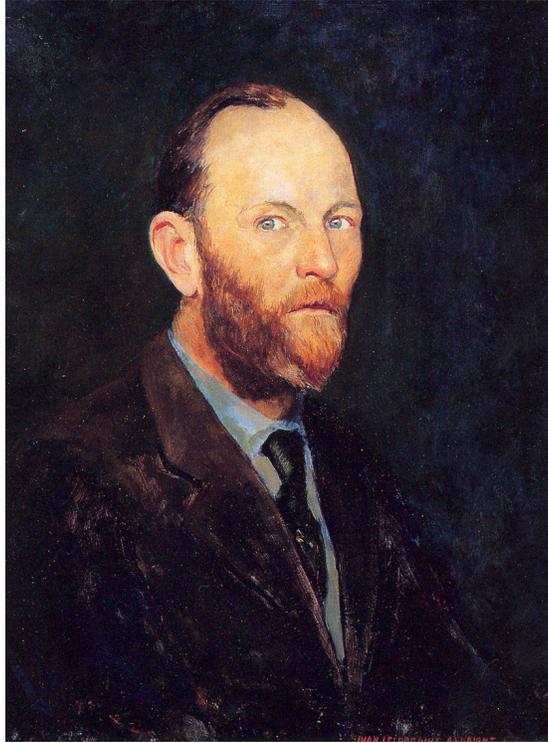


# Beckett and the Philosopher

They come on like they're peaceful but inside they're so ugly! They trip through the day! And waste all their thoughts at night! Now how can I say it! And how can I come out! When I know I'm guilty! Hang on to your seat! Hang on, but I know that you're gonna see the light. - Brian Wilson



*The Philosopher* by Ivan Albright

They told me there were others, I don't regret not knowing them. The moment the silence is broken in this way it can only mean one thing. Orders, prayers, threats, praise, reproach, reasons. Praise, yes, they gave me to understand I was making progress. Well done, sonny, that will be all for today, run along now back to your dark and see you tomorrow.

Samuel Beckett, *Unnamable*

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## Project Overview

The following is a three-part study exploring the challenges involved in reading Samuel Beckett. Starting with the problems philosophy has had in understanding his work, the study investigates the possibility of, and ultimately encourages, a meditative reading.

The first section of this study takes as its point of departure the difficulty philosophy has had in penetrating Samuel Beckett. In exploring the philosophical failure to impose meaning upon his work, the project turns to Simon Critchley, Theodor Adorno, and Jacques Derrida in an attempt to articulate what would be involved in a true engagement of his texts. It primarily focuses on Critchley's notion of the text as work or achievement, as opposed to *a* work or *an* achievement. Pursuing this prospect, the following examines Beckett's *Unnamable* and the way in which it resists the imposition of frameworks from without as well as the development of frameworks within. Linking this to a concern with the status of identity, the study ultimately suggests that there exist works of similar accomplishment in the meditative tradition. The section ends with the proposal that one properly engages with *Unnamable* by meditating, and not simply reading, the work.

The second section, a mapping of *Unnamable* as a meditation, begins with a warning. Though the study links points in Beckett's work to stages in meditation, this is not to suggest a reading, and therein to fail along with past philosophical efforts. Its purpose, rather, is to promote a meditative reading of the text, the only true engagement of the work. As for content, the middle section maps in *Unnamable* the meditative struggle to release attachment to thoughts, to their negations, and finally,

to silence, toward experience in the world without self and its attachments. It also carefully develops the two difficulties of this struggle as noted in *Unnamable*: neurotic negation and fear of others.

The third and final section attempts to further promote a meditative reading in bringing to light the relationship between Beckett's work and Shantideva's 8<sup>th</sup> century meditation *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. The problems noted in *Unnamable* are, as it turns out, the central themes of Shantideva's meditation. The section, in exploring how Shantideva works through the problems in *Unnamable* – namely, by meditating on compassion before the emptiness of self – emphasizes that the problems in *Unnamable* are indeed meditative problems. As such, the section works to further promote a meditative reading of Beckett.

### **What is *Unnamable*?**

#### I. The Approach

Before exploring philosophy's failure to enter Samuel Beckett, a word concerning the approach. To philosophically engage a text in the most productive fashion requires knowledge of what has already been written of it, knowledge of what has been achieved in analysis and interpretation. The case of Samuel Beckett's works, in particular *Unnamable*, the pinnacle of the *Trilogy*, is a unique one: nothing convincing has been achieved despite extensive analysis and interpretation. But nothing is a strong word; it suggests a foundation at least, in that philosophy might be able to dismiss Beckett. Simon Critchley puts it best in the title

of a book concerning the topic: analysis has yielded *Very Little...Almost Nothing*. Beckett's texts invite philosophical readings, only to stand firmly against them.

To philosophically approach *Unnamable* therefore requires not a grounding in secondary source material, but what has only emerged in recent years: an exploration of the problem that philosophy has had in entering Beckett. Does not a critique of secondary sources require a critical analysis of these texts? As Beckett might say, "Some of this rubbish has come in handy on occasions, I don't deny it, on occasions which would have never arisen if they had left me in peace. I use it still, to scratch my arse with" (Beckett 298). Taking this blanket dismissal to heart, the following will primarily focus on why philosophy fails, treating secondary sources only as examples of failure.

