These are difficult days in which to philosophize, and not only for institutional, historical, or political reasons. Nor is it a matter mainly of a disconcertingly eclectic pluralism of possible ways of doing philosophy; this has been a problem, or at least a temptation, ever since the disciples of Plato clustered into competing sects. More alarming, and more challenging, is the fact that the very idea of thinking and writing reflectively in various ways hitherto acknowledged by a broad consensus as "philosophical" has come into serious question. The particular form in which such doubting has emerged is itself various. In Europe, it has taken the shape of undermining the self-assurance of the "metaphysics of presence" by attempting to show that the notion of determinate presence is constricting and groundless, or self-deceptive and self-deconstructing, or relative to historical epistemes or epochs of Being. In Anglophone countries, strikingly complementary efforts have been made to dissolve traditional philosophical concerns with knowledge and reality, mind and other persons, into a tenuous tissue of language, of word-play and word-use: all becomes "wordwork" in Joyce's prophetic term. Or else—in a move that expressly conjoins continental and analytic tendencies—all becomes "conversation" of an unending and self-reabsorbing sort.¹

The issue in this winter of discontent is not confined to the vertiginous nihilism which Nietzschean perspectivism, Wittgensteinian language-games, or Kuhnian paradigm-shifts may occasion. Since nihilism is itself a philosophical position, it has philosophical remedies as well. The issue is the end of philosophy itself. A veritable Thaná-

tology—what Freud might call a “pure culture of the death instinct” —has become current, indeed is sometimes actively sought, by philosophers meditating on the fate of their own field. The sobering thought is that this field no longer possesses recognizable or reliable conditions or limits, a domain of its own that is as distinct as “epistemology” or “value theory” used to be considered. Without such a domain, it is difficult to envisage a distinctive task, or even an identifiable practice, in philosophizing. In the midst of all this morbidizing we are bound to ask: is there any life left in Philosophia?

That philosophy is very much alive and is still being pursued with vigorous thoughtfulness is eloquently evident in Robert Sokolowski’s Presence and Absence: A Philosophical Investigation of Language and Being. What this book makes abundantly clear is that philosophy can move in speculation beyond its own established end-points and yet not come to the forced end of its own activity: the self-eclipsing of philosophy into what Sokolowski terms “metaphilosophy” is a sign of health, not of morbidity. It is even the natural course of reflective thought as it follows the itinerary staked out in this remarkably far-ranging book: from prephilosophy to philosophy (via the transcendental turn), thence to first philosophy (by a metaphysical turn), and finally to a position beyond philosophy altogether. Especially noteworthy in this progression is the way in which the transcendental and the metaphysical, the epicenters of contemporary anguishing over philosophy’s fate, are accepted as valid philosophical moves, while being encompassed on both ends by nonphilosophical pursuits.

Philosophy, situated in this middle position, is conceived as an undertaking which has the unique task of considering things in their manifold forms of presentation: which takes them not as things simpliciter, nor in terms of their elementary constituents or the categories under which they may be subsumed, but in their presencing. “Differences in presencing are the theme of philosophy” (PA, 152), which concerns itself strictly with “(x) as presenced.” Presencing in-


3 On this formula, see PA, 158–9.
volves manifesting and comes in many kinds—as many kinds as there are kinds of things (objects, events, states of mind, essences, etc.) to be made manifest. The philosopher's job is not so much to give a catalogue raisonné of these kinds (though discernment of a typology of presentations is presumably a valuable preliminary task) as to explore their intrinsic structures in a nuanced and sensitive way.

Written in a lean, elegant, and often epigrammatic prose, Presence and Absence consists of fifteen brief chapters arranged in rigorous sequence. The book begins with a limpid discussion of various ways of "naming things" (evoking, articulating a shared perception, telling someone what is happening, reporting, writing, and reading) along with a comparison of nouns and verbs in terms of context-specificity (chapters 1–2); proceeds to explore the origin of names, especially indications, in the interplay of absence and presence (chapters 3–4); seeks the origins of syntax in the action of taking as (chapter 5); considers the proposition as "a fact taken as proposed or supposed" and as a peculiar achievement which serves as a rule for sentence utterance (chapters 6–9); examines the sentence as itself a signal for the accomplishment of propositions, while adding on such refinements as a striking analysis of prepositions at four different levels (chapters 10–11); ponders the differences between "essentials" and "accidentals" in the light of the preceding considerations of language, and takes up philosophy as the "analysis of the kinds of presentation" (chapters 12–13); and ends with a set of reflections on "first philosophy" and on the possibility of thinking beyond philosophy (chapters 14–15).

