

**In the silence you don't know:  
Cartesian Thought in Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable***

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By *SAM GRIFFIN*

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Thesis Director  
Dr. Blake Hobby

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Thesis Advisor  
Dr. Margaret Downes

*Where one can do nothing, one should want nothing.*  
—Arnold Geulincx

Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* is a monologue. A rant, if you will, that is setting, plot, and action: a prolonged speech that constitutes every element of the novel, and as a result, every element of the protagonist's existence. The structure of *The Unnamable* suggests discovery, or in the Unnamable's case, the process of becoming undiscovered: a structure suggesting philosophy, or the crafting thereof. *The Unnamable* is a discourse on life and death, on information and misinformation, and on existence and deletion; *The Unnamable* describes literally losing oneself amongst the heaps of gestures, comments, and actions that constitute the human condition, along with the resulting mental and physical mutations. The book is in stream-of-conscious form, an influx of Cartesian thinking self separated from its body, and when viewed in light of René Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations*, Beckett's novel seems like homage to the Enlightenment thinker. Despite the similarities, there is a major deviation between Beckett and Descartes: where Descartes leaves his meditations and discourse with new resolve, Beckett's Unnamable is locked in its eternal cyclic musings. Descartes achieves supposed knowledge, and the Unnamable achieves temporary false hope fortified by demented persistence. Beckett uses Cartesian theory, then, to show its literal absurdity—to show that Cartesian thought is completely unrealistic. Because the usage and presentation is so blatant, Beckett's writing falls into parody, and though the structure of Beckett's comical methodology is not in exact accord with Descartes, the way the information is delivered, along with the subject matter and structure, sufficiently evidences this literary caricature.

Descartes begins *Discourse on Method* by making his statement of aporia: “For I found myself beset by so many doubts and errors that I came to think I had gained nothing from my attempts to become educated but increasing recognition of my ignorance” (Descartes 113). He then begins to doubt, for uncertainty drives the Cartesian thinker. Descartes uses methodological doubt, defined by four elements or stages, to seek genuine truth: a structured approach to the skeptic abandoning of knowledge acquired prior to present thinking; in other words, Descartes discards everything he knew previous to his current speculations (Descartes 120). Among the information discarded is his own reality, his own existence, for his being’s legitimacy calls into question the means by which it was acquired: his senses; everything Descartes knows up to this point—from institutions, mentors, or the world—is considered null, for it was gained, as he will describe later in *Discourse on Method* and practically all throughout the *Meditations*, through sensory experience.

To Descartes, the senses, along with all sensory perception, cannot be trusted (Descartes 129). Solidifying this claim, Descartes distinguishes between the real and dream worlds; he states that there is no separation, for thoughts occurring in dreams also occur in reality. A person’s senses in a dream—his or her “dream” senses—obtain false information because they do not actually exist; that said, because the same thoughts occur in both reality and in dreams, no thoughts can be trusted for identical notions are crafted by nonexistent entities (Descartes 129). Since this skeptical assertion strips Descartes of practically everything, he only has his thoughts, much like the Unnamable; Descartes, as seen in his *Meditations*, is now fully aware of his being and nothing else (Descartes 17-8).

The foundation of Cartesian ideals is the *cogito*, the idea that thinking composes existence: “And observing that this truth ‘*I am thinking, therefore I exist*’ was so firm and sure that all most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were incapable of shaking it...I saw that while I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world and no place for me to be in, I could not for all that pretend that I did not exist” (Descartes 127). After proving his mind, Descartes convinces himself of several material things, including his own body and a piece of beeswax (Descartes 16-23). However, throughout these specific meditations—those regarding the mind and material things seen through the deceptive senses—there remains a schism between thought and reality, between mind and body. Descartes classifies these as two different realms, thus creating his idea of dualism. One realm can undoubtedly influence the other; the mind and body are connected by subtle mediums (McDonald 78). They are also dependent on one another, both ends needed to construct human experience.