## II. Philosophical Failure

Simon Critchley is largely recognized as providing the most insightful work on Beckett, and with reason: he clearly articulates the problem philosophy has had with Beckett. He writes to this extent,

The peculiar resistance of Beckett's work to philosophical interpretation lies...in the fact that his texts continually seem to pull the rug from under the feet of the philosopher by showing themselves to be conscious of the possibility of such interpretations; or, better, such interpretations seem to lag behind the text which they are trying to interpret; or, better still, such interpretations seem to lag behind their object by saying too much: something essential to Beckett's language is lost by overshooting the text and ascending into the stratosphere of metalanguage (Critchley 141).

Critchley is referring here to an integral part of many of Beckett's works – a conscious rejection of interpretive frameworks. This is never clearer than in

*Unnamable*, where the voice of the text, despite an obligation to speak, refuses to continue speaking in any way – to adopt any worldview, essentially – that would promote its entrance into the world as an individual. The voice never develops into a voice of its own, so to speak, picking up to immediately toss aside a number of philosophic views as if rummaging through a trash heap. Philosophy in general is no doubt ridiculed throughout *Unnamable*: “They must consider me sufficiently stupefied, with all their balls about being and existing” (Beckett 320). Again:

Warmth, ease, conviction, the right manner, as if it were my own voice, pronouncing my own words, words pronouncing me alive, since that’s how they want me to be, I don’t know why, with their billions of quick, their trillions of dead, that’s not enough for them, I too must contribute my little convulsion, mewl, howl, gasp and rattle, loving my neighbor and blessed with reason (Beckett 335).

The voice of the *Unnamable* scoffs at particular traditions as well, notably that flowing from Kant: “*De nobis ipsis silemus*, decidedly that should have been my motto. Yes, they gave me some lessons in pigsty latin too, it looks well, sprinkled through the perjury” (Beckett 329). The voice, moreover, is conscious of the problems it will cause for those wishing to impose frameworks: “Paltry priests of the irrepressible ephemeral, how they must hate me” (Beckett 316). This full-blown dismissal, Critchley argues, effectively thwarts not only an authoritative reading but any reading at all. Insofar as one must truly engage with a text in analysis, and insofar as any serious reading of *Unnamable* would come to understand that the voice would cast it aside as ineffective in achieving expression of the voice, it seems *Unnamable* represents the point at which theory collapses on itself.

### III. What to do?

Even if a sub-Cartesian interpretation concerning the inexpressible nature of the self fails, even if a Heideggerian interpretation concerning being as language fails, isn't there still something to say philosophically of a text like *Unnamable*? (Critchley 142). Critchley denies the possibility, but does note the importance of looking to the attempts of Derrida and Adorno to enter Beckett to better understand what one can do with a text like *Unnamable*.

Early in his study, Critchley writes, "philosophically mediated meanings are precisely what we should not be in search of when thinking through Beckett's work" (Critchley 142). He seems to be suggesting a way of thinking through Beckett's work that does not involve study and its multifarious platitudes of metalanguage. What would that way be? The issue emerges again in Critchley's discussion of Derrida, who he cites as recognizing an interesting element behind the refusal of Beckett's work to accept meaning. According to Critchley's reading of Derrida, "the work of Beckett's work, its work-character, is that which refuses meaning and remains after one has exhausted thematization" (Critchley 145). This work, that which "is both revealed through reading and resists reading", seems to align with what Critchley means in thinking through the text. That is, he suggests that to think through the text means to work through the text, not read through it.

What this means becomes slightly clearer in Critchley's discussion of Adorno. He praises Adorno for recognizing that Beckett abandons the subjective security of existentialism "like an outmoded bunker", that he refuses "to translate the meaninglessness of absurdity into a meaning for existence" (Critchley 149). He

further agrees with Adorno that understanding the text therefore means carefully “reconstructing the meaning of the fact that is has no meaning”, without posing a new meaning (Critchley 151). Thinking through the text, then, involves engaging in the very work of the text itself; it involves working through the loss of meaning to achieve meaninglessness (Critchley 152).

Again, what to do? Unfortunately, Critchley’s unique turn to explore the possibility of thinking through Beckett’s text to achieve something other than a reading ends here. He begins to think of the achievement of meaninglessness solely in terms of delineating a genealogy of nihilism (certainly a philosophical move), ultimately turning to an admittedly philosophical reading of the *Trilogy* with pitfalls of its own (albeit almost apologetically, as if he could not do otherwise) (Critchley 160).

#### IV. What Not To Do

Though Critchley’s work ends here, it would benefit from clarification, in particular that which can be had in looking to another of what one might call the secondary-secondary sources. Richard Begam’s work is interesting because despite a considerable amount of talk as to the importance of respecting the philosophical problem of Beckett, Begam turns to fall short in a philosophical analysis without knowing, or at least acknowledging, his ultimate failure. His failure, however, is not without value, for it clarifies what Beckett’s text achieves in achieving meaninglessness.

Begam writes:

A large and impressive body of commentary exists on the subject of Beckett and philosophy. Generally, this literature has proceeded along one of two lines: either it has been genetic, detailing the kinds of intellectual influence a particular philosopher exercised over the writer – say Descartes, Geulincx, Berkeley, Schopenhauer, Mauthner; or it has been intertextual, mapping areas of theoretical confluence that connect Beckett with thinkers like Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre, Wittgenstein, Derrida...My paper will examine Beckett in relation not to a set of philosophers but to a philosophical problem...I propose...to grapple directly with Beckett's ideas, attempting to give them definitional shape and focus...I am not interested in 'playing the labeling game,' or 'pigeon-holing' one of the most complicated and nuanced writers of the twentieth century (Begam 13).