I wonder whether this list could not be usefully reclassified as follows:

A. naming in the presence of the object ("registration")
   (i) evocation
   (ii) articulating a shared perception
   (iii) telling someone what is going on

B. naming in the absence of the object ("invocation")
   (i) reporting
   (ii) writing and reading

The very possibility of such a reclassification points, moreover, to the difficulty which any avowedly descriptive enterprise has in invoking steadfast criteria for ordering, ranking, and interrelating the kinds of things which its very descriptions have led it to distinguish. Yet without such criteria, there is no way of knowing (a) when a given list of kinds or types is exhaustive; (b) how to measure the comparative specificity of items so as to ensure that all the items in a given list are of the same order of generality; (c) how to correlate these items with items from another list; (d) how to establish, to judge adequately, or to know when to refuse to set up at all, a hierarchy of items from a given list or a hierarchy among lists themselves.
The scope is considerable, and the book succeeds in being as capacious as it is only by not becoming preoccupied with any single theme. Nevertheless, the most persistently pursued and the most sustaining theme is the interplay between presence and absence, and it is only appropriate to begin with a discussion of their place in the book.

Presence and absence obtrude themselves first and perhaps most palpably in the phenomenon of naming. For names bear ineluctably on the presence and absence of what is named. If I say "the Louvre" I name an object now absent from my current perception but which could nonetheless become present in my perceiving. Such an object is thus essentially presentable, whatever its status at the moment; its nameability entails its presentability:

It is the couple "presence-absence" that comes between me and the object and makes the object nameable. Therefore, instead of discussing "the object as present"... we might better say "the object as presentable" when we identify what makes the object subject to names. This term, the "as presentable," includes both presence and absence and the play between them. (PA, 28; cf. also 162)

Therefore, presence/absence qua presentability is a necessary condition for naming things. It is also required for thinking things, since what can be thought of possesses the same binary option of being present to, or absent from, the thought-act of the thinker. So too with making things of every description: this as well involves a dialectic of presence and absence. In each case, the intentional correlate of the activity in question is such as to be presentable—to be, in short, a function of the interplay of presence and absence, whatever the particular form taken by these latter. Given the seemingly limitless array of what is presentable in so many kinds of human activity, it becomes tempting to regard presence/absence as somehow metaphysically ultimate or at least privileged in status.

Sokolowski is sensitive to the dangers of this very temptation, warning us expressly that presence/absence has no edge in the triad of metaphysical couples which also include rest/motion and sameness/otherness. Moreover, all three couples "blend" in being, which realizes their "togetherness" (PA, 165), and they are finally equally subsumable under the One and the Indeterminate Dyad.

This is not to say, however, that presence and absence do not assume a privileged position in certain particular domains of human experience. We have just seen how they are constitutive of naming and
thus ultimately of language itself. In addition, Sokolowski makes the discerning of presence and absence basic to doing philosophy itself (cf. PA, 31); and he underlines the critical role of this couple in separation anxiety (PA, 25–27) and hence in psychological development generally (insofar as such anxiety is determinative in the early formation of the ego). In none of these areas does it seem that sameness/otherness or rest/motion is of comparable significance. These latter come into prominence only when we turn to quite different regions. Thus, we could very well maintain that rest/motion is of principal importance in the understanding of time (as Aristotle unambiguously specified in Physics 4) and of the lived body (as Bergson and Merleau-Ponty both emphasized); and that sameness/otherness is constitutive in matters of personal identity and intersubjectivity, and is decisive in questions bearing on meaning. Such diversity points, at the very least, to a pluralization of function among the various couples; or more exactly, to a principle of selective or domain-specific privilege for each of them.

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But let us keep our focus on presence and absence, whose treatment by Sokolowski involves two anomalies calling for comment here: dissymmetry within the couple presence/absence and certain refractory cases. (a) The dissymmetry concerns the priority of presence over absence at critical points. For example, it is asserted that in and by naming “the dimension of possible but excluded absence is part of the sense of presence” (PA, 28; my italics). Here absence is incorporated into presence itself, made into a virtual dimension of it. Much the same move is effected at various reprises throughout the book: e.g., in the claim that “reports” (which bear on the absent) al-

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5 Thus Sokolowski distinguishes between a mere prelinguistic “vocal reaction,” which operates by association or imitation, and genuinely linguistic naming, which involves an appreciation of absence/presence: “A vocal response can become a name when I not only have the object before me, but appreciate it as present. I recognize that the object here does not have to be here; it could have been absent instead . . . This is what makes the object nameable” (PA, 4).

