This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the debut performance of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.\footnote{1} When it premiered at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris on January 5, 1953, it drew mixed reactions. Over the past half-century it has achieved canonical status in European literature, but it remains a controversial work. There is perhaps no other work of literature that better portrays the pathology of ceaseless messianic expectation than *Waiting for Godot*.

Eric Voegelin makes occasional reference to *Godot* in his writings. It is clear that he was familiar with the play and that it had made an impression on him. In his address to the Thomas More Institute in 1965, Voegelin speaks of Beckett in relation to the "lost soul," the person who is trapped within destructive patterns of thought and activity from which he cannot escape due to either "inertia" or "stupidity." "There are such people," Voegelin says:

Think of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. A man like Beckett is also one who knows perfectly well that all that agnosticism is blooming nonsense but he can't get out of it. I don't know why.\footnote{2}

Voegelin claims that Beckett's works exemplify the "tonality of unrest," in which the questioning of existence is experienced as terrifying and meaningless, and where order is believed to emerge through terror and coercion alone. In his essay "Reason: The Classic Experience," Voegelin

\footnote{1}{In this paper I use the revised text of *Waiting for Godot* contained in *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Volume 1: Waiting for Godot*, ed. Dougald McMillan and James Knowlson (New York: Grove Press, 1993). All references to the revised text are indicated by page numbers in parentheses.}

places Beckett in a list of modern thinkers who have symbolized this unrest. Voegelin claims that *Waiting for Godot* is "reminiscent" of Heideggerian "angst" in which a person "waits for a parousia of Being' which does not come." The "tonality of unrest" depicted by Heidegger and Beckett is different, Voegelin argues, from Aristotelian philosophy, in which "questioning unrest" is experienced as "distinctly joyful." Beckett, as an exemplar of contemporary angst, is unable to convey such Aristotelian joy in his own work. Voegelin claims that many of the representatives of modern anguish such as Hobbes, Hegel, Marx, Freud, Heidegger, Sartre, and Levi-Strauss "aggressively claim for their mental disease the status of mental health."3

However, I will argue that this is not the case with Beckett. Beckett recognizes his anguish as a sickness, not as the source of order for the soul and society. He is just unable, or unwilling, to find a remedy. Voegelin is critical of Beckett for not attempting to escape from this condition. However, it is important that we do not dismiss *Waiting for Godot* as "blooming nonsense." Indeed, Voegelin himself never actually dismisses it as such. On the contrary, Voegelin, in his essay on Henry James, describes Beckett's works as "superbly clear" instances of the "symbolization of ambiguity."4

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett reveals that perpetual messianism, the never-ending desire for metastasis, is a primary source of modern anguish and ambiguity. Beckett's critique of eschatological expectation does not just apply to the immanentized eschatologies of modernity. It is also applicable to Augustinian-derived modes of expectation. Indeed, Beckett implicitly uses an Augustinian symbol that Voegelin was familiar with: the *saeculum senescens*, the "old

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age of the world." The *saeculum senescens* is, for Augustine, the present epoch, the period after the first appearance of Jesus but before his Second Coming. Augustine presents this last epoch of history as an age of spiritual vitality in which everything necessary for salvation has been definitively revealed. Christians, according to Augustine, should not waste time speculating about the year or day of Jesus' return; God will irrupt into history at his own choosing, and this moment is a mystery to all human beings. In the meantime Christians must get along in the world as best they can, and wait with both hope and fear for the Second Coming. Immanent political history, according to Augustine, has no inherent providential meaning; it is simply the story of the rise and fall of cities of men, and God will bring it to an end at some point in the future. History now wanes towards the apocalypse in its old age. Voegelin writes: "This feeling of aging and tending toward an inevitable end ... lies like a blight over the philosophy of Augustine."6 [6]

*Waiting for Godot* explores this "blight" in more detail. For Beckett, humans are trapped in an old age of the world that has a different cast from Augustine's *saeculum senescens*. Beckett uses the geriatric motif throughout *Godot*. Except for a boy who appears at the end of each act, all of the characters in the play are old and suffer from afflictions that are common in the elderly. Furthermore, everything in the surrounding natural environment is either dead or dying. In this old world populated by old people, Beckett presents an Augustinian-based civilization in decline not a wise old age of expectant faith but an age of senility. The spiritual vitality that, for

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Augustine, characterizes messianic hope in the saeculum senescens has, in Godot, been devastated by centuries of ceaseless expectation.

