devastating hope, if I dare say so, and I  
dare.

(NK.39)

After this the man offers him one of his one-and-sixpenny phials in  
exchange for a kiss, which is duly given. Then he departs "with  
radiant smile."

My pains were back, but with something  
untoward which prevented my wrapping them  
round me.

(NK.40)

The text ends with the dawn, for all this has taken place at night,  
but the dawn seems as much within him as without. He cannot see the  
stars:

For the light I steeped in put out the  
stars, assuming they were there, which I  
doubted, remembering the clouds.

(NK.42)

This can certainly be read as if the light is now emanating from the  
narrator. A comparison could be made with the dawn that rises on  
Watt, once Arsene has left, bringing in "the day without precedent  
at last." (W.63)

I think there is a suggestion in The Calmative that the narrator  
meets the young Christ, who behaves with characteristic charity. This  
boy is holding a sinner in the shape of the goat and is taking him  
away to look after him. Appropriately the narrator feels, after the  
boy has gone away, that he should have asked him what his father did.  
Once again we move from the presence, the existence, of the man who  
was Christ to the absence and ineffability of the nothing that is God.  
And for once, man, in the shape of the man on the bench, is kind and  
good and this immediately creates a "devastating hope." Interestingly  
this follows on a visit to a church and an attempt to ascend to God.  
God is not there at the top of the tower, but hope seems to be



available at ground level, at the level of man. Yet the Cathedral is necessary, the Christian background is essential, humanism is certainly not enough, the absent God, God the Void, is paradoxically ever-present.

This more positive element in Beckett (though we have seen some reasons to qualify that adjective) is also present in the trilogy. Besides a large number of anticlerical and antireligious jokes in the Moran section of Molloy and many other veiled and overt references to Christianity, the trilogy contains some remarkably mystical and even optimistic moments. I shall limit myself to a discussion of the most striking of these. It is to be found in the closing section of the first part of Molloy. Here, more perhaps than anywhere in Beckett's mature work, the clouds lift for an instant and the narrator seems to have arrived.

The last forty-five lines of the first part of Molloy are an undoubted relief and the traces of light they contain must be looked at against the darkness of what precedes them.

And true enough the day came when the  
forest ended and I saw the light...I  
opened my eyes and I saw I had arrived.  
(T.90)

Molloy has fallen into a ditch and this has woken him up, it seems. He looks across the vast plain onto which he has emerged from the forest and on the horizon he sees the towers and steeple of a town. He relapses for a few lines into the old bitterness ("How could I drag myself over that vast moor?") but then the light returns with an optimism quite astonishing in Beckett.

Fortunately for me at this painful juncture...I heard a voice telling me not to fret, that help was coming. Literally... Don't fret Molloy, we're coming.  
(T.91)

This seems to be somewhat devalued by the ensuing sentence ("Well, I suppose you have to try everything once, succour included, to get a complete picture of the resources of their planet.") But Molloy hears birds ("skylarks perhaps") and then, nearing the end of the one huge paragraph that constitutes his monologue, he says "I did not fret." Thus he obeys the voice. "It must have been spring" he says. He remains in the ditch, he even longs to be back in the forest, but it is "not a real longing", he has arrived somewhere.

The tone of this passage is a remarkable lightening of the Beckettian gloom, but one aspect of its specific content seems to demand analysis from a philosophical point of view. Whose is the voice?

In conformity with our earlier discussion in which the external voice in Beckett's prose is taken to be the author's I think we can see this voice as Beckett himself reassuring Molloy that he is getting to the end and that he will soon be relieved by Moran. However, also in conformity with that discussion, this relationship between creator and created is also that between God and creature. In An Existentialist Theology John Macquarrie summarizes this development in sentences which can easily apply to Beckett.

If man in the ocean of what is, possibility entangled in facticity, were the whole picture, the only logical outcome would seem to be that heroism of despair, the determination to be myself within and in spite of the limitations of a miserable existence, which we associate with Heidegger and Sartre... But on the other hand, if anxiety discloses the possibility of a ground of being, being itself, beyond the contingency of both Vorhandenheit and Existenz, that is, divine Being, man's finitude may be interpreted as creatureliness.

(Macquarrie, 2, 80)

With the introduction of the external voice, especially the voice bringing comfort and succour, Beckett is opening the door to "being



itself" and to a view of man not as self-dependent, as has often seemed the case in other parts of his work, but as "creaturely."