6 Sokolowski seems to acknowledge this last point in his discussions of the repeatability of words as the same (PA, 68, 81, 101, 134–35) and of the identity of propositions (PA, 89, 96).
ways involve the possibility of "registrations," which are realized only in the actual presence of the object (PA, 34). It is finally made thematic in the central contention that philosophy is concerned with "(x) as presenced." Although Sokolowski avers that philosophy "describes the play of presence and absence appropriate to the kind of object in question" (PA, 159), it is revealing that the formula "(x) as absenced" is never employed as descriptive of philosophy's primary task. What is problematic here and in the other cases just cited is not the privileging of presence per se but the fact that no effort is made to justify the imbalance in the otherwise equilibrated couple presence/absence.7

(b) It would be rash to expect every item of experience to fall under presence/absence, much less to be analyzed exhaustively by this pair of terms. Nevertheless, there are a number of phenomena which are common enough in human experience to lead us to believe they should be amenable to discussion in such basic terms as presence and absence and yet which prove refractory to such discussion. Let us consider four cases in point: (i) Within the domain of language, it is a signal fact that Sokolowski himself recognizes several such untoward cases without attempting to resolve them in any definitive manner. Gerundial and impersonal constructions are admitted to be resistant to subsumption under absence or presence despite their indispensable role in any adequate philosophy of language (PA, 16–21). Both name anonymous, continuous processes in which no distinct subject appears: can the "it" of "it is raining" be said to be present or absent? If it is true that "the anonymous emergence of the processes named by impersonals is mysterious" (PA, 20), then the status of these same processes as either present or absent is equally mysterious. So too is the copula, which Sokolowski calls ingeniously the "predicational crease" (PA, 104, 153). Once more, though, does "is" name anything which can be considered coherently present or absent? If so, it is difficult to see just how so. Similarly problematic are indicative terms (which often point to absent things, yet do not

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7 In a step apparently designed to counter this lop-sidedness within the presence/absence couple, Sokolowski has ventured in a recent invited address to the Eastern APA to emphasize the constitutive role of absence in human experience: "all presence is contingent on and involved with absence" ("The Issue of Presence," Journal of Philosophy 77, 10 [October 1980], p. 641). "Involved with" is one thing and is compatible with positions in PA; "contingent on" seems quite another matter and requires further justification before it can be accepted: contingent on in what sense, causally, metaphysically, or just descriptively?
seem to name them as absent: \textit{PA}, 33–40) and prepositions, which Sokolowski brilliantly treats (\textit{PA}, 122–28) without, however, attempting to conceive them in terms of absence or presence. That there should be this many recalcitrant cases within Sokolowski’s account of language is worrisome in view of his initial (and never retracted) thesis that naming, the basic activity of all language, is irrevocably bound up with the play of absence and presence.

(ii) When we move from names qua individual words to the level of sentences, we necessarily encounter the proposition and its articulation. Much that Sokolowski has to say on the subject of propositions is convincing, more subtle than Ryle’s parallel account, and in my view certainly valid: for instance, the claims that propositions offer rules for sentences which cannot, however, be formulated apart from the very sentences they serve to order (\textit{PA}, 94 ff.), that the mind comes to actualize itself (i.e., \textit{to think}) in propositions (\textit{PA}, 80, 84), that propositions as uttered in sentences are “public achievements” (\textit{PA}, 109) and are measured, but not governed, by facts, also public in status (\textit{PA}, 108). If propositions are as basic to language as is claimed here, it would seem that they should be analyzable in terms of presence/absence. Will it do to say that propositions are simply present to the mind of those who are thinking of certain facts as proposed by them? It will not, for as Sokolowski shows, following Husserl’s lead on this point, idle entertainment of propositions is equivalent to having them only \textit{vaguely} in mind. The passage from propositional vagueness to propositional distinctness is intrinsic to thinking itself and, more particularly, to becoming a responsible speaker with an “authoritative voice” (See \textit{PA}, 43–44, 78 ff., 117–118, 156). Yet is this passage the same passage as that from absence to presence? I think not: a proposition vaguely held in mind possesses \textit{some} kind of mental presence, though one not specified by Sokolowski (his phrase “latent existence,” used at \textit{PA}, 65 in another connection, is a promising candidate) just as a proposition distinctly thought-out involves another, more pellucid variety (would it be “realized presence”?).

(iii) There are three classes of cases which are, by their very nature, unusually obdurate to analysis in terms of the \textit{interplay} of pres-

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8 One among many statements of this thesis is as follows: “our procedure will be to show how the ‘matter’ of a sign associated with an object becomes a name when it receives the ‘form’ of the play of presence and absence” (\textit{PA}, 24).
ence/absence; and it is noteworthy that none of these is approached directly in *Presence and Absence*:

(1) There are, first of all, those sorts of things which can be said to be *always* present and never absent. Examples would include Platonic Forms, universal scientific laws, matter, the universe, perhaps mind, perhaps God. These are the kinds of things which, even in a *Gedankenexperiment*, we cannot seem to imagine as absent—to which the very thought of absence appears unmitigatably inappropriate.

(2) More difficult to conceive but equally problematic is something that would be perpetually absent and *never* present. Such is, nevertheless, the unconscious in Freud’s conception; as originating in repression (itself unconscious in its operation), it is fated to be forever absent from the repressing ego—to be ineluctably that “other scene” whose expressions are necessarily circuitous and cryptic. This is why Lacan can speak of the unconscious as an “other” within us which introduces a “radical heteronomy”\(^9\) into our existence.