Voegelin himself claimed that Augustine's symbolization of the present as a saeculum senescens had started to lose its persuasiveness as early as the twelfth century. In The Ecumenic Age, Voegelin writes:

The main Church had accepted Augustine's symbolization of the present, post-Christ period as the saeculum senescens, as the time of waiting for the Parousia and the eschatological events, while the more fervent expectations were pushed to the sectarian fringe of the apocalyptic and Gnostic movements. By the twelfth century A.D., this inconclusive arrangement had experientially outlived itself. The Western empire of the crusades, of the new religious orders, and the cathedral schools, of cities in growth and national kingdoms in formation, could hardly leave the witnesses of the age unaware that a "meaning" beyond a mere waiting was being constituted in history.7 

And yet Beckett, writing in the middle of the twentieth century, reveals that Augustinian modes of expectation continue well into modernity, and indeed constitute a central component of the modern age. If "waiting" for the eschaton had, in Voegelin's words, already "experientially outlived itself" by the twelfth century, then Waiting for Godot shows the fate of the Augustinian understanding eight centuries after it had begun to lose its meaning. We find that the residue of Christian experience remains, despite the new "meanings" that have arisen since its decline. However, this residual Christianity is merely the deformed shape of Christian faith. The characters are caught in the habit of messianic expectation, but they are no longer convinced that what they wait for is either true or desirable. As one of the characters says, "habit is a great deadener" (82). Unfortunately, the characters are unable to break their eschatological addictions.

The situation in Godot is familiar to almost all students of twentieth century literature. In Act 1, two elderly tramps named Vladimir and Estragon wait by a dying tree in a desolate spot

for a man named Godot a man they claim to have met in the past and who is supposed to arrive at sunset. It is clear, however, that they have been waiting in this same spot for many years without Godot ever arriving. Two other elderly men eventually pass by together: a slave named Lucky and his abusive master named Pozzo. Pozzo keeps Lucky on a leash, cracks his whip at him, and orders him to do menial tasks. The appearance of Pozzo and Lucky, however, does not occasion the arrival of Godot, and the two men eventually exit the stage. Subsequently, a boy, who has a message from Godot, enters. The Boy announces that Godot will not arrive tonight but "surely tomorrow" (47). Night falls without Godot appearing on the stage, and the first act ends. In Act 2, which takes place the "Next day. Same time. Same place," the same sequence of events occurs (50). Vladimir and Estragon wait, Pozzo and Lucky pass by, and the Boy appears with a message proclaiming that Godot will not arrive until tomorrow. Once again, night falls without Godot's appearance. The play ends, and Vladimir and Estragon continue to wait for their elusive man.