In Cartesian terms, the body void of a soul is a machine, a mindless apparatus that operates without conscious intention; corpuses are, as defined by Alvin Snider in his article “Cartesian Bodies,” “soulless automatons outwardly indistinguishable from living beings” (299). Human anatomy is not organic but mechanistic; the soul, or one’s interior monologue, is the catalyst for everything “human,” or “outwardly” humanlike (300). The human machine without any mental capacity beyond rudimentary survival is then a Cartesian Body: “...machines in space, composed of machine parts, while the mind, the soul, is something else” (Hacking 80). In his distinction between mind and body, Descartes creates a being hierarchy consisting of two tiers: the lower, flesh and organic matter inhabits, and the upper, the mind and soul. The only thing above this structure is God, who is, according to Descartes, the perfect being, far above any sort of

physical and mental deviation; the sole entity below the tiers is the “evil genius,” the hypothetical being that is the harbinger of all deception, yet also divine in stature (Descartes 13-4, 25-7; Curley 36). The “evil demon” is merely a supposition, and is therefore a creation of Descartes’ thoughts.

The Cartesian worldview is lonely: souls existing in animated machines, millions of minds trapped inside countless organic prisons. The only things that allow the corpus sensuality and satisfaction, the senses, are deceptive and cannot be trusted. Ultimate truth is obtainable, though only through a painstaking process of mental rebirth: by stripping what is known down to a naked, nameless core, a dark inner sanctum from which to begin, one reasons oneself back to truth. The prose of Samuel Beckett oftentimes mirrors this bleak, isolated outlook. From “Whoroscope,” his poetic debut, to *The Unnamable*, the final novel of the Trilogy, Beckett uses Cartesian thinking as basis. The way in which he employs Descartes’ theories shifts as his prose evolves, yet his literary substance— isolation, desolation, desperation, and ambiguity—remains.

“Whoroscope,” published in 1930, is among the first of his published literature. Not only is the subject of the poem René Descartes, but it also describes the philosopher sitting down to an omelet or, more specifically, waiting for an omelet to be served, complete with overripe eggs; in the poem’s footnotes, snippets of Descartes’ life are referenced to random lines of poetry, loosely describing some aspect of the philosopher’s life or ideas (McDonald 73). William Stein, in his article “Beckett’s ‘Whoroscope’: Turdy Ooscopy,” writes on Beckett’s poem:

On the one hand, he affirms Descartes’ premise in the *Meditations* of the closed consciousness, the utterly baffling aspects of the experience of *cogito ergo sum* that are to become the substance of Beckett’s later fiction

and drama, though with somewhat of a twist. On the other hand, he parodies Descartes' expedient Christian piety in the superstition of the deathbed agon of the addled conscience. (125)

Stein writes further of Beckett's "paradoxical love and scorn for the philosopher's modes of thought" in the article, revealing "Whoroscope" as a labyrinth of Descartes references, as well as Cartesian thinking; Stein's speculations are not limited to *Discourse on Method* nor the *Meditations*, but refer to all of Descartes works, such as the *Treatise on Man* (135-40). More importantly, Stein's comment on *cogito ergo sum* as the basis for many of Beckett's later works strengthens the claim of Cartesian parody in *The Unnamable*.

Aside from his early poetry, Beckett's first published novel, *Murphy*, contains a great deal of Cartesian separation; it is the first selection written after *Whoroscope* to represent dualism. Also, understanding the Cartesian elements of *Murphy* creates a stepping stone towards comprehending *The Unnamable*; in *Murphy*, the narrator is a dualistic thinker, and in *The Unnamable*, the narrator is immersed in a Cartesian reality. According to S.C. Steinberg, author of "The External and Internal in *Murphy*," *Murphy* is an allegorical text, written to demonstrate the distinction between mind and body in a fictional format. "Through a series of subtle motifs, word patterns, and structural incidents, Beckett has created the physical as the antithesis of the mental" (Steinberg 93). In *Murphy*, the physical and mental are two different worlds; the protagonist, Murphy, attempts to transcend each of these, longing for the eventual "Nothing"; a desire not unlike the *Unnamable*'s wish for silence (93-4). In the Cartesian vision, the earthly plane is littered with mindless machines; to exist in this world, especially with Descartes' theories in mind, is a bleak prospect. Murphy wishes to enter

