



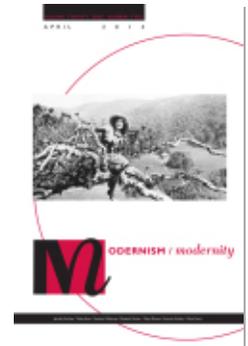
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Samuel Beckett, Wilhelm Windelband, and the Interwar “Philosophy Notes”

David Addyman and Matthew Feldman

Between the years 1930 and 1938 Samuel Beckett went through an extensive process of self-education, taking notes on psychology, art history, the history of German and English literatures, and Irish and European history, in addition to notes on specific writers as divergent as Dante and d’Annunzio, Mauthner and Mistral, Augustine and Ariosto.¹ Despite protestations later in his life that he neither read nor understood philosophy, far and away the largest portion of these extant “Interwar Notes,” are the 266 folios, mostly handwritten recto and verso notebook pages, comprising Beckett’s so-called “Philosophy Notes.”² These roughly five hundred sides of typed and handwritten reading notes derive from 1932 and 1933—likely around the time Beckett was converting his abortive novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, into the short stories *More Pricks Than Kicks* (published 1934). In turn, Beckett’s “Philosophy Notes” were taken from four main sources: J. Archibald Alexander’s 1907 *A Short History of Philosophy*; John Burnet’s 1914 *Greek Philosophy, Part I: Thales to Plato*; Friedrich Ueberweg’s *A History of Philosophy, from Thales to the Present Time*; and Wilhelm Windelband’s *A History of Philosophy*.³

Amongst these authors, Beckett’s engagement with, and subsequent employment of, Wilhelm Windelband was far and away the most profound. In fact, many of those frequently recognized as “Beckettian” philosophers—Arnold Geulincx, George Berkeley, and Gottfried Leibniz, amongst others—were actually first encountered by Beckett in the revised, second edition of *A History of Philosophy* from 1901. It is from here, for example, that much of the key imagery in Beckett’s first novel

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756 from 1935–36 (published 1938), *Murphy*, is drawn, even extending to the oft-cited epigraph on Murphy's mind, heading chapter six.⁴ Furthermore, while Beckett used all four sources for notes on ancient Greek philosophy, covering his first 109 folios, *A History of Philosophy* is most frequently in evidence among the summary sources Beckett consulted on ancient philosophy. More significant still, though, is that final 157 folios are derived solely from Windelband; that is, the remaining 1,600 years of Western philosophy in the "Philosophy Notes" are mediated solely by *A History of Philosophy*. Put another way, this volume accounts for more than three-quarters of the entire "Philosophy Notes," which itself may be considered a tale of two halves: one, a mosaic of Ancient Greek thinking, deriving from several secondary texts; and two, Beckett's summary of Wilhelm Windelband's account of the tenets and systems ostensibly governing Western philosophy thereafter.

That said, this quantitative survey of the "Philosophy Notes" should not be taken as indicative of Beckett's wholesale and wholehearted acceptance of Windelband's views on the history of Western philosophy. Far from it: in his encounter with *A History of Philosophy*, in which Windelband's philosophical views are writ large, Beckett's note-taking is shrewdly selective. Since nothing has been written on Windelband in Beckett studies to date (this is no less true of Burnet, Alexander, and Ueberweg), however, the nature of Beckett's composition of the notes has never been made apparent. This article therefore examines Beckett's approach to these "Philosophy Notes": it especially focuses on Wilhelm Windelband (a new candidate for "canonical" status amongst Beckettian philosophers), and carefully probes not just what Beckett wrote down, but also what he omitted—a telling detail that speaks volumes.

While it is not known for certain just what drew Beckett to Windelband, his work was certainly well-known in the English-speaking world after James H. Tufts' translation of July, 1893; when prefacing the second edition of 1900, Windelband claimed: "A large edition of my *History of Philosophy* [was] exhausted more than two years ago" (*HP*, xi). Its sold-out status had partly resulted from a hyperbolic review in 1893 by Egbert Smyth, who coincidentally described *A History of Philosophy's* ideal reader: "The book deserves the attention of all who would learn how thought has come to be what it is, and who would themselves 'learn to think.'" ⁵ But when Beckett encountered Windelband's work some forty years later, his interest was very nearly the opposite of "learning to think." For this was just at the time Beckett decried "the loutishness of learning" in his 1934 poem, "Gnome." As he informed Anne Atik some four decades later, "you have to get back to ignorance." Put another way, Beckett sought "knowledge of non-knowledge," or in still another formulation, "non-Euclidian logic."⁶ Given the genocidal disasters brought about by twentieth-century knowledge, to which he was an engaged and horrified witness, Beckett's position of "docta ignorantia" is refreshingly heretical. Yet it remains the case that "learning to think" and "unlearning to think" both demanded a priori knowledge of systematic thought; in this significant case, via Windelband's account of Western philosophy from the pre-Socratics to Friedrich Nietzsche.

At first sight, it is not self-evident that Beckett made the notes his own, or that he even authored them—can the "Philosophy Notes" can be seen as a Beckettian text at all?