Beckett himself never denied that the figure of Godot is suggestive of the Christian God. There are numerous references to Christianity throughout the play. Obviously, name "Godot" contains the word "God," but Beckett adds the diminutive suffix "-ot," suggesting that Godot is a diminished deity. Godot, like Jesus, has come before though the details of the first coming are sketchy and he is expected to come again though the second coming is perpetually deferred. Furthermore, the arrival of Godot, like the arrival of Jesus, is expected to bring salvation. Vladimir and Estragon suffer from illness, hunger, cold, homelessness and restlessness. Godot is expected to give them food, warmth, shelter, and a place to rest. Vladimir reassures Estragon that "Perhaps we'll sleep tonight in his loft. All snug and dry, our bellies full, in the hay. That's worth waiting for. No?" (19). "We'll be saved," Vladimir proclaims, if "Godot comes" (85).
However, Beckett categorically denied that Godot is only an allegory for God, Christ's Second Coming, or Christian salvation. Godot's meaning is much broader and has more implications. As one critic put it, Godot is "the promise that is always awaited and not fulfilled." Godot is anything—a person, an idea, a hope, and event, an ideology, a religion, a product, a technique, a God that promises to bring a definitive end to present sufferings and create a radically new condition. That said, the mode of Vladimir and Estragon's "waiting" is distinctly Augustinian. They do not try to actualize salvation themselves through an immanent revolutionary program. They wait for a transcendental character—a figure who transcends the space and time of the play to irrupt into their world and change everything for them. Vladimir and Estragon have limited power, so they adopt a humble attitude towards the one who is coming (see 18). In this sense, they are different from the other pair of characters in the play, Pozzo and Lucky, who are attempting to redeem themselves through vigorous activity. In the French version of the play, Pozzo claims that he and Lucky are walking towards the "march de Saint-Sauveur" (market of the Holy Saviour). As opposed to Vladimir and Estragon, who are stuck in one spot as they wait for salvation, Pozzo and Lucky move towards salvation along a road, with Lucky leading the way and Pozzo spurring him "onward" with a whip. Pozzo and Lucky are a dim reflection of Hegel's master/slave dialectic, moving towards the fulfillment of history without ever arriving. Both men desire the absolute but they are in fact moving away from it. Pozzo is a failed tyrant who wants absolute power over people and things, but he is gradually losing control. By Act 2 he has lost all of his belongings and has gone blind. Lucky, who has willingly surrendered himself to Pozzo's dictatorship, is a failed encyclopedist who wants absolute knowledge. Lucky speaks only once in the entire play, delivering a rambling monologue in which he attempts to provide a complete account of God, humanity, and nature (39-40). He ends up expressing uncertainty and confusion rather than articulated


omniscience. Lucky plays a senile Hegel to Pozzo's Napoleon in rags, a lunatic Kojève tied to a doddering Stalin. By Act 2, Lucky has become mute.

Pozzo and Lucky's immanent revolutionary approach is a disaster. Rather than progressing towards absolute fulfillment, they stammer towards complete disintegration. Vladimir and Estragon, in comparison, are not nearly as horrific. Their Augustinian approach avoids the pitfalls of fervent apocalypticism and revolutionary Gnosis. Those who expect that an "end" will be brought to them by a transcendent power at an indeterminate point in the future are less likely to try to realize the eschaton for themselves through a violent solution. Vladimir and Estragon's mode of eschatology allows them to cultivate a relative degree of sanity and kindness in their dealings with each other. Though Vladimir is more dominant than Estragon, he is not Estragon's abusive master; the two men address each other as equals. Occasionally, they display tenderness and concern for each other. Though they bicker constantly, they are like an old married couple who cannot imagine life apart. Consequently, they do not suffer as much, nor do they deteriorate as quickly as Pozzo and Lucky. Since Vladimir and Estragon's lives are comparatively superior, it is tempting to argue that their Augustinian form of expectation is essential for goodness. Beckett, however, consistently undermines any inclination to celebrate or advocate their condition. For Beckett, an Augustinian-derived form of eschatology is not a genuine remedy for the immanentized eschatologies of modernity; it is, rather, a less-advanced form of the same disease. In *Waiting for Godot*, pneumopathology is found in the very desire for metastasis, not just in the desire to immanentize the eschaton.