the inner world to exist among the “infinite substances,” which, as Descartes describes in the *Meditations*, hold more concrete “realities” (Descartes 31). In doing this, he would separate himself from physical reality. It does not seem that Beckett intended parody with *Murphy* because this separation is not portrayed in an entirely negative light. Rather, the restrictions set forth by the body, as well as his inability to transcend to a realm constituted only by the mind—as in *The Unnamable*—tortures Murphy and the narrator (Steinberg 109). Thus, the characters are isolated, alienated, and mentally antagonized.

Though scholars generally see the novel as Cartesian, *Murphy* separates from René Descartes and focuses more on the writings of Belgian thinker Arnold Geulincx. Whereas Descartes believes the mind and body to be separate but not completely independent of one another, Geulincx sees the two entities as entirely different (McDonald 78-9). In *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett*, Rónán McDonald describes Geulincx’s distinction: “Geulincx argued that mind and body are wholly separate, and that they only cooperate as a result of God’s intervention. The mind does not instruct the foot to walk. Rather, the idea of walking enters the mind, which is the *occasion* for God to cause the motion of walking” (McDonald 78). Also, whereas Descartes declares that God proves the existence of pristine truth and the assurance that one holds knowledge, Arnold Geulincx states that God is proof of not knowing. In other words, Geulincx uses God as evidence of definite ignorance (Uhlmann 351). Because God knows something that man doesn’t, man is therefore ignorant in the fact that he does not know something. Though Murphy believes the mind and body to be impartial, God is not the harbinger of action; instead, planetary patterns govern the deeds of mankind (McDonald 79). This pattern is not what we see in *The Unnamable*: though the

Unnamable thinks of the physical world as separate from his own, what he thinks affects the physicality of the supposed realm. All images that include the Unnamable, Mahood, or Worm in physical form are helpless to the movement of the mind; the narrator's corporeal state fluctuates as the mental discourse does. In *Murphy*, on the other hand, the mind and body do not affect one another, thus relating more to Geulincx's distinction.

Though the nature of separation differs, Beckett's description of the mental plane in *Murphy* resembles the Unnamable's surroundings. The narrator in *Murphy* describes the three areas within Murphy's mind: light, semi-dark, and dark (Cousineau 224). Though this differentiates *Murphy* from Cartesian dualism—as it has instead become a “tripartite” instead of a pair—these environments illustrate literally the Unnamable's world, as seen in the beginning of the novel (Cousineau 224). For example, the Unnamable initially resides in darkness, with occasional flashes of light in the supposed distance; the realm of light is long past, if it ever was, and memories that place the Unnamable in light are false memories because Mahood tells them (Beckett 287, 292; Tindall 16). The Unnamable cannot be deceived by a concrete reality because there is not one immediately available, relieving him of the agony experienced by Murphy. Both *Murphy* and *The Unnamable* exhibit Cartesian qualities, but while Murphy longs to rid himself of material existence, the Unnamable has already done so, whether intentionally or not, and is still miserable. The novels form a sort of chain, a Beckettian testament to Descartes and Cartesian dualism: to transcend the material to the mental is not only impossible and agonizing, but also futile.

But, although Beckett portrays Descartes' philosophies in such a light, Beckett does not necessarily scorn. L Roesler, in his article “Beckett Lecteur de Descartes: Vers



une Metaphysique Parodique,” argues that Beckett, while adopting qualities of Descartes in his writing, does so for the sake of comic satire and parody (Roesler). For Roesler, this satirical writing results from Beckett’s take on Descartes: that Cartesian existence is impossible. Beckett is forced to use parody and satire because of his stance on the plausibility of Descartes’ writings. Roesler states that Beckett has no ill intention when parodying, but is only using Descartes as a platform to accurately display the human condition and its supposed Cartesian qualities: “Mais cette satire n’a rien de vicieux ni de cruel, car Beckett, dans son oeuvre, s’attache plus à montrer la fragilité: de la condition humaine que les défaillances de le méthode cartésienne” (Roesler). That said, Beckett sees Cartesianism as impossible and obsolete, yet as a valuable means to portray his own fictional, and perhaps autobiographical, literary worldview. Thus, Beckett’s relationship with Descartes’ writings is complex: we can now read the *Discourse on Method* and the *Meditations* as fiction, and use them as literary, rather than philosophical, influences. *The Unnamable* undoubtedly emits Cartesian inspiration, and Roesler’s assertions make the comparisons increasingly plausible.