(3) Finally, there is the kind of instance to which neither presence nor absence applies, not because they are intrinsically inapplicable but because the phenomenon in question represents their merging with one another to the point of indistinguishability. A case in point is found in Gadamer’s notion of the “fusion of horizons” that occurs when an individual assimilates a given cultural-historical tradition. The absence of this tradition from the individual’s living present—an absence which may bring with it a decided sense of distance and alienation—is merged with the vivid presence of this same tradition as it becomes familiar and appropriated for oneself, so that the tradition’s horizon fuses with one’s personal horizon in the achievement of a fully realized *Horizontverschmelzung*.\(^10\)

(iv) Even areas of experience cited in *Presence and Absence* as everyday instances of the interplay between presence and absence display refractory features on closer inspection. I shall limit myself to brief comments on three such areas:

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Perceptual recognition: ordinary perception is exemplary of the presence/absence interaction when we restrict ourselves to the relationship between the actually presented sides of an object and its now-unpresented other sides: the presence of the one entails the absence of the other. (PA, 51–52.) But the plot thickens when we consider cases of perceptual recognition, e.g., my recognizing a friend’s face. Here the dialectic of presence (the actually perceived face) and absence (the same face as known on previous occasions) is so subtle that distinguishing these intimately enmeshed factors would be a truly Sisyphean task, especially since the criterion for such distinguishing is by no means self-evident.

Imagination: here we certainly have to do with absence, with what is (in Sartre’s term) “out of reach” by virtue of existing elsewhere, existing possibly, or not possibly existing. In fact, we have to do with several kinds of absence, depending on which kind of object we are imagining or how we are imagining it. Would there be answering forms of presence in each case? It is difficult to say, short of having a more detailed typology of presence and absence in human experience.

Memory: in this instance as well there are various kinds of absence, most of them temporally determined: e.g., the just-past of primary memory or the wholly elapsed past of secondary memory. But again, how do these tie in with the several sorts of remembered presence of which we are capable? As we move toward forgetting, absence dominates presence—just as the converse obtains as we move toward short-term memory. Yet it is not clear how we are to analyze even an ordinary case of recollecting a scene from our own distant past: despite the temporal gap, we may experience the scene as a vivid presence. What kind of presence is this? According to Husserl, it is one in which the rememberer, though knowing he is identical with the self as remembered, must “de-present” himself without, however, being absent from himself.11 If this is so, it is not obvious

how presence or absence, in any of their usual senses at least, will remain pertinent in a full analysis. What the just-above discussion of these everyday activities suggests is that either the relationship between absence and presence is in their case more complex than the idea of their mere "interplay" allows for or the application of the couple presence/absence to these activities is much more tenuous than we might have suspected. More troubling still is the lack of any certain basis for deciding which of these alternatives is more likely to be true.

4

One of the most considerable, and most unanticipated, virtues of Presence and Absence lies in its decisive avoidance of the snares of transcendentalism, especially of the very Husserlian variety of which Sokolowski is himself such an accomplished scholar. No taint of idealism, subjective or objective, can be found in these carefully crafted pages. True, the term "transcendental" appears, and is even closely allied with doing philosophy: "The philosophical perspective is reached by a philosophical 'reflection' or transcendental 'turn'" (PA, 151). The turn is not, however, a turn to the transcendental ego, but to a reflection on "(x) as presenced" in all of its manifold forms: "philosophical analysis explores how things are presenced" (PA, 151). The how of appearing takes precedence over the to whom things appear, that is, the "dative of manifestation" in Sokolowski's preferred term for the human subject.

Sokolowski's recurrent epithet for the dative of manifestation—"receiver of presences"—is highly reminiscent of the later Heidegger's conception of human beings as gatherers, guardians, preservers (of language, of truth, of Being). Both Heidegger and Sokolowski, reacting to Brentano and ultimately to Descartes, wish to eliminate "consciousness" as a central philosophical term by dissolving it into what the human subject is conscious of: "'consciousness' is simply another name for the various kinds of presentation" (PA, 169). In this extero-centric vision, mentation or mental activity has no status independent of the presences it receives: "The mind is the accumulation of presences that has been built up within one receiver of presences, one dative of manifestation; it is further the potentialities that this dative has for more presencings" (PA, 155–56). Further, neither mind nor
consciousness survive the move into metaphilosophy, through which move they become mere moments of the ultimate metaphysical couples and of being. Subordinated first to presentations, consciousness and mind, the most elemental dimensions of the transcendental self, are subordinated once more to that which conditions presentations themselves.