In this, Begam is stating his intent to avoid imposing upon Beckett in a way that thinking of his texts through philosophers, even through them by means of a comparison, is guilty. Yet, for all of Begam's apparent humility and a desire to avoid 'pigeon-holing', he inevitably turns to an analysis of Beckett's texts that classifies them as centrally concerned with the dichotomy between speech and writing. That Begam wants this approach to stem solely from Beckett's own ideas is certain, but his appeal to prior criticism in his apparently improved form of analysis is telling (Begam 27). Whether one writes with an appeal to philosophy or not, whether one tries to read into a text in its own right or not, philosophy still makes its way in. Further, even if Begam could piece together a philosophy that emerges self-contained in one or more of Beckett's texts, the work of those texts, especially that of *Unnamable*, would inevitably toss it back to the garbage heap with the rest.

Again, Begam's failure not only highlights how difficult reading Beckett really is, but sheds light upon Critchley's insight into the work's achievement of meaninglessness. Specifically, Begam's failure highlights how Beckett's work achieves both imperviousness to the imposition of frameworks (and the meaning therein) and the preclusion of the possibility of drawing out a framework from within

the text through which to pass the text (and the meaning therein). (One thinks at this point of Beckett's fascination with regurgitation and excrement.)

## V. What Not To Do, Part II; or, The Postcolonial

That the meaninglessness the text achieves involves avoiding frameworks imposed from without as well as those that arise from within, and therein all identity, calls one's attention to Beckett's situation as a postcolonial writer. The postcolonial must not only discard imperially imposed identity (and the frameworks of interpretation embedded therein), but also the illusion that the withdrawal of force leaves in its wake: that of pre-colonial identity. That is, the postcolonial must fight both identity as imposed from without and aspirations to identity from within.

To call the work-character of *Unnamable* postcolonial seems awfully close to imposing a historical interpretation upon the text. However, given that the postcolonial character of the work emerges in an analysis of the philosophical problem of the text (and not the text itself), and in an effort to move toward a way to think through the text rather than read it, the move skirts failure. Of course, it will only continue to do so insofar as this approach to *Unnamable* uses the insight as a guide to working through (as opposed to reading through) the text; it will work only insofar as the avoidance of the assumption of identity (the establishment of the meaninglessness of identity) is understood to be the achievement, and not the topic, of the work.

## VI. The Postcolonial As A Guide, But To What?

If Critchley's title is any gauge for progress, this analysis has yet to violate Beckett's work; very little has been said about it...almost nothing. Turning then to work through the text without reading it, a question arises: Are there other texts not about overcoming the assumption of self (both the donning of and identification with), but that achieve this meaninglessness? Is there a kind of work such that it is not a work, but work, the ultimate Wittgensteinian ladder?

I draw here from my study with the students of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the 11th Trungpa tülku. Trungpa, a teacher in the Kagyü lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, recognized for its dedication to meditation practice, was a pioneer in East-West philosophy. My study was with advanced disciples and graduates of his Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, and centered upon just such texts. Shantideva's *Way of the Bodhisattva*, an 8<sup>th</sup> century Indian text reputed to be best preserved in the Tibetan tradition, is a prime example: it is a highly complex work meant to be meditated, not read, toward a realization of the emptiness or meaninglessness of self (and the frameworks imbedded therein). Similar, and more recent texts, include Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche's (also of the Kagyü lineage) *Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness* (1977).

Given that the particular course of a meditative reading is never understood to be universally valid – that is, that meditations are treated as ladders to be released upon the achievement of emptiness – a meditative treatment of *Unnamable* would seemingly avoid philosophical failure. Further, given that meditation works toward the achievement of the emptiness of self, the realization that there exists no enduring perspective, a meditative reading would also seemingly achieve Critchley's

meaninglessness. To explore this possibility, I will provide in the following section an account of such a reading.

A final word: Foucault claims in *Madness and Civilization* that his project is to conduct an archaeology of the silence of the mad. Derrida calls him on this in *Writing and Difference*, suggesting that Foucault's prosecution of reason (at least in this initial volume) is suspect. "...such a trial may be impossible," he writes, "for by the simple fact of their articulation the proceedings and the verdict unceasingly reiterate the crime" (Derrida 35). The present undertaking is not only suspect, but very clearly guilty for the same reason: to claim that Beckett cannot be read and then to propose a reading is self-defeating. So, then, a warning: to relate the meditation is to put it down on paper as a set reading. As a result, the following articulation fails in and of itself to fully think through Beckett's work. It is meant, however, for a different purpose: to encourage meditation of *Unnamable*, the only true engagement of the text.

## ***Unnamable as a Meditation***<sup>1</sup>

### I. Meditative Guide

In the following meditative account of *Unnamable*, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche's *Turning the Mind into an Ally* is invoked as the primary source on meditation. Mipham Rinpoche, the son of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche and an incarnate lama, is not appealed to in any affirmation of his particular authority on

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<sup>1</sup> I call the voice of *Unnamable* 'Beckett' for practical purposes, not because I believe him to be attached to his name. I do believe him, however, to be working through a meditation.

meditation as a whole, but because he provides a clear articulation of the basic philosophy of meditation for the inexperienced Western student. Again, the parallel to be established between Beckett's work and the meditative practice is not undertaken to provide a comparison with the overarching concern of supplying a reading (for it has already been made clear that such a reading fails to enter the text). It is meant solely to promote a meditative reading of *Unnamable*, the proper engagement of the text.