*The Unnamable* does not only share affinities with Cartesian thought; the entire novel is comprised of deception and doubt, the faculties on which *cogito* is crafted. The Unnamable resides in complete ambiguity, unsure of anything: the narrator does not know for sure who he is, what he is, how he is communicating, if he is communicating, or anything regarding anything (Beckett 285-6). Uncertainty is, like *cogito*, the essence of the novel. Points are stated and refuted, situations are presented and reverted, and images are described, reiterated, and abandoned. As McDonald explains, “Or, no sooner has he made an assertion about where he is or what surrounds him than he pulls it down and dismisses it as ‘lies’” (103). Characters are introduced with important implications

and detailed stories, such as the ever-deceptive Mahood and the sludge pile Worm, yet are all eventually identified as the narrator's own creation: unconsciously crafted by the narrator to deceive, to imprint false hope in his undertaking towards silence (Beckett 387). Silence is the only plausible end, for the Unnamable knows no truth: truth is only a word, and the narrator is unsure whether words are credible.

Before dissecting the Cartesian aspects of *The Unnamable*, we must first establish an analytical outline; a summary of things examined. Primarily, the Unnamable and Descartes begin from comparable standpoints: both are inwardly ignorant and alone. After the groundwork is established, both begin to search for truth, and both capitalize on deception. Subsequent to this is the realization of self: what is the Unnamable, and what is Descartes? Individually, they both realize that they are things that think and conceive, but where Descartes presses onward, the Unnamable lingers on this question throughout the novel. Furthering this, *The Unnamable* and Descartes also conclude that deception originates from the self. Underneath the hypothetical "Evil Demon," Descartes' senses deceive him; the self-propagated Mahood deceives the Unnamable. According to both, deviance from knowledge exists because of self-restriction. However, Descartes believes in a divine third party, a perfect being capable of perfect truth; therefore, Descartes knows he can never truly be deceived. The Unnamable, however, dismisses the "supreme being" as lies (Beckett 299).

Finally, the Unnamable and Descartes vow to continue. Whereas Descartes dedicates his life to further knowledge, the Unnamable devotes his to the desire for silence, ending in essentially the same state as he began. In *Trapped in Thought: A Study in Beckettian Mentality*, Eric Levy writes:

Thus, the Cartesian *cogito* and the Unnamable are rationalist contraries. Both begin in absolute doubt, and both begin with introspection. But each uses doubt and introspection in a way opposite to that of the other. Whereas the Cartesian *cogito* doubts now in order to know or affirm apodictic and indubitable truth later, the Unnamable doubts now in order to go on doubting in the future. (Levy 103)

The Unnamable feeds off his methodology; his doubt is self-propagation, where Descartes' doubt is a stepping-stone. The Unnamable doubts for the sake of doubting, and Descartes doubts for the sake of truth. Despite the apparent differences, *The Unnamable*, *Discourse on Method*, and the *Meditations* search for the same thing—knowledge—but acquire different results. As Descartes states, “I think, therefore I am,” the Unnamable says, “I think, therefore I am a mere state of confusion about identity” (Levy 102). *The Unnamable* is Cartesian thought as stark reality, Descartes' philosophies forced into a darker perspective, one characterized by imprisoning obsession.