His note-taking is often rather slavish. Many of his reading notes on the ancient Greeks, for example, are closely summarized or copied nearly verbatim from his sources; this is not just the case for the notes from Windelband but for those from Burnet too (and to a lesser extent, for entries from Alexander and Ueberweg). One example from the perhaps 120,000 words comprising the "Philosophy Notes" is the following (elements found in Windelband but not in Beckett's notes are indicated by square brackets):

In forming a conception of [the] Sophistic doctrine we have to contend with the difficulty that we are made acquainted with them almost exclusively through their victorious opponents [,] Plato and Aristotle. The first has given in the Protagoras a [graceful,] lively delineation of a Sophist congress, [redolent with fine irony,] in the Gorgias a more earnest, in the Theaetetus a sharper criticism, and in the Cratylus and Euthydemus supercilious satire of the Sophists' methods of teaching. In the dialogue the Sophist [,] to which Plato's name is attached, an extremely malicious definition of the theories of the Sophists is attempted, and Aristotle reaches the same result in the book on the fallacies of the Sophists. (TCD 10967, 40v–41, taken from *HP*, 71.)

While the near-verbatim transcription illustrated above becomes less frequent and gives way to greater use of paraphrasing as Beckett progresses through *A History of Philosophy*, there is very little by way of interpolation in the notes. Windelband's brief discussion of Arnold Geulincx—representing Beckett's first introduction to the post-Cartesian "Occasionalist" philosopher—provides a rare example of Beckett's textual intervention:

This furthest developed in Ethics of Geulincx. Illustration of the 2 Clocks which having once been synchronised by same artificer continue to move in perfect harmony, "absque ulla causalitate qua alterum hoc in altero causat, sed propter meram dependentiam, qua utrumque ab eadem arte et simili industria constitutum est".

What anthropologism!

(TCD 10967, 189, taken from *HP*, 415)⁷

More characteristic, though, are Beckett's notes on the Sophists and Protagoras. Here, over eleven pages Beckett's only insertion is the word "Et alors" in the following passage (where the original reads "What then?"):

[Protagoras] is said to have met Zeno at Athens, when problem of continuity was discussed:
Z [Zeno]: Tell me, P [Protagoras], does a single grain of millet, or ten thousandth part of one, make a noise in falling?

P: No.

Z: Does a bushel of millet make a noise in falling?

P: Yes.

Z: Et alors . . . Is there not a ration of a bushel of millet to 1 grain and ten thousandth of 1 grain [?]

P: Yes.

Z: Then will not the sounds leave the same ratio? As the sounding objects to one another, so the sounds. There if the bushel makes a noise, the grain and ten thousandth grain will make a noise. (TCD 10967, 45–46v)

758 Parenthetically, and in keeping with the more veiled allusions to Beckett's earlier process of learning in his postwar work, this image provides the opening line from the 1958 *Endgame*: "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. [Pause.] Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap."⁸ Similarly, the 1946 *Mercier and Camier* expresses this Sophist paradox as: "every millet grain that falls, you look behind and there you are, every day a little closer, all life a little closer."⁹

However, despite appearances, Beckett did not merely copy his sources slavishly. In fact, he carefully edited them. For instance, he omitted many passages where the views of one of his chosen sources are at odds with his. Beckett's input into the "Philosophy Notes" is therefore revealed as much in terms of what he left out as what he included. In characteristic fashion, Beckett appears as an absence in the notes. The most repeated prominent example of this concerns Beckett's systematic purging of Windelband's interpretative commentary in *A History of Philosophy*. While, as shown above, it is an exaggeration to claim that the "Philosophy Notes" contain no Beckett, in terms of philosophical exegesis they certainly contain no Windelband. Indeed, it is perhaps symptomatic that Windelband's name never appears in Beckett's published texts or letters. A very rare reference to the "Philosophy Notes," made in a letter to Alan Schneider of 21 November, 1957, underlined the manner in which Beckett makes the notes his own—quite literally in this case:

I can't find my notes on the pre-Socratics. The arguments of the Heap and the Bald Head (which hair falling produces baldness) were used by all the Sophists and I think have been variously attributed to one or the other. They disprove the reality of mass in the same way and by means of the same fallacy as the arguments of the Arrow and Achilles and the Tortoise, invented a century earlier by Zeno the Eleatic, disprove the reality of movement. The leading Sophist, against whom Plato wrote his Dialogue, was Protagoras and he is probably the "old Greek" whose name Hamm can't remember. One purpose of the image throughout the play is to suggest the impossibility logically, i.e. eristically, of the "thing" ever coming to an end.¹⁰

It is telling that Beckett writes, "I can't find *my* notes," rather than, say, "I can't find the notes I took from Windelband"—despite the fact that the source of the imagery is the latter's work. The figures of the Heap and the Bald Head, for example, come from *A History of Philosophy*, while the word "eristically" appears in the noun form on the same page of Windelband's work (but in none of the other sources that Beckett used) (*HP*, 89, n. 4). Before looking in more detail at how Beckett purged *A History of Philosophy* of Windelband, it is worth looking at what he might have found objectionable in the latter's account of Western philosophy. To do so, it is necessary to say a little more about the life, work, and context of this once-famous German philosopher.