## II. Meditation

*Unnamable* begins as all meditation begins – staying in, within, “instead of going out, in the old way, out to spend day and night as far away as possible, it wasn't far” (Beckett 291). And it fails just as quickly. The practice begins with a decision to refrain from projecting the self and its frameworks of reality in order to examine the substance of one's being, and therein one immediately begins again to project, however stripped the self and reality might be (Mipham 42). Beckett writes, “Perhaps that is how it began” (Beckett 291).

The struggle is underway, and as is essential to the meditative process, the technique employed is present to the mind. Beckett writes, “[while] things are to be expected”, when “a thing turns up, for some reason or another, take it into consideration...I flatter myself it will not take me long to scatter them, whenever I choose, to the winds” (Beckett 292). In *Unnamable* Beckett has reduced himself to thoughts, and thus by “things” he means those things defined fully by thoughts, and therefore thoughts alone. This is characteristic of meditation, where one seeks to recognize a thought and release it as unsubstantial, refraining from forceful

repression and the inevitable rebound of the mental state and its projected reality (Mipham 43-44). Beckett begins then, where meditation on emptiness begins: with a concern to continue rejecting the existence of any self and reality despite their persistence in releasing attachment to the thoughts that one assumes to ground them. Most telling is his initial acknowledgement and immediate release of the thoughts grounding the self: "I say I. Unbelieving" (Beckett 291). He reaffirms the technique throughout the meditation: "Bah, any old pronoun will do, provided one sees through it" (Beckett 343).

Technique in mind, the meditation progresses. Not only does Beckett reject a naïve acceptance of thoughts as definitive of the world, but also the negations of those thoughts as somehow establishing a higher ground within that world. At the opening of the meditation he reflects, "What am I to do, what shall I do, what should I do, in my situation, how proceed? By aporia pure and simple?" (Beckett 291). He immediately clarifies what will need to be done in order to remain being at a loss of what to say: "Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, sooner or later" (Beckett 291). Being at a loss of what to say, he sees – rejecting the entire ego realm – will involve protecting against the supposed comfort of higher ground in negation. (Ego here means what Beckett calls "my next vice-exister", vice referring both to the self's corruption and its inevitable failure (Beckett 315).) Further in the meditation he develops this more clearly: "...you always overlook something, a little yes, a little no, enough to exterminate a regiment of dragoons" (Beckett 303). At this stage, he is acknowledging his negations and releasing them as definitive of his self and reality, affirming only his technique (and only as technique, not a ground in itself). In short, he loosens the reins on his mind (releasing a neurotic hold on

negation) and in so doing, gains better control. This begins the move from self-control to self-mastery described by Mipham Rinpoche (Mipham 109).

As Beckett refines his method by releasing attachment to it in terms of releasing the substantiality of negations in the ego realm, he begins to construct an alternative realm, a here as opposed to there. Thus, while overcoming attachment to technique in terms of negations within the ego realm, he becomes attached to technique insofar as it can be employed to reject the entire ego sphere (affirmations and negations) towards the creation of an alternative space. Initially, here is only exploited syntactically to emphasize the insubstantiality of the ego realm: "I have been here, ever since I began to be, my appearances elsewhere have been put in by other parties" (Beckett 293). Again: "...here all change would be fatal and land me back, there and then, in all the fun of the fair" (Beckett 295). This changes, though, as he comes to regard this space as distinctly removed from the supposed history of a self: "Hell itself, although eternal, dates from the revolt of Lucifer. It is therefore permissible, in light of this distant analogy, to think of myself as being here forever, but not as having been here forever" (Beckett 296). This pristine ground, apparently untainted by the ego realm (and therefore pervaded by said realm in its dependence), subtly shifts from useful as a syntactic tool to valuable as an actual ground; there is a way to think, and therefore be, it seems for Beckett, other than historically. Beckett comes to think of this place as the location of his being: "Did they intrude on me here? No, no one has ever intruded on me here. Elsewhere then. But I have never been elsewhere" (Beckett 297). The alternative realm is progressively reified:

It's a lot to expect of one creature, it's a lot to ask, that he should first behave as if he were not, then as if he were, before being admitted to that peace where he neither is, nor is not, and where language dies that permits of such expressions (Beckett 335).

Again, this marks another stage in the progression of meditation: the emergence of the remains of the attachment to method (as a ground) released previously in terms of negations within the ego realm, and the construction (in thought) of an alternative space. The Tibetans refer to this laxity as *chingwa*, where one sinks into oneself as if drowning. It is a dangerous pitfall in meditation, for it feels as if one has stopped thinking when in fact the mind has merely been suppressed to another level (Mipham 109-110).

As Critchley recognizes, the goal of Beckett's work is not the silence of this alternative realm; the meditation continues. Beckett writes,

I add this, to be on the safe side. These things I say, and shall say, if I can, are no longer, or are not yet, or never were, or never will be, or if they were, if they are, if they will be, were not here, are not here, will not be here, but elsewhere (Beckett 301).