Both Descartes and the Unnamable begin in isolation, though the reasons for their individual environments vary. The Unnamable has no control over location, no choice but to continue the discourse; it is as though he is a man, perhaps a skeptic thinker, placed directly into his element. In her essay, “Where now? Who now?” Maurice Blanchot describes the Unnamable in dark isolation: “...and in fact *The Unnamable* evokes something of this malaise of a man fallen out of the world, eternally hovering between being and nothingness, henceforth incapable of dying as of being born, haunted by his creatures, meaningless ghosts he no longer believes in” (147). The Unnamable has no immediate knowledge about himself, and thus continues to a

recognition of ignorance (Beckett 287-92). Descartes also describes his previous deception in the *Discourse on Method* and the *Meditations*, though it seems he has made this realization before beginning (Descartes 113). Both have, at this point, stripped everything previously known as false; they are both nothing but thought, communications void of any plausible cause or source. Throughout *The Unnamable*, references are made to speech as his means of communication, though this is also discredited multiple times (Beckett 301, 386). Descartes does not quite describe speaking, per say, because his *Meditations* and *Discourse on Method* are distinguished as thoughts: Descartes mentally crafts everything composed, and he understands this.

Much like Descartes, the Unnamable eventually distinguishes himself as a thing that thinks (Beckett 340). However, Descartes uses this as a foundation for further speculation, and Beckett delves deeper into this particular question, thus plugging holes in the Cartesian conclusion: why is he a thing that thinks, and if this is all he is, can he not be a thing that does not think and still 'exist'? Is silence possible? Further still, is the concept of existence a fabrication of his own thoughts and desires? This is opposite to Descartes' progress, who, after realizing he is a thinking thing, gradually proves his physicality. Beckett's *The Unnamable* is a perversion of Descartes assertions concerning two different realms of being, while at the same time solidifying the philosopher's claim of mental superiority (Descartes 31).

The Unnamable is entirely disconnected from his physical self; any mention of physicality is, because of Mahood, subject to drastic change. As Levy concludes, "Hence, the unitary identity available to the Cartesian *cogito* is denied to the Unnamable, whose attempts at self-definition merely explode the identity to be defined into hypothetical fragments or fragmentary hypotheses" (103). The Unnamable's features begin, for the

most part, in place. They fade as the novel continues, but, in seemingly random intervals, reappear as solid attributes; in one instance, he has begun to “locate” his head, “to [his] satisfaction,” and in another, he “cannot feel a head on” him (Beckett 344, 406). Sometimes he is nothing at all, a ball in a void “talking about things that do not exist, or that exist perhaps, impossible to know, beside the point” (Beckett 299). Therefore, the Unnamable’s body is at the mercy of his mind, a distant unit ever shifting under streams of reminiscence. It is as though his inner discourse, the essence of *The Unnamable* itself, causes the narrator to lose his human features. Immersing himself in such ignorance, in the presence of utter deception, causes him to doubt further, thus immaterializing: the deeper the Unnamable’s doubt, the less physicality he emits.

Also, The Unnamable does not realize he is a thinking thing until late in the novel, and then only through indirect embodiment as the character Worm (Beckett 358-9). Of course, dialogue prescribed as thought does occur earlier on, yet it is not directly recognized, the action “to think” simple utterance. Here, Beckett comments on Descartes’ distinction between thought and existence. Descartes believed in a dualistic separation between mind and body. “Descartes theorised that the mind and body are distinct, but not wholly separate. He posited that the pineal gland or the ‘conarium’ was the point in the physical brain which mediated between body and mind” (McDonald 78). The Unnamable is independent of this Cartesian divergence because it is locked on a single side: the mental as he says, “Speak of a world of my own, sometimes referred to as the inner, without choking” (Beckett 383). Since the communicatory process of the narrator has the ability to cause physical self-destruction without a significant shift in diction, his other dualistic entity, the mind, must be dominant.