Ceaseless waiting for a transcendent salvation does not make Vladimir and Estragon stand out as paragons of excellence. At one point Vladimir says, "We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?" Estragon responds "Billions" (73). And if they are not justified by faith, they are certainly not redeemed by works. Like Pozzo and Lucky, Vladimir and Estragon cannot escape from certain messianic habits. This
ultimately devastates their ability to think and act in meaningful, productive ways. Their questioning of existence is not erotic or joyful in the Platonic or Aristotelian sense, but world-weary at best and terrified at worst. Furthermore, they cannot seem to do anything to make their condition more bearable. Though they try to alleviate suffering on a few occasions, there are many more instances where they either ignore the pain of others or intentionally cause harm.10

For the most part, Vladimir and Estragon seem either indifferent to suffering or openly malicious. For Beckett, Augustinian modes of expectation have led to paralysis in both thought and action, so much so that even the simplest thoughts seem complicated and the most basic acts of assistance seem impossible. The expectation of metastasis distorts our ability to think clearly and act virtuously. Indeed, in the shadow of the eschaton, mystery and faith trump knowledge and virtue. Living in hope of a future deliverance might alleviate the pain of existence for a period, but as this expectation becomes perpetual and habitual it becomes less persuasive and thereby aggravates the very suffering it sought to ameliorate. As Vladimir says:

All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which how shall I say which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. No doubt. But has it not long been straying in the night without end of the abyssal depths? (73)

Further aggravating the suffering is the fact that Godot is not just expected to bring salvation but judgement as well. Vladimir claims they cannot stop waiting for Godot because he would "punish" them (84). Whenever Estragon thinks he hears Godot approach, he cowers in fear and proclaims he is "is accursed" or "in hell" (18, 66-67). Vladimir also claims that they must wait for Godot so that they will "know exactly where [they] stand" (17, my italics). There is an ominous tone to Vladimir's words, for the two tramps may be in bad standing with Godot.

10 Beckett, in his notebook for the 1975 Schiller-Theatre production of Waiting for Godot, counts twenty-one moments in the play when Vladimir and Estragon are addressed by pleas for help. Of these twenty-one pleas, they answer only four with concrete gestures of assistance. Of the rest, fourteen are ignored, one is aborted, one is answered on condition, and the status of another is unknown. See McMillan and Knowlson, Theatrical Notebooks Vol. 1, 355.
Vladimir and Estragon perceive Godot's arrival as a definitive end, bringing either reward or punishment, justification or denial, inclusion or exclusion, election or rejection, salvation or damnation. The spectre of damnation haunts the characters in *Waiting for Godot*. Indeed, early in the play, Vladimir expresses anxiety over the fact that only one of the four Gospels in the New Testament — Luke — speaks of a crucified thief being saved (11-12).

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark claim that both thieves chided Jesus on the cross, which would imply that both thieves were damned.

Beckett acknowledged that the source of the judgement motif in *Waiting for Godot* was derived from a statement attributed to St. Augustine: "Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned." Augustine's statement reveals the antagonism and exclusivity within the very structure of the Christian apocalyptic promise. It signifies an absolute selection, not universal hospitality or charity. In expectation of the eschaton, humans must live in the uncertainty of the final selection, in which hope is immediately qualified by fear. This, for Augustine, is the true shape of messianic experience in the *saeculum senescens*, and it is this pattern that Beckett presents to us in *Godot*. Indeed, Beckett suggests that this Augustinian pattern still shapes and influences modern phenomena even those things that are not explicitly Christian.


12 [12] See Matthew 27:38, 44 and Mark 15: 27, 32. The Gospel of John mentions that Jesus was crucified between "two others" but it does not give any further details (John 19:18).