Wilhelm Windelband was born in 1848, a moment when philosophy in Germany was at its lowest ebb—a significant factor, as will be seen, in the composition of *A History of Philosophy*. Nevertheless, he had gained a PhD in philosophy by the age of twenty-two, though his career was to be interrupted by the Franco-Prussian war, for

which he received a commission. After the war he took his *Habilitation* at Leipzig in 1873, and was subsequently appointed lecturer in that city. He also taught at Zurich and Freiburg before moving in 1882 to the then-German University of Strasbourg, where he was appointed Rector in 1892. His final post was at Heidelberg (1903), where he died in 1915. At the last two universities, Windelband made his reputation as a philosopher in his own right, even if he is largely remembered today as the author of *A History of Philosophy*. Frederick Copleston, for example, in his 1963 synthesis, *A History of Philosophy: Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century German Philosophy*, introduces Windelband as "the well-known historian of philosophy," but devotes less than two pages to his actual thought.¹¹

Nonetheless, at the turn of the century, Windelband was a key figure in the Neo-Kantian movement then dominating academic philosophy (*Schulphilosophie*) in Germany at the time, with most university chairs being occupied by representatives of the movement. The Neo-Kantians were broadly divided into two camps, the Marburg and Baden (also called Southwest German) Schools, and Windelband was long the acknowledged leader of the second. While the Marburg School focused on logical, epistemological, and methodological themes, for the latter—and for Windelband in particular—the key question for fin-de-siècle Western philosophy turned upon the demarcation between the natural and the cultural sciences, especially where this related to a philosophy of values.¹²

At this time, academic philosophy was fighting a rearguard action against the seemingly irresistible rise of the materialist sciences in nineteenth-century Europe, ranging from Darwinian biology to Rankean history and threatening to obviate the very discipline of philosophy itself. As Windelband put it, "In the nineteenth century, a certain paralysis of the philosophical impulse set in."¹³ Traditional philosophical debates (such as the relation of body to mind) were increasingly held to be translatable into technical problems that could be pragmatically solved by the empirical sciences. Philosophy, it was argued, had reached its peak with positivism and, in doing so, had effectively rendered itself redundant. Where it was studied at all, it was approached from a historical perspective as a catalogue of curiosities; there was no belief in philosophy's ability to offer transcendental norms, because there was no interest in transcendental norms in any of the sciences. This condition led Windelband to lament: "Philosophy is like King Lear, who has bequeathed all his goods to his children, and who must now resign himself to be thrown into the street like a beggar."¹⁴

To rectify this parlous state of affairs—which, one assumes, would ultimately throw academic philosophers onto the street—it was vital for Windelband and the other Baden Neo-Kantians to redefine the parameters of philosophy and defend the discipline as an autonomous one. In his 1894 Rectorial Address delivered at the University of Strasbourg, formally entitled "History and Natural Science," Windelband outlined his philosophical position as an epistemological inquiry into "the relationship of the general to the particular" ("RAS," 175). For him, the proper role of philosophy was to *evaluate* and, above all, *critique* the first principles and knowledge claims made by the newly-independent, materialist disciplines. As Windelband's Rectorial Address was

760 given just as *A History of Philosophy* was being translated by James Tufts, this important lecture offers a good indication of Windelband's thought at the time of composing the work that Beckett read so closely.

Windelband's contribution to the firestorm engulfing philosophy in Germany was to argue that the proper terrain of Western philosophy was knowledge claims. As such, any discipline dealing in the acquisition of knowledge—for him, history and psychology in particular—was necessarily involved in philosophical inquiry; it was thus fair game for philosophical criticism. In this way, Windelband began his address by acknowledging the two fashionable routes of discourse open to him:

The philosopher might well be tempted to provide nothing more than an historical sketch of some aspect of his discipline. Or he might take refuge in the specialized empirical science which the existing academic customs and dispositions still persist in assigning to him: psychology. ("RAS," 169)

However, he rejects both options, claiming, "I shall not employ either of these routes of escape. I do not propose to lend credence to the view that philosophy no longer exists, but only its history" ("RAS," 169–70).

In setting out a different stall, Windelband then considered the differences between the natural and cultural sciences. The first is concerned with the form that remains constant; and the second, vital to the study of history in particular, was the unique, real event. This distinction is used to introduce the now-familiar separation of "nomothetic" and "idiographic" methodologies:

One kind of science is an inquiry into general laws. The other kind of science is an inquiry into specific historical facts. In the language of formal logic, the objective of the first kind of science is the general, apodictic judgment; the objective of the other kind of science is the singular, assertoric proposition. Thus this distinction connects with the most important and crucial relationship in the human understanding, the relationship which Socrates recognized as the fundamental nexus of all scientific thought: the relationship of the general [nomothetic] to the particular [idiographic]. ("RAS," 175)¹⁵

Windelband goes on to complicate this picture, however, by arguing that the two approaches cannot be so easily separated, either from each other or from philosophy more generally. Both make judgments of value. Windelband argued that, for all its focus on unique events, history remains intrinsically concerned with value. It is not in the practice of listing *every* fact, but only those considered important within the discipline's (and society's) value-system: what facts are selected depends on a priori, transcendental judgments of value. Windelband offers the following example to illustrate his point:

In the year 1780, Goethe had a door bell and an apartment key made. On February 22 of the same year, he had a letter case made. Of this there is documentary proof in a locksmith's bill. Hence it is completely true and certain to have happened. Nevertheless it is not an historical fact, neither a fact of literary history nor of biography. ("RAS," 181)

Philosophy is thus the ground for the other sciences, insofar as the former critiques the assumptions underlying the latter. As Frederick C. Beiser holds with respect to the issue of this Neo-Kantian "normativity":

Philosophy could only retain its identity as a distinct discipline, and it could still be a science, Windelband argued, if it only became what Kant had originally conceived it to be: namely, a critical philosophy, i.e. an investigations into the conditions and limits of the first principles of knowledge. All the special sciences, morality and the arts, presuppose first principles that they cannot investigate; and the defining task of philosophy should be to investigate just such principles. Philosophy thus retains its validity, albeit as a *second-order* science, whose role is precisely to examine the logic of first-order sciences. ("NN-K," 12–13)

Value was to be philosophy's currency, critique its method of exchange. In this way, Windelband wanted philosophy to concern itself with the value-dependent claims of the other sciences. Philosophy could thus remain both independent of (and implicitly superior to), the new forms of knowledge knocking at the door of fin-de-siècle German *Wissenschaft*. In the final analysis, then, Windelband not only helped to rescue philosophy, he did so by reasserting the transcendental, absolute standards of thought.