As the Unnamable's discourse is locked in the mental state, with the body as distant, there is mention of a purely physical entity: Worm. He is described as an "embryonic lump;" a mass possessing few noticeable human features (Tindall 31-2). In *The Unnamable*, Beckett describes Worm:

He is nothing but a shapeless heap, without a face capable of reflecting the niceties of a torment, but the disposition of which, its greater or lesser degree of crouch and huddledness, is no doubt expressive, for specialists, and enables them to assess the chances of its suddenly making a bound, or dragging its coils faintly away, as if stricken to death. Somewhere in the heap an eye, a wild equine eye, always open, they must have an eye, they see him possessed of an eye. (350)

The narrator continues to describe Worm at the mercy of "they": an invisible host of critics that dictate to him the ways of the world, as well as various human trials and tribulations he would experience lest he ever became human (350-1). "They" are trying to trap Worm, to "seize him" in their "arms;" "they" are also trying to convert the Unnamable to Worm, or to an entirely physical state (351). But it is, according to the Unnamable, a "blessing for [Worm] he cannot stir, even though he suffers because of it..." (351). Worm is immune to "their" lessons because he is inanimate, a Cartesian body in full; he possesses no soul, no ghost to operate the machine, and is therefore an antithesis to Mahood—the Unnamable's main influence on the mental. The Unnamable envies Worm in his ignorance, though he is horrified by the prospect of becoming something so utterly physical, for in this state he would "feel nothing" (Beckett 358). Here is specified, even more so than before, the seemingly futile separation of body and

mind: the physical state renders nothing—as seen in Worm—and the mental state renders confused chaos—as seen through the Unnamable himself.

The *Unnamable* narrator takes Descartes' theory to the utmost degree: the Unnamable is deceived by outside influence, every individual sense tormented by subtle lies constituting existence. A host of beings, ranging from previous Beckett characters to ones initially described within *The Unnamable*, have created a reality for the narrator; it seems that, at the time of the Unnamable's discourse, this reality has fallen into shambles. Described are recollections, reminiscences on previous events; these events are, according to the Unnamable, lies. Descartes writes of an "evil demon" that would, in the scenario of an ever-deceiving universe, be the Supreme Being. As a result of this, the nature of the cosmos would be ultimate deception; Descartes would not prove himself, because the absence of God would result in an absence of anything. He would be, much like the Unnamable, only a stream of thought.

The characters Basil and Mahood, who are characterizations of Descartes' "evil demon," deceive Beckett's narrator. Descartes describes the "evil demon" in detail:

I will suppose therefore that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all of his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgment (15).

Descartes considers that he possesses no physicality or mental attributes and that all is a fabrication of this "malicious demon" (Descartes 15). He cannot be sure of anything because, in this purely hypothetical situation, there is no foundation of perfect

knowledge: knowledge supplied by a divine, knowing presence, one aware of things above the thinker's mental capacity (Curley 36). However, the presence of Descartes "evil demon" supports his *cogito*, for, in pondering its existence, he is thinking; deception causes thought, and thought, to Descartes, is the essence of existence. So, even if this deceptive power did exist instead of God, he would still exist: thus, the "evil demon" does not have control of Descartes' psyche (Curley 36-8).

Similar, if not identical, to the "evil demon" is the character Mahood. He begins in distant form as Basil, along with a host of followers, and is, at this point, removed and overbearing. Basil and friends teach the Unnamable about God and fellow man, along with "courses on love, on intelligence" (Beckett 292). They also instruct him how to count and reason, knowledge the narrator uses to "scratch [his] arse with" (Beckett 292). In describing Basil, the Unnamable becomes a pupil, and Basil is the bullying teacher; there is nothing personal in the relationship between the Unnamable and Basil (Beckett 301). Eventually, Basil is renamed Mahood due to his increasing "importance," and it is here that Mahood tells the Unnamable "stories about himself" (Beckett 303).

Mahood is dictating the Unnamable's life to him. Everything that constitutes his memory is a tale and is therefore something separate, something physical, and all attributes, suppositions, and features that he possesses are, as a result, false. Mahood is the teacher of the Unnamable's language, "the only one they taught me," deeming it artificial and all information conveyed through its medium null and void (Beckett 330; Fletcher 179-80; Levy 347). As Worm is, whether he realizes it or not, tortured by the ambiguous "they," the Unnamable suffers due to Mahood for identical reasons, though the Unnamable does not possess the stubbornness to reject his anecdotes. Rather, he is a pliable surface, absorbing information against his physical will. Worm is not troubled



because his inanimate state makes him immune; the Unnamable, possessing frantic mental qualities, cannot help but absorb the things that Mahood tells him, for they instill false hope in something previous, as well as in an inevitable end.