That is, what he says here (in the alternative realm), and will say, has already fallen into the historical insofar as it is "no longer" or "not yet". The same for what he will not say: the words "never were" said or "never will be" said. Thus, what words do arise in the alternative realm, including those that form thoughts defining that realm itself, are immediately "elsewhere" – the ego realm. In short, Beckett here comes to question the affirmation of the alternative space that arises from the force of his negation of the ego realm. This space, it appears, manifests only in thoughts that should be released; they are not higher order thoughts.

Beckett begins to understand the need to reject the alternative realm as he enters more deeply into the meditation on emptiness. He writes,

I who am here, who cannot speak, cannot think, and who must speak, and therefore perhaps think a little, cannot in relation only to me who am here, to here where I am, but can a little, sufficiently, I don't know how, unimportant, in relation to me who was elsewhere, who shall be elsewhere, and to those places where I was, where I shall be (Beckett 301).

He cannot think of here, he realizes, without some reference to the vice-exister and its ego realm, even if it is their negation. The alternative space, then, far from overcoming ego reality, relies on the historically-based ego realm and its affirmation-negation dualism. To recount: that the thoughts that define the alternative realm manifest in the ego space calls the former into question; that the thoughts never exist apart from dependence on the ego realm renders the alternative space as insubstantial as that of the ego.

In rejecting both the identities he assumes of the ego realm (Mahood and Worm), as well as the I said to exist in the alternative space, Beckett reveals the depth of his meditation. He writes, "The essential is never to arrive anywhere, never to be anywhere, neither where Mahood is, nor where Worm is, nor where I am, it little matters thanks to what dispensation" (Beckett 338). In meditative language, he has begun to empty the emptiness of self and its reality towards a realization of dependent co-arising. That is, in rejecting the ego sphere and then its alternative, Beckett moves towards reconciling the two in a nondualistic way. That this occurs in the meditation is clear. At one point, Beckett struggles to understand an intuition about going on peacefully without being silent (being there while here; or, thinking without attachment), even if he in the end falls back into a reification of here as a desirable place. He writes to this extent:

And yet I do not despair of one day sparing me, without going silent. And that day, I don't know why, I shall be able to go silent, and make an end, I know it. Yes, the hope is there, once again, of not making me, not losing me, of staying here, where I said I have always been, but I had to say something quick, of ending here, it would be wonderful (Beckett 302).

Shortly thereafter, he attempts again to understand the nondual less dualistically, reflecting, "If I could speak and yet say nothing, really nothing..." (Beckett 303). That Beckett never reaches a direct insight into dependent co-arising, however, is evident in the famous last words of the text, where he continues his struggle towards reconciliation: "...where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (Beckett 414).

Though at the end Beckett seems to have reached an impasse in the meditation, at the same time he poises himself to enter another based on two central difficulties encountered in *Unnamable*. First, as suggested by the distaste he shows for his ego, Beckett is excessive, even neurotic, in his rejection of the self. He writes, "At first sight it seems impossible. Me, utter me, in the same foul breath as my creatures" (Beckett 300). His disgust for his self – that which is more alluring than any creature, despite shared origin in thought – pervades his forceful rejections. Beckett recognizes this attachment to technique as problematic for the achievement of a nondual existence that dissolves the dichotomy between the ego sphere and the alternative realm. He writes,

...what prevents the miracle is the spirit of method to which I have perhaps been a little too addicted. The fact that Prometheus was delivered twenty-nine thousand nine hundred and seventy years after having purged his offence leaves me naturally as cold as camphor (Beckett 303).

Beckett admits here that like Prometheus, his sacrifice (of his vice-exister) is a false one, or at least incomplete. That is, he seems to recognize that his addiction to negation was not fully overcome when he abandoned negations within the ego realm as definitive of a self and reality, nor when he abandoned the alternative realm as a space above that of the ego sphere. He appears to understand that it is his continuing attachment to self, even that so stripped as to be grounded solely in method, that prevents him from emptying emptiness and entering the nondual.

The second difficulty has to do with others grounding the self. These are not the others of a solipsistic mind. Those others, referred to as Malone and Co., are echoes of his self. Beckett writes of one almost fully released, "...his voice is there, in mine, but less, less. And being no longer renewed it will disappear one day, I hope, from mine, completely" (Beckett 309). The others he fears, by contrast, are actually others in the world. In particular, he's concerned with their calling upon him to engage in the ego realm, to accept their assumed existence and the accompanying world as reality itself. He writes of their attempt to draw him out of the meditation,

They also gave me the low-down on God. They told me I depended upon him, in the last analysis. They had it on the reliable authority of his agents at Bally I forget what, this being the place, according to them, where the inestimable gift of life had been rammed down my gullet. But what they were most determined for me to swallow was my fellow creatures (Beckett 298).

Beckett's annoyance is understandable given his project. The proposal of a rational, stable reality is dangerously alluring, making his already difficult release of thoughts (the ground of the ego realm) all the more difficult. He writes, "Yes, more than once I almost took myself for the other, all but suffered after his fashion, the space of an instant. Then they uncorked the champagne. One of us at last!" (Beckett 316).

Beckett is above all concerned with the persistence of the others. He remarks,

They told me there were others, I don't regret not knowing them. The moment the silence is broken in this way it can only mean one thing. Orders, prayers, threats, praise, reproach, reasons. Praise, yes, they gave me to understand I was making progress. Well done, sonny, that will be all for today, run along now back to your dark and see you tomorrow (Beckett 337).

Filled with false hope, it is an unending task to refuse to believe that he is making progress. He reflects at a later point, "Do they believe I believe it is I who am speaking? That's theirs too. To make me believe I have an ego all my own, and can speak of it, as they of theirs" (Beckett 345).