Consequently, Windelband viewed norms as the "central concept of the critical philosophy."¹⁶ In fact, as he claimed elsewhere, philosophy itself was nothing more than "a system of norms" ("NN-K," 14). And so, Windelband's normative critical philosophy, his Neo-Kantianism of the Southwestern German variety in particular, was to form the bedrock of a "critical science of universally-valid values."¹⁷ For Windelband, in Philip J. Swoboda's words, "the philosopher does not invent or promulgate norms; he merely attempts to separate out of the mass of evaluative judgments actually made by individuals and societies over the course of history those which enjoy the sanction of the 'normal consciousness.'"¹⁸ For the remainder of his life, Windelband went on to investigate the relation between the individual bearer of values, and the transcendent sphere from which these values were held to derive. In this context, *A History of Philosophy* was hardly a neutral account of its subject. Indeed, the book's subtitle announces its partisanship: *with especial reference to the formation of development of its problems and conceptions*. This would be no mere "historical sketch of some aspect of [the] discipline," but one which lays its emphasis on philosophy as an organic whole, and one whose conceptions were very much still relevant at the time. There is subtle, supporting evidence of Windelband's interests in the "Preface to the First Edition":

The choice of material has fallen everywhere on what individual thinkers have produced that was new and fruitful, while purely individual turns of thought, which may indeed be a welcome object for learned research, but afford no philosophical interest, have found at most a brief mention. (*HP*, ix)

As Windelband maintains, this is immediately apparent in the "external form" of the book, with sections devoted to concepts rather than thinkers; examples being "Authority

762 and Revelation,” “The Dualism of Body and Soul,” and “The Problem of Civilisation.” On the next page of the preface, he made a bold statement on the value of philosophy (like all these prefatory comments, not recorded by Beckett): “To understand this as a connected and interrelated whole has been my chief purpose;” it is out of the development of philosophical thought that “our theory of the world and life has grown.” The suggestion is that history and psychology, as well as the argument that philosophy is no longer valid—“our theory of the life and world”—are all themselves held to be derived from the achievements of philosophy. Windelband then announced his bias in favor of ancient Greek thought (albeit only certain brands of it) and the work of Immanuel Kant: “for a historical understanding of our intellectual existence, the forging out of the conceptions which the Greek mind wrested from the concrete reality found in Nature and human life, is more important than all that has since been thought—the Kantian philosophy excepted” (*HP*, x).

From the start, then, Windelband’s own interests suffuse *A History of Philosophy*. But these interests run counter to Beckett’s, who, just a handful of years after finishing his “Philosophy Notes,” wrote, in a memorable entry in his “German Diary” of 15 January 1937, that what he wanted was the “straws, flotsam, etc., names, dates, births and deaths” of specific, individual lives—precisely that which Windelband endeavors to exclude.¹⁹ How, then, are Windelband’s “normativity” and Beckett’s “nominalism” (of which more below) to be squared?

First of all, the second edition of *A History of Philosophy* includes far more of what might be considered “straws, flotsam, etc.” than its earlier incarnation. In the “Author’s Preface to the Second Edition,” Windelband indicates that some new sections have been included, seemingly reluctantly: “A desire has been expressed by readers of the book for a more extended notice of the personalities and personal relations of the philosophers.” His apologia for not doing so in the first edition was “because of the special plan” of his work, but this had to be altered a decade later: “Now I have sought to fulfill this demand so far as it has seemed possible *within the limit of my work*, but giving *brief and precise* characterizations of the most important thinkers” (*HP*, xi–xii). The concessionary material is included in most chapters in smaller font, between a general overview of each period and a more detailed look at “its problems and concepts.” There appears to have been little attempt to integrate this biographical information, however, and it often duplicates content from the preceding or following sections. Indeed, it sticks out like the proverbial sore thumb, appearing to underline that it is not part of Windelband’s original design. Yet these are very often the entries from which Beckett took the closest notes. One excerpt from the “Philosophy of the Renaissance” makes this clear:

Main seat of Platonism was Florentian academy, founded by Cosimo de’ Medici [*sic*]. Impulse for this given by Georgius Gemistus Pletho (1355–1450) author of numerous commentaries & of a treatise in Greek on the difference between Plato and Aristotle. Bessarion (born 1403 Trebizond – d. 1472 Cardinal at Ravenna). Pupil of above. His main treatise: Adversus Calumniatorem Platonis (Rome, 1409).