13 [13] Beckett refers to this statement in Harold Hobson, "Samuel Beckett, Dramatist of the Year," *International Theatre Annual*, no. 1 (London: John Calder, 1956), 153. No scholar has ever been able to locate the source of the quotation that Beckett attributes to Augustine, leading to speculation that it is apocryphal. However, Bert O. States directs us to a sentence by Augustine that is striking similar: "Let the good man fear lest he perish through pride; let the evil man not despair of his many wicked acts" (States, *The Shape of Paradox* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978], 3 n. 4. The sentence is found in Augustine, "De Symbolo ad Catechumenos," *Patrologiae Latina*, vol. 40, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1945), col. 646.
But does Godot actually exist? And is the salvation and damnation associated with his return a reality? The fact that Godot never arrives suggests that he does not exist; the fact that a boy arrives at the end of each act with information about Godot suggests that he does exist. But even if Godot were to arrive he would not give Vladimir and Estragon what they expect, which is complete comfort, abundant food, undisturbed rest, and complete knowledge of "where they stand." The Boy who arrives with a message from Godot claims to know his master; however, he cannot confirm whether Godot is "fond" of him or not, and he cannot say for sure whether he is happy or unhappy as a resident of Godot's estate (47-8). He can confirm that Godot feeds him "fairly well" but not very well (47). This does not bode well for Vladimir, who expects to receive a "full" stomach if Godot arrives (19). Thus, Vladimir says to the boy: "You're as bad as myself" (48). With this exclamation, Vladimir unintentionally implies that his own condition will not be improved if Godot arrives. On the contrary, his condition might be made worse. Other things the Boy says suggest this possibility. The Boy, who claims to be Godot's goat keeper, says that he has a "sick" brother a sheep keeper who is "beaten" by Godot (83, 47). Like God in Matthew 25, Godot separates the sheep from the goats, only the significance of the biblical symbols is reversed: whereas God damns the goats and blesses the sheep, Godot damns his sheep keepers and blesses his goat keepers. However, even Godot's blessed goats are not sure if they are actually saved, given the goat Boy's inability to proclaim his happiness to Vladimir.

The information Vladimir receives from the Boy reveals that there are, in fact, two Godots in the play. There is, first, the Godot of faith, the Godot whom Vladimir and Estragon expect. This Godot is extremely hospitable, but only to some. Vladimir generally lives in hope of such hospitality, whereas Estragon fears that, like Godot's sheep keeper, he will be excluded from it. Nevertheless, if Vladimir and Estragon do not receive the hospitality they desire or if

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14 See Matthew 25: 31-46.
only one of them does they will at least know where they "stand" with the arrival of the Godot of faith, the Godot who is always coming, the Godot who inspires both hope and fear in the present. However, there is also the "real" Godot, the "historical" Godot, the Godot who is reported to us by the Boy. The real Godot cannot provide the certain judgement that Vladimir and Estragon expect, nor can he offer much hospitality, even to those whom he supposedly prefers. Consequently, the real Godot cannot bring a definitive end to the situation that presently plagues Vladimir and Estragon. On the contrary, it seems that his arrival will only exacerbate the problems that Vladimir and Estragon already have.

If the real Godot were to come he would be like Pozzo. The resemblance between these two goes well beyond their names. Pozzo exhibits a power over people and things that is similar to what we hear about Godot. Pozzo claims to have a "manor" full of slaves (42, 30), and given his treatment of Lucky we can see that, like Godot, he beats at least one of them. Since Pozzo is so noticeably similar to Godot, Vladimir and Estragon are confused about Pozzo's true identity. In both acts, the two tramps mistake the impending approach of Pozzo for Godot (18-19, 66-68). The resemblance is so strong that Estragon wonders if Pozzo actually is Godot. Despite Vladimir's assurances that Pozzo is not Godot, he is not entirely convinced himself (81). The point is that if the "real" Godot were to arrive, he would be Pozzo or something like him. In other words, he would be something horrible.