Beckett writes near the end of the text, "...they'll have to come and get me if they want me..." (Beckett 378). It is a rare occasion, though, that he is confident enough in his meditation to suggest that the others have a demanding chore in front of them if they wish to drag him forth. It is far more frequently the case that he must work to avoid their touch. He laments at one point: "...if only they'd stop committing reason, on them, on me, on the purpose to be achieved, and simply go on, with no illusion about having begun one day or ever being able to conclude" (Beckett 385).

Again, as with his insight into his addiction to method, Beckett acknowledges that the problem is his. It is his fear of others, not the others themselves, that ultimately grounds the self. The insight begins in the meditation in reflections where he recognizes that others are not concerned with him, but in successfully projecting their own selves and realities. He notes, "They are not interested in me, only in the place, they want the place for one of their own" (Beckett 369). Gradually, he comes to focus primarily on the others' struggle and their suffering, not his own:

What can you expect, they don't know who they are either, nor where they are, nor what they're doing, nor why everything is going so badly, so abominably badly, that must be it. So they build hypotheses that collapse on top of one another...Ah a nice mess we're in...a nice mess each one in his own peculiar way (Beckett 372).

Beckett remains focused so long on the suffering of others that at one point he borders on compassion, noting, "poor devils...they're like me" (Beckett 386). At this stage in the meditation, the comments through the text concerning a desire to listen begin to make sense - Beckett at some level understands that it is not others who reinforce his attachment to ego, but how he responds to them. In this vein, he writes, "...the better to listen, but peacefully, victorious, without ulterior object" (Beckett 310).

To recount: at the close of the meditation, Beckett understands that he has an attachment to ego that reinforces itself in an ungrounded fear of others. Given that these difficulties prevent the nondual experience of thinking without attachment to an illusory self and reality, the meditation ends, but in a way that prepares for another.

### **Meditative Therapy**

It's true! The aspiration's made in ignorance.  
But for the total vanquishing of sorrow,  
The goal, which ignorance conceives, should not be spurned  
(Shantideva 9: 76).

#### **I. Beckett and Bodhichitta**

To clarify again the importance of the foregoing analysis, it is essential to stress that it is meditating through Beckett's *Unnamable* that evades the

philosophical problem, not this account. To put it another way, the attempt in this analysis to encourage the meditative approach fails to capture Beckett's work. But it fails knowingly. The sole aim of this project is to promote a meditative reading, not to justify it. This approach is taken because there is no other.

To further emphasize the need for a meditative turn in the effort to promote its undertaking, this analysis turns now to where Beckett's meditation ends and where another begins: the apparent impasses of *Unnamable*. Both problems – (1) attachment to method as a ground for self, or more specifically, the neurotic rejection of the ego, and (2) the closely related fear of others – are conveniently, and revealingly, the two central themes developed in Shantideva's 8<sup>th</sup> century meditation *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Before exploring how the difficulties of *Unnamable* are dealt with in Shantideva's meditation, further prompting the need to meditate *Unnamable*, it is helpful to examine what the meditator of Shantideva's text hopes to achieve: bodhichitta.

Recent translators of the text provide this introduction:

According to tradition, bodhichitta is said to have two aspects, or rather to exist on two levels. First, one speaks of absolute bodhichitta, referring to the direct cognizance of reality. This is the wisdom of emptiness: an immediate, nondual insight that transcends conceptualization. Second, there is relative bodhichitta, by which is meant the aspiration to attain the highest good, or buddhahood, for the sake of all...as Shantideva gradually reveals, absolute and relative bodhichitta are two interdependent aspects of the same thing. The true realization of emptiness is impossible without the practice of perfect compassion, while no compassion can ever be perfect without the realization of the wisdom of emptiness (Padmakara 3).

To condense, there is a joint path to enlightenment: that of emptiness of self and that of compassion. Though the approach seems circular, Shantideva and Buddhist philosophy as a whole see the achievement of each as possible because they

compose man's natural state. Each path needs the other: the pursuit of emptiness of self ultimately requires compassion, and the pursuit of compassion ultimately requires emptiness of self. By pursuing both emptiness of self and compassion one prevents one or the other from becoming a ground for self rather than the path to release of self. Such a balance in one's approach, it is taught, will lead to the successful dissolution of ego.

## II. Absolute and Relative Bodhichitta: Therapeutic Meditation

Beckett's admitted problems in *Unnamable* are, again, the forceful rejection of self and fear of others. From *Unnamable's* perspective, then, the meditation cannot progress because it cannot avoid the neurotic negation of self, especially because a fear of others still lingers (despite later development of compassion), feeding the force of the negating self. From the perspective of bodhichitta, Beckett's meditation hits a wall because the energy poured into the emptying of self comes to ground a negating self that the development of uncertain compassion cannot overcome. Understanding this problem to be common, Shantideva's *The Way of the Bodhisattva* centers upon meditations on compassion with the aim of undercutting the last bastion of the self – the distinction between self and other – before meditating directly on emptiness.

*The Way of the Bodhisattva* makes it clear from the beginning that others, since they suffer in the same condition as he who assumes a self, do not purposefully inflict suffering, and therein should not be the focus of one's energy. Shantideva is clearest about this when he writes,

Although indeed it is the stick that hurts me,  
I am angry at the one who wields it, striking me.  
But he is driven and impelled by anger—  
So it is his wrath I should resent (Shantideva 6: 41).