Most important members of the Platonic circle: Marsilio Ficino (1433–99). Translator of Plato & Plotinus & author of Theologia Platonica (Flor, 1482), & Francesco Patrizzi (1529–97) author of Nova de Universis Philosophia (Ferrara 1591). Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) Neo-Platonism alloyed with Neo-Pythagorean & ancient Pythagorean motives. (TCD 10967, 172v–173, taken from *HP*, 354)

Beckett's "Philosophy Notes" are therefore much less an account of "the formation and development of [philosophy's] concepts" than a list of the "straws, flotsam, etc." Yet if Windelband reluctantly incorporated this biographical material, Beckett happily imported even more of it, through his weaving of other sources into and between his notes from Windelband. Thus, when Windelband discussed the implications of Protagoras's dictum, "man is the measure," specifically in relation to *value* (*HP*, 93), Beckett abandoned *A History of Philosophy* and switched to Burnet, turning not to the latter's own section on "Man is the measure," but to the opening of the chapter, where biographical facts are to be found:

He legislated for Thourioi 444/3. On this his traditional date is based. Everyone connected with Thourioi is supposed to have "flourished" in year of its foundation, and to "flourish" is to be 40. Thus Empedocles, Herodotus, and Protagoras are all given as born 484/3 B.C.

Celebrated Suit for the Fee (Diog. Laert.) Euathlos was to pay the fee when he had won his 1st case. When Protagoras demanded it he said: "I have not won a case yet." P[rotagoras] answered that he would sue him, then he would have to pay "If I win, because I have won; if you win because you have won."

Interestingly, the idea that to "flourish" is to be 40 is taken from a footnote in Burnet.²⁰ But even more significant is Beckett's use of material which appears in footnotes from Windelband: time and again, Beckett turns to the German's footnotes, copying them painstakingly. Indeed, the image of the Heap and the Bald Head referred to above comes from a footnote, and this is the case for many of the key images that Beckett retains from Windelband, like the epigraph to chapter six of *Murphy* noted above. By way of further example, the infamous "*Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*," so central to *Murphy*, is found in a footnote on page 417 of *A History of Philosophy*. If Beckett's note-taking appears slavish, then it is this slavishness—its attention to detail—that provides him with a number of the key images he uses in his fiction. Yet Beckett, by including Windelband's disjecta in the body of his "Philosophy Notes," and later including many of these in fictional texts, creates of Windelband's work something very different from the stated aims of that work. In doing so, he perverts Windelband's take on the transcendental development of Western philosophy, providing the very catalogue of detail *A History of Philosophy* is so keen to avoid.

Moreover, Windelband's mediation of Western philosophy—and Beckett's resistance to it—is also apparent in the treatment (or otherwise) of individual philosophies and philosophers. This is especially evident where *A History of Philosophy* treats two related doctrines: Sophism, particularly Protagoras's brand, and nominalism. Windelband's "normative" position unmistakably placed him on one side of the ancient debate between universals and particulars, or in philosophical parlance, realism and nominalism:

Whoever proposes to discuss philosophical matters must, above all, have the courage to take a general position. He must also possess a kind of fortitude that is even more difficult to maintain: the boldness to steer his audience onto the high seas of the most abstract reflections, where the solid earth threatens to vanish from the eye and disappear beneath the feet. ("RAS," 176)

By contrast, Beckett's "Philosophy Notes" are weighted much more towards what *Murphy* dubbed "demented particulars."²¹ They tilt toward philosophical schools prioritizing this:

The source of Nominalism is the Aristotelian logic, in particular the *De Categoriis*. In this individual things of experience were designated as true "first" substances . . . Attached to this—*sensualism*, since the individual is that given by the world of sensible reality. (TCD 10967, 155v–156r, taken from *HP*, 296)

It might be expected that the exclusion of universals and the attachment to the individual in this movement was anathema to Windelband; and, indeed, his generally even-handed treatment of philosophy breaks down here. In yet another footnote—not taken down by Beckett—commenting on the nominalists outlined in the passage above, he interjects: "How inferior such considerations are to the beginnings of Greek thought!" (*HP*, 296, n. 4)

Windelband's lumping together of the two schools in order to better dismiss them—in this case Aristotelianism and medieval nominalism—is also apparent in his leveling of the same charge against Protagoras, namely "*sensualism*." And like nominalism, Sophism is a doctrine to which Beckett later returns in his work, in *Molloy* and *Endgame* and elsewhere. Considering that Beckett's notes (albeit taken from Alexander this time, not Windelband) assert that Protagoras was the "first *great* individualist, relativist & agnostic," a clash with Windelband's reading can be expected (TCD 10967, 44).²² Like his presentation of nominalism, Windelband's equanimity is strained in analyzing the Sophists; in fact, he is little short of scathing towards them. Nonetheless, he commenced his overview by begrudgingly offering them some credit:

while the Sophists were perfecting the scientific development of the formal art of presentation, verification, and refutation which they had to teach, they indeed created with this rhetoric, on the one hand, the beginnings of an independent *psychology*, and raised this branch of investigation from an inferior position which it had taken in the cosmological systems to the importance of a fundamental science, and developed, on the other hand, the preliminaries for a systematic consideration of the *logical* and *ethical norms*.