Perhaps more fearful that the "real" Godot, however, is the Godot of "faith," the bringer of the decisive selection, the Godot who would tell Vladimir and Estragon "exactly" where they "stand." Such a resolution might seem desirable to Vladimir at times, but anything that approaches this goal in the "real" world is horrific. With Pozzo and Lucky in Act 1, we see an approximation of what such a final selection would resemble. They go the furthest towards realizing the eschatological promise of a final twofold division, a categorical and unchanging distinction between the saved and damned. The "decision" that Vladimir and Estragon expect
from Godot in the future would result in a perfected version of what Pozzo and Lucky already experience in the present. It would be terrifying to behold. Vladimir and Estragon thus wait for and desire something that is far more horrific than the bleak lives they live in the present. This, of course, has implications for Augustinian-based modes of eschatology. For Augustine, the final and perfect realization of God's providence occurs at the eschaton when the saved will be eternally separated from the damned. And yet, the closest analogue we have of such a final selection in history is found in totalitarian regimes, where the saved were determined on the basis of either race, class, or ideology, and the damned were sent to the camps. To be sure, Augustine would condemn the immanentized eschatologies of modernity. However, it is disturbing that what is most horrible to look at in this world is what most resembles the Christian eschaton in the world to come. Hell, which for Augustine includes both never-ending spiritual torment and everlasting physical torture, is a concentration camp without end. It raises questions about the health of Augustinian expectation, or, for that matter, any form of eschatological expectation that awaits a final selection. Likewise, the similarity between Pozzo and Godot raises questions about the desirability of Godot's arrival. Beckett suggests that all forms of eschatological expectation wait for something that is not only illusory, but also undesirable.

In fact, Beckett goes further. In Godot, he reveals that when we root our experience in the expectation of metastasis, even as an imaginary regulative ideal, we desert the present. The perpetually absent eschaton de-divinizes the world, and strips the present of meaningfulness, since meaning is only found in relation to the perfection to-come. The play reveals that when the promised transfiguration does not arrive, humans become disenchanted with the world and society. This disenchantment encourages either nihilistic passivity or the deification of human power. Beckett indicates that every form of messianic expectation has been tried, from the most radical to the most sensible. There is presently "nothing to be done" within the confines of the

15 See Augustine's account of eternal punishment in Book 21 of City of God.
eschatological (9). The messianic has made us sick, distorting our perceptions of the present and causing us to desire an imaginary, and ultimately horrific, future.

How can we get out of the situation depicted in *Godot*? There have, of course, been numerous remedies prescribed for the malaise presented in the play. One response of recent days has been to revive the messianic impulse with new fervor. In Beckett's age of senility, people are nominally messianic, but they have become weary and skeptical of their unfulfilled expectations. The term "fundamentalism" now refers to the late modern attempt to revive the messianic impulse, to give it new life, and to make people truly "believe" once again. Religious fundamentalism attempts to counter the "agnosticism" of modernity with a more vigorous, literalist, apocalyptic faith. But there are also numerous secular fundamentalisms. After the horrors of the twentieth century, there have been fervent attempts to revive the Enlightenment idea of immanent historical progress, to place absolute faith in human ingenuity, science and technology, and to postulate the coming of a truly universal human community that respects human rights and free enterprise. But Beckett would simply dismiss late-modern fundamentalism as both in its religious and secular manifestations as a necrophilic reconstitution of failed eschatological hopes.

There are those who, while criticizing "fundamentalism," will also defend the Augustinian position, or some related form of messianic faith. Jacques Derrida, for example, argues that the messianic spirit the expectation of a justice to-come, of a hospitality to-come is essential for ethics in the present.16 Indeed, Derrida argues that messianic expectation is a universal constituent of human experience experienced by all people in all places at every point in history. However, Derrida claims that the "messianic" was not fully

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articulated until the emergence of Abrahamic religion. Similar to Voegelin, Derrida argues that the revelatory traditions developed a more differentiated symbolism. Derrida refers to the "events of revelation" of the births of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as "absolute events" because these religions finally symbolized the messianic aspect of human experience, an aspect that was always part of the human condition but not adequately symbolized.17 [17] The messianic, according to Derrida, is contained in the human experience of awaiting a "promise." Every awaited promise, no matter how trivial, carries with it the expectation of "peace" and "justice." In other words, all forms of future expectation are "messianic." So Derrida insists that we must retain a general messianic orientation, which is aware of how far our present epoch falls short of the "hospitality" in the messianic age of a "hospitality" which provides unlimited and unconditional care for each individual.