Mahood and Worm are recognized as creations of the Unnamable himself, thus deeming them products of the narrator's senses, or, more specifically, sensory perception (298, 385). The Unnamable describes his situation:

Now there is no one left. That's a good continuation. No one left, it's embarrassing, if I had a memory it might tell me that this is the sign of the end, this having no one left, no one to talk to you, so that you have to say, It's I who am doing this to me, I who am talking to me about me...it's not theirs, they were never there, there was never anyone but you, talking to you about you, the breath fails, it's nearly the end, the breath stops, it's the end... (387)

Mahood, Worm, and "they" are no longer present, for the Unnamable realizes that there was never anyone else (387). What originally seemed like legitimate memories and stories delivered by concrete outside entities have now dissolved into the original discourse. The fact that there was never a Basil, Mahood, or Worm causes the Unnamable to falter briefly in his dialogue; he searches for a sign of their existence, trying to find something they have affected with their deceptive prowess (388). Also, he does not know whether he has finally succumbed to Mahood—thus resulting in his newfound isolation—or if he is soon to be immersed in silence (399-400).

After Mahood is denounced, Beckett's prose becomes increasingly fragmented and sporadic, as though some aspect of structure vanished with the characters. "...he says it, or they say it, yes, they who reason, they who believe, no, in the singular, he who

lived, or saw someone who had, he speaks of me, as if I were he, as if I were not he, both, as if I were others, one after another..." (Beckett 396). The Unnamable becomes more desperate since he has nothing to base his existence on, nothing to prove as false, and nothing more to doubt. Silence is all the more appealing to him, for this loss of control leads him to no new conclusions; the frequency of contradiction increases. Language is the only thing left above him, and is the only thing left to doubt and deceive; all of his previous musings he now dismisses as "hypotheses" generated by his association with Mahood (388). He can no longer stand doubting, for there is nothing to not be doubted; or, in other words, everything constituting the Unnamable's reality is false, so there is nothing on which to base truth. Unlike Descartes, who, almost haphazardly, discards the notion of a divine evil presence, the Unnamable suffers.

Descartes avoids a similar fate through God. To him, God is perfect in stature, void of deception: the harbinger of all pure knowledge (Descartes 128). Descartes is comforted by supreme knowledge, in knowing that it does exist alongside a power greater than himself (Descartes 128-9). In order to make this realization, he had to "raise [his] mind over the senses" (Descartes 129). Also, he asserts that not everything known is obtained through personal information, and thus, must have been placed into the conscious by a divine being:

So there remains only the idea of God; and I must consider whether there is anything in the idea which could not have originated in myself. By the word 'God' I understand a substance that is infinite, <eternal, immutable,> independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else...that exists. (Descartes 31)

He has undermined any ambiguous deception through divinity. However, the loopholes in Descartes' celestial theory are the foundations for the Unnamable's view on God. It seems that Descartes has concluded much unknown territory by dismissing it as supreme knowledge; he does not know the ways of the universe, but there is a being that does. Also, Descartes deems personal knowledge for which he knows no source as having come from God.

The Unnamable, on the other hand, only knows God and man through Mahood, and, therefore, only through himself: "Ah yes, all lies, God and man, nature and 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" (Beckett 298). The Unnamable claims to have invented natural law, something Descartes believed ultimately divine. He does not feel touched by the Holy Spirit because his condition warrants the opposite: "Faith would require a response; yet [Beckett's characters] are never in a position to feel assured that such a response would be heard" (Bryden 74). The darkness of his void, his mental plane, does not allow for hope in anything, and, because of this, no faith can be acquired. Consequently, the Unnamable does not have faith in God because, as realized late in the novel, there is no point, no epiphany to reach, and no way to feel religiously complete, as Descartes does through God's perfection.