Enrico Garzilli, in Circles Without Center (a pregnantly Beckettian title if we think of Watt) suggests that we can take this a stage further to a synthesis of an atheistic view with the Christian view in an overall interpretation of Beckett. This is based on the Prologue to St. John's Gospel in which Logos and Theos are seen as created (and, especially, created word) and creator. This duality underlies the relationship between God and Man, between God the Father and Christ, between the narrator and the narrated, between self-consciousness and the self. Here we have a development of the Sartrean slogan about man making himself: "The person is most himself when he creates...The person ultimately is one who is creating himself as he lives" (Garzilli, 1, 144-149) This brings in Heidegger, Sartre and a Christian view and in fact also echoes Hegel. Consciousness, for Garzilli, "looks back" at its creator just as human spirit, in Hegel, looks at Absolute Spirit.

Thus the "voice" of Molloy is God, the Absolute, the author, the self, consciousness. Under a certain light all these are identical. This mystical intuition is perhaps the final depth in Beckett, the mystery towards which his parables aspire but which they never attain for the end of all these attempts, if they are unsuccessful, is failure, and, if they are successful, is nothing. As Coe puts it

Just as the Self is the inconceivable  
Néant of silence behind the words of  
language, so also "God" is the Total  
Nothing behind the word which is  
Creation.

(O'Hara, J.D. 1, 111)

Or, as Charles Glicksberg has it in Modern Literature and the Death of God,

When literary nihilism...is carried to an  
extreme, it then comes full circle and

approaches the condition of "negative theology"...The literary nihilist... is a mystic manqué.  
(Glicksberg, 1, 99)

Beckett strenuously attempts the impossible and his task is profoundly human, whence perhaps the consolation to be derived from his work. Nietzsche expresses his position with strange accuracy:

But that "other world", that inhuman, dehumanized world which is a heavenly Nothing, is well hidden from men; and the belly of being does not speak to man, except as man.  
(Thus Spake Zarathustra, p.59)

It is in the impossible going-on that Beckett, as man, speaks to us as man and it is within that discourse that Being is to be found, if anywhere. Like all metaphysical entities, Being, God, the Self, the Absolute, "are brought into being by someone's wielding them in discourse."<sup>10</sup> Beckett creates the conditions of metaphysical possibility in his discourse, and at times this is quite specific. I can conclude with two examples.

The Voice (appropriately enough) in Cascando speaks this over the Music:

no further...no more searching...to  
find him...in the dark...to see him...  
for whom...that's it...no matter...  
never him...never right...start again  
...in the dark...done with that...this  
time...it's the right one...we're  
there...nearly...finish -

(p.44)

This voice, the voice of philosophical discourse, the foundation of the possibility of metaphysics, is Beckett's own and offers an abstract summary of his total project. "Words", in Words and Music offers a more concrete, and therefore more metaphorical, summary of the same ontological process with its inevitable, but unattainable, mystical goal:



Then down a little way  
Through the trash  
Towards where  
All dark no begging  
No giving no words  
No sense no need  
Through the scum  
Down a little way  
To whence one glimpse  
of that wellhead.

(P.35)

Notes to Chapter 5

1. The most thorough chronology of Beckett's work that is readily available appears, on unnumbered pages, at the beginning of Ruby Cohn's book Back to Beckett (Cohn, 2.)
2. I give the date both in conformity with academic convention and for a purpose. The purpose is to point out that the Three Dialogues, although now printed together with the essay on Proust of 1931, are not in fact early, Joycean work like that essay (and like Beckett's essay in Our Exagmination...., of course) but belong to his second, post-war period and are the artistic theory of the man then currently engaged upon the trilogy and the Texts for Nothing.
3. For information concerning this lost work cf Deirdre Bair's biography, Samuel Beckett, pp.253-257.
4. Cf. for example, the end of the "Existenz" section of Chapter 3, above.
5. Here, as a Beckettian aside, we can remember the Unnamable's statement already quoted: "I shall say therefore that our beginnings coincide, that this place was made for me, and I for it, at the same instant." (T.298)
6. Beckett's essay on Joyce in Our Exagmination of 1929 is entitled "Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce." The first story in More Pricks than Kicks of 1934 is "Dante and the Lobster", etc, etc.
7. This may need a précis to render it intelligible. I suggest: "Man is the being that questions Being; the meaning of Being must lie inside man; the answer lies within the question; Being only is a question for man because man is by definition the questioner of Being."
8. Heidegger is presumably speaking metaphorically here. There are languages that do not possess the verb "to be", Arabic for example, although the concept "being" can be present in such languages.
9. For a clear and concise summary of the relationship between Absolute Idea, Absolute Spirit and their associated concepts cf. Stace, 1, pp.101 ff.
10. Elmer Sprague, Metaphysical Thinking, New York: OUP, 1978 (p.4.)



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