Such a double subordination is an important price to pay; but it is paid willingly in the interest of establishing a new divided line which Presence and Absence proposes in tribute to Plato. This is a line which extends, as has been noted, from the prephilosophical realm of taking as (like eikasia, the region of first appearances) to philosophical reflection, thence to first philosophy or metaphysics and finally to metaphilosophy (where the controlling notion, that of the Indeterminate Dyad and the One, is explicitly borrowed from Plato). In this step-ladder progression, mentality occupies the second rung alone: “The mind’ is only properly appreciated from the philosophical attitude” (PA, 155). The implication is that conscious mind has no standing before or after this second-level position and that, even at this position, it is a decidedly passive being insofar as it is a mere accumulator of presences.

This severe constriction of mentality seems unwarranted, and is countermanded by some of Sokolowski’s own observations and contentions. First of all, at the prephilosophical level, his scintillating analysis of propositional thinking calls into question the imputation of passivity to mentation. To move from the vague to the distinct (PA, 79–82), or from taking as to “saying is” (PA, 43), is not only to use one’s mind in becoming clear about initially murky matters; it is to effect oneself as an active, self-responsible thinker: “The person

12 “Since being and its couples are what allow presentation to occur in its many pairs, being also allows consciousness and the mind to come about. Mind itself can only come to be because of sameness and difference, presence and absence, rest and motion, taken together in being” (PA, 170).

13 Indeed, even before propositionality is achieved, Sokolowski acknowledges, en passant, the critical place of mind in two ways: (a) in “internal” taking as (vs. bodily taking as), “my mind, resting on the memories of what I have done, begins to ‘grasp’ things, to ‘know’ them” (PA, 42); (b) “in appreciating a picture, we have the unification of many slants in a single perceived thing, which in turn is at one with its original in a pictorial way when that perceived thing is taken as a picture; and all this in turn involves the continuous oneness of the dative of manifestation” (PA, 176). See also “The Issue of Presence,” p. 633: “Someone has to be around to be able to say ‘here and now’ if something is to be there here and now.”
emerges as a speaker concomitantly with the position he takes; his mind becomes actualized only when he achieves propositions distinctively" (PA, 80). The authoritative voice, articulating itself in propositions, bespeaks an authoritative mind (PA, 43–44, 49, 117–118). Second, if it is true that "the mind becomes actual in correlation to the presences that accumulate in and for it" (PA, 156), then it would follow that philosophical reflection on this same presencing will activate and actualize the mind still more. Not just to see (x) as "a," or to say that it is "a," but to think of (x) as presenced as "a" requires mental activity of a comparatively high order. Third, it is hardly thinkable that we could make the move to metaphysics and metaphilosophy without considerable assistance from mental activity—so unlikely that many are tempted at this point to posit Mind überhaupt. But we need not turn to Neo-Platonism (or even to Aristotle, whose notion of nous noein is questioned at PA, 171) to face up to the essential ingredient of mentality at these final levels. Indeed, just after arguing for the eliminability of the dative of manifestation at the level of presence/absence, Sokolowski admits that nonetheless "we cannot imagine presence and absence without a dative" (PA, 170; my italics). By Husserl's test of free variation in imagination, this should make the dative subject, and thus the mind of this subject, indispensable—or, at the very least, not easily so dismissable and as strictly subordinate to the presencing which it receives.

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The problematic status of the human subject is part and parcel of the more general problematic of truth: of what Sokolowski calls "the truthfulness of things." For if the human subject is only datively given and obliquely self-identical—\(14\)—is an occluded subject as we

\(14\) "Being and its couples are prior to any receiver of presences and absences . . . On the level of being as being, the couple presence/absence does not require a dative of manifestation; rather, the couple is the condition for a receiver of presences" (PA, 170).

\(15\) Although Sokolowski speaks of the dative of manifestation as a "person," possessing memory and "continuous oneness" (PA, 176), it is far from clear how a full sense of self-identity is achieved by an entity which is primarily receptive and non-self-activating. Minding, qua gerund, is held to be "the anonymous emergence of a process" (PA, 19). But surely such minding must arise from a self having an identifiable personal identity.
might call it—then it is to "things," to their manifestations, that we must look for truth. Even if truth-proposing and truth-verifying in here in the subject, truth itself inheres in the things we propose about and verify. One of the consequences of the virtual *kenosis* of the Sokolowskian subject effected by its de-transcendentalizing is a superfetation of presentations and a stress upon them, as if following a law of inverse ratio: the less essential the subject, the more essential the presentations to this same subject. The result is a pan-presentationalism, seemingly serving to compensate for the self's vacuity. This situation is not unknown in modern philosophy: the ironized and de-substantialized Nietzschean subject also confronts a plethora of perspectives, and so too does Heideggerian Dasein standing out as it does in the clearing of Being.