But Windelband's mood soon changed, as can be seen in the remainder of the paragraph:

But as they considered what they practised and taught—viz. the skill to carry through any proposition whatsoever—the *relativity* of human ideas and purposes presented itself to their consciousness so clearly and with such overwhelming force that they disowned inquiry as to the existence of a universally valid truth in the theoretical, as well as in the practical

sphere, and so fell into a scepticism which was at first a genuine scientific theory and then became frivolous. With their self-complacent, pettifogging advocacy, the Sophists made themselves the mouth-piece of all the unbridled tendencies which were undermining the order of public life. (*HP*, 69)

Characteristically, Windelband considered the Sophists' most important contribution to the development of philosophy to be a preliminary attempt to delimit transcendental norms. Crucially, by contrast, Beckett's version of this paragraph retains only the following:

As the Sophists considered what they practised and taught—viz. the skill to carry through any proposition whatsoever—the relativity of human ideas and purposes struck them with such overwhelming force that they disowned inquiry as to the existence of a universally valid [sic] in both theory and practice, and so fell into a scepticism which was at first genuine scientific theory and then became frivolous. (TCD 10967, 40–40v)

Beckett's omission of the word "but" in the midpoint of Windelband's paragraph, and indeed his omission of the first half of the paragraph, gives the passage an entirely new orientation—such that it may be read as approving of Sophist doctrine (the last three words notwithstanding). A page later, Windelband again devalues the Sophists, contrasting their "pettifogging" with "the plain, sound sense, and the pure and noble personality" of Socrates; again, Beckett omits this phrase.

It should be clear, then, that the "Philosophy Notes" are not merely taken passively from Windelband (or indeed Burnet, Alexander, or Ueberweg), with little input from Beckett. As this article has suggested, Beckett made the "Philosophy Notes" his own throughout. Beckett's authorship appears often as a change of emphasis, as in the re-weighting of Windelband's (and Burnet's) footnotes, and often in the form of an absence, as in his purging of Windelband's views in *A History of Philosophy*. It should thus come as no surprise that Beckett relied upon his meticulously compiled "Philosophy Notes" across his oeuvre. However, even when they do not employ images taken directly from Windelband, Beckett's fiction displays a clear distance from the German's thought, and the remainder of this article examines how it does so.

In the short story, "Ding-Dong," part of Beckett's first published work, *More Pricks than Kicks*, the protagonist, Belacqua, stands unable to move in the center of Dublin, that city made so famous by Joyce as a place of paralysis. But Belacqua does not suffer from the paralysis that affects Joyce's characters—the unwillingness to do anything about one's fate, so well illustrated by Eveline in the story of the same name.²³ He suffers from the sense that nothing can come of anything he does, or any direction in which he goes:

He squatted, not that he had too much drink taken but simply that for the moment there were no grounds for his favouring one direction rather than another, against Tommy Moore's plinth. Yet he durst not dally. Was it not from brooding shill I, shall I, dilly, dally, that he had come out? Now the summons to move on was a subpoena. Yet he found he

could not, any more than Buridan's ass, move to right or left, backward or forward. Why this was he could not make out at all. Nor was it the moment for self-examination. He had experienced little or no trouble coming back from the Park Gate along the north quay, he had taken the Bridge and Westmoreland Street in his stride, and now he suddenly found himself good for nothing but to loll against the plinth of this bull-necked bard, and wait for a sign.²⁴

As with Buridan's ass, famously positioned exactly halfway between hay and water such that it cannot choose between them, and as a result eventually dies of both hunger and thirst, Belacqua is unable to choose. However, in Belacqua's case it is not, as with the ass, that both choices are equally attractive, or as with Eveline that one choice (doing nothing) is more attractive than the other, but rather that all options are equally unattractive. As Andrew Gibson puts it, "The range of choices matters little. Belacqua has no foundation for any choice . . . Choice itself implodes."²⁵ Many of Beckett's letters written from Dublin at the time he was working on *More Pricks* return to this lack of grounds for choice: "I long to be away and of course can't bear the idea of going & can't understand why Hamburg, where it won't be warm and where I will probably be frightened."²⁶ A little later he speaks of "the old cowardice of keeping one[']s hand off the future. And I'm too old and too poor in guts or spunk or whatever the stuff is to endow the old corpse with a destination & buy a ticket & pack up here."²⁷ The suggestion that there is no system of value that underwrites Belacqua's choices is emphasized further in the manner in which he finally chooses, in the next story, "A Wet Night," a direction in which to go. The impetus is provided not by some higher system of value, but by the random blinkings of the illuminated Bovril sign that used to be attached to one of the buildings in this part of Dublin: "Belacqua had been proffered a sign, Bovril had made him a sign." The choice is thereby reduced to one between two public houses, and finally it is the quality of the beer he will find in the respective hostelries that moves him one way rather than another: he would go "where the porter is well up," and where he could avoid "poets and peasants and politicians."²⁸ These are hardly the kind of choice-informing values that Windelband had in mind.

In Beckett's next work, *Murphy*, the idea of a transcendental system of values is subject to questioning in a different way. On its very first page the novel announces that Murphy inhabits a "big world" in which things have no value other than that given to them by the "mercantile gehenna"; this is the arbitrary value of exchange, of "*quid pro quo*" as the cuckoo clock puts it (*M*, 27, 3). Murphy's response is to attempt to escape into "the little world" of the mind, in the manner (in his view) of the patients in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, an asylum in which he later finds employment. These patients, he feels, have attained the ideal state of world-abnegation expressed in Geulincx's maxim, quoted in the novel: *Ubi nihil valet, ibi nihil velis*; where you are worth nothing, there you should want nothing (*M*, 112). It should be noted that this phrase, taken down by Beckett in his notes from Windelband, is concerned with value, claiming that this should not be attached either to the subject or to the world. However, before self- or world-abnegation (and from there, Geulincx's philosophy) themselves become things of value, the irony, as in *More Pricks*, is stacked against Murphy. This

aspect of the novel has been well noted. Paul Davies points out how "the ironic poise . . . is so finely maintained that all the statements fall just short of assent," while Gibson argues that irony is the means by which "Beckett most clearly tips the balance against Murphy's choices."²⁹ Thus the narrator says that the difference which Murphy makes between the big world and the little is "lovingly simplified and perverted," while the patients' "frequent expressions apparently of pain, rage, despair and in fact all the usual" suggested "a fly somewhere in the ointment of the Microcosmos" (i.e., in Murphy's idealization of the patients' little worlds) which Murphy "either disregarded or muted to mean what he wanted" (*M*, 112–23).