This meditative verse, however, and others like it appearing through the text, only echo Beckett's insight into the others' lack of concern with him. In short, further meditation on it would seem to gain no ground.

To supplement such insights, in the fifth, sixth, and eighth chapters of his work Shantideva goes through three main meditations on compassion: the first on why not to fear others, the second on why one should cultivate compassion (even from what remains an egocentric mindset), and the last on the dissolution of the distinction between self and other. In the first part, he begins by attempting to shift the meditator's attention to the mind's responsibility in its own suffering:

Wandering where it will, the elephant of mind,  
Will bring us down to pains of deepest hell.  
No worldly beast, however wild,  
Could bring upon us such calamities (Shantideva 5: 2).

This isn't to say that there are not others who promote one's suffering. Rather, it is to say that those others, ignorant of their condition, lack the responsibility as regards their perpetuation of suffering. Shantideva writes, again stressing one's responsibility,

When in wild, unruly crowds  
We move with care to shield our broken limbs,  
Likewise when we live in evil company,  
Our wounded minds we should not fail to guard (Shantideva 5: 19).

In short, while one seems to have reason to fear others, Shantideva suggests, one is more appropriately fearful of the self; to be otherwise is to evade the responsibility inherent in the recognition of one's condition. In fact, others, ignorant of the human condition, deserve compassion. He writes of the benefit to be had in taking responsibility,

By simple binding of this mind alone,  
All these things are likewise bound.  
By simple taming of this mind alone,  
All these things are likewise tamed (Shantideva 5: 5).

In the sixth chapter, Shantideva moves to meditate on why one should work to cultivate compassion (beyond the reason of common suffering). One should meditate, he suggests, on how others benefit the self:

Because of them, and through the exercise of patience,  
My many sins are cleansed and purified.  
But they will be the ones who, thanks to me,  
Will have the long-drawn agonies of hell.

Therefore I am their tormenter!  
Therefore it is they who bring me benefit!  
Thus with what perversity, pernicious mind,  
Will you be angry with your enemies? (Shantideva 6: 48-49)

Here Shantideva suggests that not only do the desires and anger of others allow one to practice patience (invaluable to meditation), but that they also, in cutting short one's own desires and therein problematizing the ego, help one to remain on the meditative path. Not only do others aid in meditative practice, Shantideva asserts, but by existing as an object to be desired or envied, one exists as a hindrance to the others' enlightenment. That is, others help the self while the self hinders others. Shantideva compels the meditator to compassion:

For if a patient quality of mind  
Is mine, I shall avoid the pains of hell.  
But though indeed I save myself,  
What of my foes, what fate's in store for them? (Shantideva 6: 50).

Near the end of the sixth chapter, Shantideva engages with the first two meditations on compassion simultaneously:

Praise and compliments disturb me,  
Sapping my revulsion with samsara.  
I start to covet others' qualities,  
And thus all excellence degenerates.

Those who stay close by me, then,  
To ruin my good name and cut me down to size  
Are surely protecting me  
From falling into ruin in the realms of sorrow (Shantideva 6: 98-99).

As for those few others that are friends, he explains in the first of the verses, they are dangerous, but only insofar as one allows them to be (in shirking responsibility for the perpetuation of one's suffering). One should value most others highly, he explains in the latter verse, because their opposition helps one forward on the meditative path. Briefly: others are largely helpful in the cessation of suffering, and while at times problematic, are only so for he who fails to guard himself against allure.

After redirecting fear from others to the self and then promoting compassion for others (an egocentric compassion insofar as others are seen as useful for the self), Shantideva ultimately turns to a third and final meditation on compassion dissolving the distinction between self and other (in effect promoting a more selfless compassion that will not and cannot be entirely selfless until the self is emptied). He begins by appealing to common experience in the ego realm:

Strive at first to meditate  
Upon the sameness of yourself and others.  
In joy and sorrow all are equal.  
Thus be guardian of all, as of yourself (Shantideva 8: 90).

Given this common experience, he questions the need to distinguish one's self from others, even in this realm:

Since I and other beings both,  
In fleeing suffering, are equal and alike,  
What difference is there to distinguish us,  
That I should strive to have my bliss alone? (Shantideva 8: 96).

With this introduction, Shantideva turns to ground the necessity of compassion on the emptiness of self. If there is no self, he argues, distinguishing the suffering of self and others is useless – to most fully overcome the suffering involved in the illusion of self is to overcome all perpetuation of the illusion and therein all suffering. He writes to this extent,

And if there is no subject suffering,  
Mine and other's pain—how are they different?  
Simply, then, since pain is pain, I will dispel it.  
What grounds have you for all your strong distinctions?

Thus the suffering of everyone  
Should be dispelled, and here there's no debate.  
To free myself from pain means freeing all;  
Contrariwise, I suffer with the pain of beings (Shantideva 8: 102-103).

The meditations on compassion go far deeper than need be explored in this analysis. It is enough to map the three main movements and the way in which such meditation pre-empts the ego from clinging to fear of others as a final ground once a meditation on the emptiness of self is undertaken. Surely, such a movement would

aid the meditation that is *Unnamable* insofar as it plays upon redirection and finally the dissolving of a fear that is already suspected of being ego-based.