What we must avoid, Derrida argues, is an uncritical lapse into what he calls "messianisms" that is, into fundamentalisms, literalisms, or ideologies that identify a specific person or thing as the "messiah" and that proclaim a specific people as absolutely elected. The coming of the messiah, for Derrida, is not a literal future event, but an orientation in the present, an active pursuit of the good. It is something that is always coming, but that never actually arrives; we will always fall short of messianic "hospitality." Derrida is here recasting Augustine's *saeculum senescens*. The arrival of the messiah is not just radically indeterminate but infinitely postponed.18 [18] Indeed, Derrida claims that if the messiah were to arrive we should send him away, for his actual arrival would be catastrophic.19 [19] Like Vladimir and Estragon, we must always await a messiah who we cannot identify, who will never arrive, and


18 [18] This might be intentional. Derrida confesses his own "love and admiration for St. Augustine." Indeed, Derrida goes so far as to announce that there is a "love story and a deconstruction" between himself and the Bishop of Hippo (ibid., 21).

whose actual arrival is in fact undesirable. But Derrida argues that this expectation should not paralyze us like Vladimir and Estragon; it should, rather, motivate us to create more hospitable and responsible political institutions in the present without immanent utopian illusions. Thus, Derrida wants to salvage the spirit of Abrahamic expectation without falling into inertia or religious fundamentalism. He also tries to retain the messianic "ghost" underlying Marx's critical writings without falling into rigid Marxist doctrine or Communist ideology.20 Derrida writes, "the messianic in general" is "a ghost which we cannot and ought not do without."21

But is this true? Is it necessary for humans to always posit the idea of an impossible saviour who will transfigure the world once and for all? We are compelled to ask: Is messianic expectation truly a universal structure within human experience that is inescapable, or is it something that gradually arose to prominence in human history and became habitual? If the later is the case, then the idea of the "messianic" is a historical contingency, not an essential constituent of all human experience. Thus, Vladimir and Estragon do not necessarily represent all of humanity, but rather humanity after twenty centuries of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic expectation.

It is, perhaps, dangerous to associate the erotic pursuit of the good with the eschatological symbols of messianic faith. In eschatological symbolism, the specter of metastasis is always before us; the potential for derailment into extreme passivity, apocalyptic fervor, or revolutionary activism is great. The Greeks, on the other hand, spoke of giving birth to moral and intellectual virtues in a tragic universe. The pursuit of the good for them took place in a world that would not be purified by metastasis and final judgement. They did not require eschatological symbols symbols that may in fact introduce more ambiguity than greater differentiation in our


21 Ibid., 168.
philosophical anthropology. For the Greeks, the arrival of a messiah is neither a literal or hypothetical event. Plato, Thucydides and the tragedians dismiss all literal and hypothetical utopianisms as either foolishness or hubris. Perhaps "joyful" participation in tragic existence can be enhanced if the desire for metastasis is recognized as a constant but excessive yearning of the soul. Thus, instead of awaiting the impossible, we could arrive at an acceptance of our mortality and recognize the ethical imperatives imposed on us by a non-apocalyptic consciousness of the good.

There is one character in *Waiting for Godot* who challenges us to accept this world as "enough." Strangely enough, it is Pozzo. The fact that Pozzo issues this challenge, the most despicable character in the play, should make us suspicious. But in the second act, Pozzo has lost almost everything. His fall is perhaps accompanied by tragic insight. In his final words he condemns all messianic expectation:

One day, *is that not enough for you*, one day, like any other day, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, *is that not enough for you?* They give birth astride a grave, then the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (81, my italics)

Beckett forces us to consider whether it is desirable, or even possible, to live without messianic hope. That means accepting this world, with its goods and evils, with its life and death, as sufficient. To say that Beckett espoused such a course, and clearly advised us to follow it, would be taking things too far. Nevertheless, this possibility is suggested in *Waiting for Godot*. It is up to us to clarify what such a possibility might look like in the aftermath of the age of senility.

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22 The characters repeatedly wonder whether this world is "enough." See 15, 36, 56, 168.