Along with Heidegger, Sokolowski espouses a doctrine of truth as disclosure: disclosure for both Heidegger and Sokolowski means, minimally, that things present themselves as true, in their very truth, and that verification follows only after such disclosure has been put into propositional form. Both, likewise, reject a correspondence theory of truth, and on much the same basis (namely, the impossibility of comparing thing and proposition: *PA*, 110–111). But from this point on, Sokolowski branches off into his own thinking, which can be encapsulated in four steps:

(i) Even if things present themselves as true (and thus also as false, illusory, etc.), naming them adds to them a dimension they would lack as simply showing themselves unnamed: "Names bring about a new excellence in things, their truthfulness" (*PA*, 29). This excellence is a perfection which "makes the goodness of the thing become a known and named goodness, when the thing is named" (*PA*, 29–30). More is not said about the excellence or intrinsic goodness of truthfulness, except that it makes the thing named more desirable and somehow encompasses absence as well as presence (*PA*, 30–1).

(ii) The truthfulness of things-as-named is not acquired tout d'un *coup*, in some existential *Augenblick* but only by slow stages: "We become truthful gradually, not out of sheer ignorance and silence" (*PA*, 113). Sokolowski's insistence that "the activity of disclosure" is not instantaneous serves as a cautionary note in the face of the temptation to regard manifestation as an immediately self-revealing matter, or even (*pace* Heidegger) as an inextricable mixture of concealing and revealing: the emptiness of the subject is not suddenly replenished by the fullness of truth.

(iii) A main basis for the gradualness with which truthfulness
is gained is found in its essentially public character. Where Heidegger would have consigned publicness to das Man or perhaps to the arena of world-time, Sokolowski actively embraces the process of “publication,” and far from finding it to be degenerate or inauthentic considers it to be quintessential in the acquisition of truth:

The public, vocal character of the sentence and its parts assures us that neither the proposition nor facts are private, hidden, or psychological things. They are public achievements done with words. (PA, 109; also 116–118)

Even the mind, that downgraded dimension of the dative of manifestation, becomes a “public reality, not something private and inaccessible” (PA, 109) when it comes to questions of truth. In other words, the mind goes public, moves out from its isolated passivity into the public domain, when it articulates the truth of things.16

(iv) This articulation is effected in sentences, which serve as “signals for propositional achievement” (chapter 10 passim). As has been noted, propositions operate as rules for the sentences which embody them, and they express “facts,” which in turn can be said to measure propositions rather than to correspond to them. (See esp. PA, 107 ff.) For Heidegger, the proposition is the culprit in the affair of truth; for Sokolowski, it is where truth itself becomes possible in its articulated form: “the proposition adds the dimension of truth to the sentence” (PA, 74), for it takes us into the way things are disclosed. If these things, these facts, measure propositions, the latter rule language in its sentential format (PA, 107). Thus we can conclude that “The activities of disclosure, the sentence, and the proposition are all interlocking aspects of truthfulness and must be clarified in terms of one another” (PA, 99).

I have set forth Sokolowski’s doctrine of truth in this much detail as a sample of the subtle ways in which he moves beyond both of his primary phenomenological progenitors: not only Heidegger but also Husserl, for whom truth is to be understood as a synthesis of coincidence between what is meant and what is given. Sokolowski provides an alternative view of truth that remains nonetheless resolutely in the continental tradition—unlike, say, his notion of being which, as that which pervades all the metaphysical couples, has deeply Platonic

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16 This is true not only of my (the speaker’s) mind but of others’ minds as well, since my auditors co-perform the same syntactical operations and make the same propositional moves as they listen to me.
roots. To say this is not to claim that Sokolowski's account does not raise questions:

(a) Is there not an unexpected echo of the correspondence model of truth in the idea that the "predicational crease," the "is," is at once "in the object" (PA, 106) and in the sentence?

(b) Are facts as measuring propositions to be classified as rules? (They seem to be so regarded at PA, 106; but this is explicitly denied at PA, 109.)

(c) What do we get back to when we suspend propositional belief: is this always something pre-propositional (as is implied at PA, 45, 59, 102, 109, and 146) or could it not be yet another, more naive proposition? And if it is pre-propositional, what then is it to be considered: a registration (which seems too narrow as a point of departure) or an instance of taking as (which seems too broad, since it includes everything from pre-predicative perceiving to making propositions themselves)?

(d) Still more basically, just how is it that speaking allows things "to be presented, to appear, to be truthful" (PA, 46)? And how does the authoritative voice contribute to truthfulness beyond becoming more clear as to the speaker's initially vague thoughts?