Shantideva's therapy concerning the fundamental problem – attachment to self in meditation on emptiness – is developed in the infamously intricate ninth chapter on wisdom. He poses the problem in an interchange between student and master:

“If that which is deceived does not exist,  
What is it,” you ask, “that sees illusion?”

But if, for you, these same illusions have no being,  
What, indeed, remains to be perceived? (Shantideva 9: 15-16).

In terms of *Unnamable*, must there not be a negating-self? Shantideva answers here, and further explains elsewhere, that if the illusions grounding the self are fully released (and the self is not subtly persisting in its fear of others), that which perceives illusion, in being grounded solely in illusion, will also be released.

Appealing to the same sense of awareness *Unnamable* encounters in the alternative realm, the student presses further, grasping for self:

“But,” you say, “it's like the flame  
That perfectly illuminates itself” (Shantideva 9: 18).

Shantideva responds to the question through the master, noting that darkness is a promoting condition for the existence of the flame, not a hindrance:

The flame, in fact, can never light itself.  
And why? Because the darkness never dims it! (Shantideva 9: 19)

Just as darkness allows for the flame to burn brightly (promoting rather than hindering), he implicitly suggests, the ego realm allows for awareness (as in that of

the alternative realm). That is, the ego realm doesn't hinder a self-supporting alternative realm, but rather provides the conditions that allow for it. And, given that the ego realm is one of illusions, the alternative realm and the awareness have no actual ground, and therein no substantial existence.

Ultimately, Shantideva states the underlying point clearly: when one truly releases attachment to illusion, whether understood as real or as nonreal, the attachment to the self perceiving illusion will be released as well. He writes,

By training in this aptitude for emptiness,  
The habit to perceive substantiality will fade.  
By training in the view that lacks all entity,  
The view itself will also disappear.

“There is nothing”—when this is asserted,  
No “thing” is there to be examined.  
For how can nothing, lacking all support,  
Remain before the mind as something present?

When real and nonreal both  
Are absent from before the mind,  
Nothing else remains for mind to do  
But rest in perfect peace, from concepts free (Shantideva 9: 32-34).

He stresses the need to continue meditative practice again further into the meditation, suggesting as regards *Unnamable* that following a confrontation with fear of others, one need only continue the practice of emptiness to overcome addiction to method:

“But when the process of analysis  
Is made in turn the object of our scrutiny,  
This investigation, likewise, may be analyzed,  
And thus we find an infinite regress.”

If phenomena are truly analyzed,  
No basis for analysis remains.  
Deprived of further object, it subsides.  
That indeed is said to be nirvana (Shantideva 9: 109-110).

### III. Implications

To follow Shantideva's meditations in the above analysis is to do more than simply progress through the apparent impasses of *Unnamable*. Insofar as these meditations direct one through difficulties mirrored in *Unnamable*, it is apparent that these problems are indeed meditative in origin. Yet again one finds reason to engage a meditative reading of *Unnamable*.

At the close of the ninth chapter, Shantideva notes that should the meditation be successful, one will be able to engage in the world without attachment and the ego to which it gives rise. He writes,

To linger and abide within samsara,  
But freed from every craving and from every fear,  
To work the benefit of those who ignorantly suffer:  
Such is the fruit that emptiness will bear (Shantideva 9: 52).

This is precisely the nonduality Beckett anticipates when he writes, "If I could speak and yet say nothing, really nothing..." (Beckett 303). As Critchley recognizes and as should philosophy, the goal of Beckett's work is not to achieve silence – it is to achieve the silencing of mind necessary to engage in the world without the ego and the suffering it brings.

### **Conclusion (End Game)**

The best teachers I've had have always stressed that boredom for the attentive mind signals not the danger of regression but the point of progression. It is with this understanding that I hope you find the following recapitulation unnecessary.

The first section of this project attempted to articulate why philosophy has had difficulty in entering Samuel Beckett. Following Simon Critchley, it suggested namely that readings of Beckett's works ignore that the texts invite philosophical accounts while simultaneously pulling the rug out from underneath such articulations. Further exploring Critchley's work, the study turned to consider his understanding of Beckett's work as work or achievement, and not a work or *an* achievement. Noting how Beckett's *Unnamable* resists the imposition of frameworks from without as well as the construction of frameworks within, the study then suggested that the text, given its concern with identity, mirrors works of remarkably similar accomplishment in the meditative tradition. On this basis, the section further suggested that in the search for the proper engagement of Beckett's work, one would be well served in a meditative reading of *Unnamable*.

Stressing that the following sections of the study were not meant to propose a reading of *Unnamable* but to promote a meditation of the work – the true engagement of the text – the thesis moved to map the meditative progress of *Unnamable*. Appealing to Mipham Rinpoche's articulation of the meditative practice, the second section specifically considered *Unnamable*'s struggle to release attachment to thoughts, to their negations, and ultimately, to silence, toward experience in the world without the attachment of ego. The section ended with a careful detailing of the two difficulties noted in *Unnamable* as hindrances to its project: neurotic negation and the related fear of others.

In an effort to further promote a meditative reading of Beckett's work, the third and final section of the thesis illuminated the relationship between *Unnamable* and Shantideva's *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Noting the problems with which Beckett's work conclude to be the starting points of Shantideva's meditation, the study

explored in detail the benefits to be had in using *The Way of the Bodhisattva* as meditative therapy. Concluding at the very least that *Unnamable's* problems are meditative problems, the study once again urged a meditative turn in the reading of Samuel Beckett.

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\*Note that this is the translation quoted through the study.