God is a false being in *The Unnamable*, but He also holds great influence over the narrator. He first appears during Basil's introduction: "they also gave me the low-down on God. They told me I depended on him, in the last analysis" (Beckett 292). He reappears randomly, usually in blatant denunciation: "Yes, God, formenter of calm, I never believed it, not a second;" at one point, the Unnamable claims divinity: "I am

Matthew and I am the angel, I who came before the cross, before the sinning, came into the world, came here” (Beckett 295, 299). Not only is the latter statement bold, but its occurrence suggests mockery. Unlike Descartes, who live in a time of great religious influence, the Unnamable exists outside the physical realm. Because of this, he need not worry about physical repercussions, and can judge anything as it stands. God gives the Unnamable something to defy, something to denounce. Also, God is a representation of Mahood, a powerful reminder of the invasive material world.

To conclude, we begin by observing the development of Cartesian thought from *Murphy* to *The Unnamable*. In *Murphy*, dualism is not only exact and complete but necessary to escape the falsities and frustrations of physical existence. Murphy longs to separate from his material reality, the mental plane portrayed as a painless limbo: not particularly enjoyable, but numb to the false, artificial workings of the outside world. However, in *Murphy* the narrator’s Cartesian goal is a positive one. His aspiration is to make the disconnection precise, to solidify himself as purely nonexistent. The futility of his desire is not specified, because it is not demonstrated in full. Not until *The Unnamable* do we see a character transcended and, because of his state, completely miserable.

In *The Unnamable*, Samuel Beckett portrays Cartesian theory in extremes and as ultimately false. In his article, “Three novels and Four *Nouvelles*,” Paul Davies writes: “Beckett then figures this in the prison of solipsism, the human shut up in a jar. The rare moments when the walls dissolve and the frustration gives way to peace show his hero, and us, that the Cartesian conclusion, though entrenched, is a false one” (Davies 58). The mental plane, that which the Unnamable inhabits, is a place ridden with doubt, uncertainty, and deception; it is a place void of the definite, where all is ambiguous. The

bodily plane is constantly shifting, moving at the mercy of thought; physicality is weakness, for even its existence is entirely uncertain. Beckett, then, portrays Descartes' theories literally: he places a mind stripped of all animal attributes in a dark cell. On one end is the Unnamable himself, cloaked in complete indecision. Since the Unnamable is mental, he is unsure of anything material; the Unnamable constantly muses over what he does and does not possess physically. The mind perverts things, distorts them like an old rumor, and thus the material world becomes a distant report of what it once was; objective reality develops into a memory, though the Unnamable claims to have none. On the other is Worm. Worm is utterly material, and is, as a result, mindless. He is not susceptible to any mental processes because he does not possess the other dualistic quality. His lack of a mind leaves him without reason, though this is, as the Unnamable states, a kind of bliss. Beckett presenting the elements of dualism individually demonstrates the theory's ultimate uselessness.

Also, Beckett takes Descartes claim of the "perfect being" and strips it of eloquent assumption; there is no telling if God exists, and there is no way of ever knowing—especially not through complex deductive reasoning. In fact, there is no way of knowing anything for certain, as Geulincx states. The idea of a higher presence must be crafted by the mind, and because of this, there is no way to distinguish it as completely true. *The Unnamable* shows that such reasoning only plunges one deeper into the recesses of the mind, deeper into deception, narcissism, and guilt. After all, according to both Descartes and Beckett, true deception originates in the self, which then creates and exploits its own deceptions. Until late in the novel, Mahood dominates The Unnamable's discourse; he spends a great deal of time lamenting over things told to him by Mahood, and the resulting uncertainty causes agony. Once Mahood is realized as a product of the self, the

narrator is alone. Perhaps Mahood was to spur false hope, something that drives the Unnamable until the end. Additionally distinguished is the art of contradiction, especially by those who claim to know the universe, and the development of cyclical logic. Finally, Beckett illustrates the essence of self: is there anything beneath physicality, above mentality? Can the two realms of being coexist without one perverting the other? Or better yet, does either one exist? From this rises the Unnamable's own divided *cogito*, his self-imploing conclusion "You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on."

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