It is increasingly in Plato's ever-lengthening shadow that the rest of this book's drama is played out. His presence, even when not marked textually, is quite imposing in the two culminating chapters, especially in their emphasis on being, on sameness/difference, motion/rest, and above all on the Indeterminate Dyad and the One as "what remains beyond being as being" (PA, 172). Even the disagreement with Aristotle as to the necessity of a self-thinking thought has the effect of throwing us back on Plato rather than propelling us ahead in the history of philosophy (PA, 171). What does propel us ahead is precisely presence and absence, which do not figure among Plato's Great Kinds. If it is true that "Plato does not exclude a couple like presence and absence from blending with being as such" (PA, 170), it is even more strikingly true that he does not discuss it as such. Perhaps, as Sokolowski suggests, presence/absence is presumed in Plato's very treatment of the blending of the forms and especially the grammatical aspects of this blending; but this is mostly a matter of conjecture.
In fact, it is only with Husserl that the polarity of presence and absence becomes pervasively thematic in philosophy. Or more exactly, only with Sokolowski’s own interpretation of Husserl’s notion of empty and fulfilled intentions—a notion which, first emerging in Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, requires no supervening transcendental ego. Thus we read in *Husserlian Meditations* that for Husserl “the object’s identity comes to be presented only within the differences of presence and absence,”¹⁷ that is, the differences in the fulfillment of our various intendings of it. What happens between *Husserlian Meditations* (1974) and *Presence and Absence* (1978)—which is to say, between Husserl and Sokolowski themselves—is that the factor of identity is pried apart from its alliance with presence and absence. Whereas for Husserl (as interpreted by Sokolowski), presence, absence, and identity are strictly co-foundational in relation to each other,¹⁸ for Sokolowski identity, in the guise of “identifiability,” becomes securely attached to sameness/otherness as what the members of this couple achieve by their conjoint action; as such it is the analogue of “presentability,” the common achievement of presence and absence. The effect of this seemingly subtle shift is at once to lend increased importance to sameness/otherness and to liberate presence/absence for identity-independent tasks of its own. Moreover, thanks to this very liberation, these tasks are now less logocentric than had been the case for Husserl, for whom “the presence and absence of what is intended must be considered as moments in the whole which is the identity of the object presented.”¹⁹ By the same token, the dis-severing of identity from presence and absence rejoins the convergent critiques of identity which we find in Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, and Deleuze—each of whom attempts to dethrone identity as a supreme metaphysical term and to replace it by more pliable post-metaphysical (Sokolowski would say “metaphilosophical”) nomenclature.

The couple presence/absence, freed from the dominance of identity, is nothing if not pliable. It lends itself aptly to the analysis of

¹⁷ Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations*, p. 22. The statement continues: “[The object’s identity] is founded on these differences and is a third dimension to them. Only when we are able to experience the object in its presence and in its absence do we encounter its identity.”

¹⁸ “They are each moments to one another. In the technical sense of ‘foundation’, identity is founded on presence and absence, presence and absence are founded on each other, and both are founded on identity” (PA, 23).

perception with its mixture of the given and the non-given (perception had been Husserl's own paradigm of the empty and the fulfilled in the Logical Investigations), to vagueness and distinctness, to naming in all its varieties, to thinking, and to truth itself. This is not to say that everything in human ken is equally well, much less completely, analyzed in terms of presence/absence. Difficulties have already been detailed in their application to recognition, imagination, and memory. Facts and propositions can certainly bear on what is absent; but their own intrinsic accessibility, their publicness, obstructs an analysis devoted to the interplay of presence and absence: they are, as it were, all too available to be captured by the term "presence." And being, which is neither private nor public, can be said similarly to be too pervasive to be analyzed into the interaction of presence and absence; indeed, this may be why Plato did not include either presence or absence in his list of Great Kinds. If it is the case that "presence/absence, or presentability, belongs to being as being" (PA, 170), it is difficult to conceive of what "present being" or "absent being" would be like: the former seems distinctly pleonastic, while the latter is paradoxical if not downright contradictory.

Whereas being and presence/absence ought to be able to qualify each other (since they are all on the same level of first philosophy), this could no longer hold true of the relationship between presence/absence and the Indeterminate Dyad and the One. According to Sokolowski, the former can be said to "participate" in the latter, but the issue is then no longer one of conjoint qualification but of a one-sided sharing. Moreover, two special problems arise with regard to any such participation:

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20 "Indistinctness is a kind of absence" (PA, 21).
21 "The appropriate elements for the analysis of thinking and truthfulness are presence, absence, and the interplay between the two" (PA, xv–xvi).
22 A fact is "simply there for everybody" ("The Issue of Presence," p. 636); and "every proposition that is made by anyone is made as assertible by all" (PA, 81).
23 Neither of these alternatives apply in the blending of being with sameness/difference, motion/rest: as Plato shows precisely in the Sophist 254b–255e.
24 On such participation, see PA, 172 ff., esp. p. 175, where it becomes clear that this participation occurs at every level of the Sokolowskian divided line: "The number two, the presentational pairs of image and imaged, supposition and fact, name and named, and so on, each of three couples, and the blending of the three couples with being, are all participations in the One and in the Indeterminate Dyad."
(i) The first concerns the privileging of sameness/otherness at the expense of presence/absence. It is revealing that the only prolonged discussion of the participation of metaphysical couples in the Dyad and the One takes place entirely in terms of the same and the other (PA, 176–177). This is hardly accidental in view of Sokolowski’s interpretation of the One as “unification” and the Dyad as “divergence,” terms that at once incorporate and suggest sameness and otherness themselves. Thus it is not surprising to be told that:

Things are other than or different from one another upon a condition, and the name we give to this ultimate divergence is the Indeterminate Dyad. And things can be the same as other things, or even enjoy an identity with themselves, only upon a condition, and the name we give to the ultimate strength of Unity is the One. The One and the Indeterminate Dyad allow things to be the same and to be other than something else. (PA, 176)

Here we must ask: do the One and the Dyad allow things to be present and absent in the same intuitively evident and structurally intimate manner? One reason they do not, I believe, is that there is no correlation between the One and presence, or between the Dyad and absence, in any manner comparable to that between the One and the same and the Dyad and the other. Even if we allow that the One rules the interplay of the couple sameness/otherness (and thus cannot be allied with just one of its members), the Dyad will retain a special link with otherness. As could be argued in this connection: whereas otherness is both other than sameness and other than itself, absence involves absence from presence but not from itself. The self-applicability of otherness, in short, allows it to be more deeply participatory in dyadic divergence than is absence, whose participation is restricted to the ways in which it departs from presence. Therefore, at the culminating metaphilosophical level we can detect a comprehensiveness possessed by sameness/otherness that is not found in presence/absence.

(ii) A second question concerns conditioning. Sokolowski speaks at numerous points of the way in which the One and the Indeterminate Dyad “allow” or “permit” the activity of the couples—which then serve as “conditions” of all that falls under them. Dyadic divergence, for example, “permits those blends in being which, in turn, allow the further plays of presence and absence, sameness and otherness, rest and motion, to bring forth things like willows and whales as we experience and think them” (PA, 173). What kind of permission is operative here? Evidently, not a transcendental sort;
if conditions of possibility are at work at all, they are at once unKantian (since there is no extant transcendental subject) and restricted to the philosophical level. But if they are not transcendental in nature, how are we to characterize them? One might be tempted to call them linguistic conditions, given the considerable emphasis placed on language in Presence and Absence. But language, whether at the level of names or of sentences, does not make possible what is named (i.e., objects and manifestations) or what is sententially signalled (i.e., propositions). Language enhances truthfulness; it clarifies thought and communicates it to oneself and to others. More generally still, language makes public by embodying propositions, and as such it is to be regarded as a form of praxis, not as a condition of possibility.25

Presence and Absence is "A Philosophical Investigation of Language and Being," and the kind of conditioning with which it is concerned is ontological, not transcendental or linguistic. Although the book never spells this out explicitly, it is massively implicit in the book's last chapter, "Thinking Beyond Philosophy," where neither language nor the transcendental appear any longer. Instead, the One and the Indeterminate Dyad dominate the scene, and they do so precisely as conditions of being, as ontological conditions. This is evident in the statement that "no member of any couple, and no single couple, could ever be by itself: they are only by blending with one another, and the achievement of this blending is their participation in the One" (PA, 163; my italics). Comparable claims are made as to the way in which the Indeterminate Dyad, acting through divergence, serves as an ontological condition for everything coming under its sway.

At the end of this richly rewarding book we are left with a sense both of a particular lacuna and of a major achievement in the very face of this lacuna. The lacuna is a lack of concerted consideration of methodology, above all Sokolowski's own methodology, in Presence and Absence.26 Perhaps this is a deliberate strategy in the wake of Husserl's celebrated (and just as often execrated) obsession with

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25 "... Speech is more like praxis, like an exercise of judiciousness or temperance or generosity, which exists only in their performance" (PA, 65; my italics). A condition of possibility cannot exist only in a performance but must pre-exist the latter in some fashion.

26 In a recent article, "Making Distinctions" (Review of Metaphysics, 32, 4 [June 1979]: 639–676), Sokolowski attempts admirably to fill up the lacuna here in question.
methodological issues, sometimes to the neglect of actually *doing* phenomenology, practicing the method. Sokolowski’s achievement is precisely to have written a book which is at once an examplary instance of phenomenological practice and a transcending of this practice toward metaphysics (which Husserl barely deigned to touch) and then toward a post-modern position that is confluent with contemporary currents of dissent even as it rejoins ancient avenues of thought. The resources and vision contained in this compact book are vast. Its movement is bold: from a phenomenology of naming to an ontology of ultimate conditioning. The accomplishment that results is as considerable as it is timely, coming as it does in a time of philosophical dearth and doubt. *Presence and Absence* is a book of importance for all who are actively engaged in the philosophical enterprise, whatever their differing persuasions. It shows philosophy to be flourishing in the midst of its own self-proclaimed signs of morbidity.27

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