If the rejection of transcendental values is one way in which Beckett's fiction is at odds with Windelband's philosophy, then the former's gravitation towards superfluous detail, selected without any regard for value, is its corollary. Where history and literary biography must reject the example of Goethe's lock, Beckett, in *Watt*, written between 1941 and 1944 (and his first text since the statement in his German Diary), indicates how the "straws, flotsam" might be incorporated into his fiction, distorting not just the art of literature (by forcing it to include material it normally omits), but also the philosophical system. Where the latter is concerned, Ackerley and Gontarski note the novel's concern with scholastic categories: "Quis? quid? ubi quibus auxiliis? cur? quomodo quando? (Who? what? when? by what means? why? in what way? when?)."³⁰ Richard N. Coe has called *Watt* "a pilgrimage in search of meaning" in a "jungle of hypotheses," and in the absence of meaning, Watt (and his surrogate narrator, Sam) has no way to choose what to select and what to leave out.³¹ Thus the novel (in the loosest possible sense of the term) contains a section entitled "Addenda," into which material is shunted not because it is less valuable than anything in the novel proper, but because "Only fatigue and disgust prevented its incorporation."³² Here we find flotsam that are not dissimilar in their focus on given names, assumed names and traditions to what Beckett copies from page 354 of Windelband (see above): "Art Con O'Connery, called Black Velvet O'Connery, product of the great Shinnery-Slattery tradition" (*W*, 215). The lack of any means of selection, though, is most apparent in the infamous passages which detail every possible permutation of a proposition. The following is but one example of many:

With regard to the so important matter of Mr Knott's physical appearance, Watt had unfortunately little or nothing to say. For one day Mr Knott would be tall, fat, pale and dark, and the next thin, small, flushed and fair, and the next sturdy, middlesized, yellow and ginger, and the next small, fat, pale and fair, and the next middlesized, flushed, thin and ginger, and the next tall, yellow, dark and sturdy, and the next fat, middlesized, ginger and pale, and the next tall, thin, dark and flushed, and the next . . . (*W*, 181)

And so on for another page and a half. However, this is not to suggest a *preference* for valuelessness on Beckett's part. He is well aware of the paradox of value: it is all too easy to end up valuing the devaluation of value. In a conversation with Charles Juliet, Beckett commented, "Negation is no more possible than affirmation. It is absurd to say that something is absurd. *That's still a value judgment*. It is impossible to protest, and

768 equally impossible to assent.”³³ Although this conversation took place three decades after the composition of the “Philosophy Notes,” and more than two decades after *Watt*, Beckett’s comments illustrate an attitude towards “normative values” that is nonetheless discernible in these texts. The *value* of the “straws, flotsam” is apparently that they undermine all attempts to establish a system of values. This is reinforced in *Molloy* (written 1947, published 1951). At one point in the novel, at the end of a long digression, the narrator says, “I apologise for these details, in a moment we’ll go faster, much faster”; however, he adds, “And then perhaps relapse again into a wealth of filthy circumstance”; this in turn will “give way to vast frescoes, dashed off with loathing.”³⁴ If details fare no better here than normative values, then it seems highly significant that the next line of the text evokes Protagoras: “Homo mensura can’t do without staffage.” Staffage is a term used in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century landscape painting to denote the human (and sometimes animal) figures which are depicted in the scene, but which are not the main subject matter of the painting; they are included merely to balance the composition or in the interests of decoration.

This last example shows the long process of transformation that Windelband’s account of the history of Western philosophy undergoes at Beckett’s hands: from a first stage, in which Windelband’s text is purged and warped to produce a uniquely Beckettian text, to a second stage, in which not just the images that Beckett finds in *A History of Philosophy* but also Windelband’s own philosophy are subject to further distortion. All of this goes to underline that *A History of Philosophy* remained a key text for Beckett, many years after he first encountered it, allowing him to “get back to ignorance” and develop his “knowledge of non-knowledge.”

Notes

1. David Addyman and Matthew Feldman would like to acknowledge the Bergen Research Foundation and the University of Bergen, Norway for, respectively, a Research Fellowship and a Senior Research Fellowship with the “Modernism and Christianity” project, which has graciously facilitated the completion of this text. Both authors also gratefully acknowledge permission to quote from Samuel Beckett’s “Interwar Notes” from Mr. Edward Beckett and the Estate of Samuel Beckett.

2. These notes were found in a trunk in Beckett’s Parisian flat after his death, and were made available for scholarly consultation in 2001. For an overview of Beckett’s “Interwar Notes,” including the “Philosophy Notes,” see Matthew Feldman, *Beckett’s Books* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 21–38.

3. Beckett’s “Philosophy Notes” are conserved in Trinity College Dublin (TCD) 10967 (hereafter cited with the manuscript number, followed by the folio number). They are described in “Notes diverse holo”: Catalogues of Beckett’s Reading Notes and Other Manuscripts at Trinity College Dublin, with Supporting Essays,” *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd’hui* 16 (2006): 67–89.

