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Anthony Uhlmann, The Physics of the Ancient Stoics and Beckett's Late Plays

This paper draws upon the French philosopher Imile Brihier's work on the Ancient Stoics and other commentators on the Stoics so as to consider the problem of violence in the later dramatic works of Samuel Beckett. In particular I develop a reading of the distinction in Stoic physics between bodies as causes, and events (and other incorporeals) as effects, so as to describe how *What Where* and other later works such as *Play*, *Come and Go*, and *Quad*, seem to move from a consideration of the problem of violence through reference to violent events, which was evident in certain of his earlier works, and begin to offer representations of violence understood as a being or a body. I briefly examine available evidence for Beckett's knowledge of the Stoics and their system, and the work of Imile Brihier who was at the height of his career at the Sorbonne when Beckett first came to France, before describing aspects of Stoic physics. I then relate this unusual understanding of the nature of bodies, events, their interrelations and 'representations' to the configurations of bodies presented in Beckett's late plays. I argue that a knowledge of Stoic physics sheds light on these plays, particularly with regard to their apparent representations of emotional states of affairs such as violence or guilt, for example. I argue that certain of Beckett's late plays might be understood as representing states of affairs as bodies (or ghosts of bodies) which have their own being, rather than as representing the interaction of clearly separate individuals.