4. The epigraph on Murphy’s mind (“*Amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat*”) is found in Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (London: Faber, 2009), 69; it corresponds to a footnote in Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy*, 2 vols., trans. James Tufts (New York: Harper Torchback, 1958 [rev. ed. 1901]), 410, n. 2. (Hereafter cited in text as *HP*).

5. Egbert C. Smyth, “Brief Notice of Important Books,” in *The Andover Review: A Religious and Theological Monthly* 114 (Nov./Dec. 1893): 776.

6. “Gnome,” in Samuel Beckett, *Selected Poems 1930–1989*, ed. David Wheatley (London: Faber, 2009), 9. For Beckett’s statement to Anne Atik, and for discussion of Beckett’s “non-Euclidian logic,” see Feldman, *Beckett’s Books*, 5 and 13–20, respectively.

7. The term "anthropologism" likely refers to Beckett's rejection of what he called "anthropomorphization." This is put forward in a letter to Thomas McGreevy of 8 September, 1934: "Perhaps it is the one bright spot in a mechanistic age—the deanthropomorphizations of the artist. Even the portrait beginning to be dehumanised as the individual feels himself more & more hermetic & alone & his neighbour a coagulum as alien as a protoplast or God, incapable of loving or hating anyone but himself or of being loved or hated by anyone but himself." Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, 1929–1940, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 223.

8. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*, with a preface by Ronán McDonald (London: Faber, 2009), 6.

9. Samuel Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, ed. Seán Kennedy (London: Faber, 2010), 62.

10. Samuel Beckett to Alan Schneider, in *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*, ed. Maurice Harmon (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 23.

11. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 7, *Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century German Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2008), 364–65. It is ironic, given that so many of Beckett's key images come from footnotes in *A History of Philosophy*, that Windelband's own life is reduced to a three-line footnote in Copleston's study; see 364 n. 1.

12. *Ibid.*, 361–62, 364.

13. Wilhelm Windelband, "Rectorial Address, Strasbourg, 1894," reprinted in *History and Theory* 19.2 (Feb. 1980): 171 (hereafter cited in text as "RAS").

14. Cited in Frederick C. Beiser, "Normativity in Neo-Kantianism: Its Rise and Fall," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17.1 (2009): 12 (hereafter cited in text as "NN-K").

15. John Jalbert helpfully describes this methodological distinction: "according to Windelband's formulation, natural sciences are described as 'nomothetic' because they aim at general laws, and historical sciences are 'ideographic' because they focus their theoretical interest upon the individual and unique." See his "Husserl's Position Between Dilthey and the Windelband-Rickert School of Neo-Kantianism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26.2 (1988): 282. See also Rudolf A. Makkreel, "Wilhelm Dilthey and the Neo-Kantians: The Distinction of the Geisteswissenschaften and the Kulturwissenschaften," *History of Philosophy* 7.4 (1969): 426.

16. Lanier R. Anderson, "Neo-Kantianism and the Roots of Anti-Psychologism," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 13.2 (May 2005): 314. See also "Wilhelm Windelband: Philosophy as the Science of Values," in Thomas E. Willey, ed., *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860–1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), 134–39.

17. Philip J. Swoboda, "Windelband's Influence on S. L. Frank," *Studies in East European Thought* 47.3–4 (Dec. 1995): 264, which later highlights "the characteristically Windelbandian opposition between the valid and the merely factual. The 'factual' exhibits a 'blind necessity' which contrasts with the self-evident 'validity' of the primordial ground and those aspects of being that the latter 'illuminates'" (282). See also Rudolf A. Makkreel and Sebastian Luft, "Who Were the Neo-Kantians?" in Rudolf A. Makkreel and Sebastian Luft, eds., *Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 1–4.

18. Swoboda, "Windelband's Influence on S. L. Frank," 272.

19. Cited in James Knowlson, *Samuel Beckett: Damned to Fame* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 244–45.

20. John Burnet, *Greek Philosophy, Part I: Thales to Plato* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 90, n. 2.

21. Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (London: Faber, 2009), 11 (hereafter cited in text as *M*).

22. Taken from Archibald Alexander, *A Short History of Philosophy* (Glasgow: Maclehose, Jackson and co., 1922), 49–50; italics added.

23. Eveline, famously, rejects the opportunity to leave Dublin and start a new life in "Buenos Ayres" with the sailor, Frank. The last words of the story, as she stands frozen on the jetty, unable to follow Frank, underline her paralysis: "She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal." James Joyce, *Dubliners* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29.

24. Samuel Beckett, *More Pricks than Kicks*, ed. Cassandra Nelson (London: Faber, 2010), 33.

- 770 25. Andrew Gibson, "The Irish Remainder: *More Pricks Than Kicks*," keynote lecture, "Beckett in the Thirties" Conference, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris, October 2006 (unpublished).
26. Beckett, *The Letters*, vol. 1, 1929–1940, 73.
27. *Ibid.*, 88.
28. Beckett, *More Pricks than Kicks*, 44.
29. Paul Davies, *The Ideal Real: Beckett's Fiction and Imagination* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994), 32; Andrew Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 152.
30. C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber, 2006), 629.
31. Richard N. Coe, *Beckett* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1968), 38.
32. Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, ed. C. J. Ackerley (London: Faber, 2009), 215 (hereafter cited in text as *W*).
33. Quoted in Charles Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde* (Leiden: Academic Press, 1995), 165; italics added.
34. Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, ed. Shane Weller (London: Faber, 2009), 62–63.