Husserl’s five lectures entitled, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, were presented in 1907, seven years before the outbreak of World War I. They were part of a course he gave in the summer semester of that year at the University of Göttingen. Forty years later they were edited by Walter Biemel as the second volume in the series *Husserliana*; the editor’s introduction is dated 1947, a scant two years after the end of World War II. We now in Chicago are commemorating them in 2007, one hundred years after their original presentation and sixty years after Biemel signed off on his introduction. Much has happened in this century and in these two intervals, the first comprising forty years and covering the First and Second World Wars, and the second comprising sixty years and covering the Cold War and its aftermath. We vividly experience the passage of time as we think about this text; it was written shortly after Husserl’s first analysis of inner time consciousness and it contains a few remarks about temporality. The lectures themselves, as an event in history and philosophy, involve timing and punctuation, because they mark a distinct turning point in Husserl’s own work, a turning point that occurred during the 48th year of his life. There is a lot of *lebendige Gegenwart* going on in this text and in our commemoration of it, as well as a lot of retrieval and recapitulation.

The lectures are very short. Each covers only about ten pages. The argument of the combined lectures is a kind of template that we find again in the overall structure of the first volume of *Ideas*. We also find traces of it in other works of Husserl, such as *The Crisis of European Sciences*. Husserl begins the lectures by describing the natural attitude and the world
and things that are correlated with it. He then mentions the turn into phenomenology, but mentions it only very briefly. Instead of going full throttle into philosophical analysis, he spends a lot of time distinguishing his phenomenology from the psychological and naturalistic study of consciousness, calling the turn to phenomenology by the name of the “phenomenological reduction,” and using Descartes’ radical doubt as an instrument in this maneuver. He says that phenomenology’s task is to explore the overall correlation between consciousness and world by analyzing the various forms of intentionality through which we have a world and experience things.

The point of his analysis of intentionality is to account for the transcendence and constitution that occur in it. Husserl wishes to clarify what he repeatedly calls the “enigma,” the Rätsel, of transcendence, the problem of how we as organic, natural entities, can intellectually and consciously possess something that exists beyond us. He assures us that no reasonable man would doubt that transcendent knowledge is possible and that the world we know does exist, but, he says, “The enigma is, how is it possible, Das Rätsel ist, wie sie möglich sei.” In a passage that reminds us of something in David Hume, Husserl says, “Here lie the enigmas, the mysteries, the problems concerning the ultimate sense of the objectivity of knowledge, Hier liegen ja die Rätsel, die Mysterien, die Probleme um den letzten Sinn der Gegenständlichkeit der Erkenntnis.” (Hume’s analogous remark, expressed at the end of his The Natural History of Religion, is, “The whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery.”) In what is certainly an optimistic remark, Husserl says that while the objectivity of things is an enigma to us, no Rätsel are involved in the way we possess our own cogitationes, because they contain no transcendence and they are evidently, unquestionably, and fully present to us.
Husserl’s argument in these lectures remains on a rather general level, in contrast with the more detailed analyses found in the 1907 course that followed them, in which he analyzes the perception of material bodies, but the five lectures still contain many formulations that the philosophical connoisseur will find elegant. Some of the best, I think, are found in the fifth lecture, where he narrows down his analysis of intentionality and describes the kind of intending that deals with the true or validated presencing of things. He discusses what we could call “evidential” intentionality, and such an analysis is found again in section 4 of the first volume of Ideas, under the heading of “Reason and Reality, Vernunft und Wirklichkeit.” In this fifth lecture, he lists various forms of givenness (Gegebenheit) and objectivity (Gegenständlichkeit), and he mentions the modes or manners in which they occur (die verschiedenen Modi der eigentlichen Gegebenheit). For example, he mentions the givenness of a cogitatio extended over time, the givenness of a thing in perception, logical givenness, the givenness of the universal, of the predicate, of the thing imagined, of fictions, and of the Sachverhalt. He even mentions the givenness of an incoherence, a contradiction, and of a nonexistence, as well as the givenness of mathematical and other ideal things. In a kind of exuberant summation of this list he exclaims, “Givenness is everywhere, Überall ist die Gegebenheit.” In all such cases, we are to explore the correlation between the object of knowing and the activities of evidencing that constitute the object given and thus allow it to appear to us.

These remarks about givenness, evidencing, and their correlation are philosophically attractive, but there is also a theme in this text that is certainly less appealing to our tastes, namely Husserl’s use of the Cartesian motif or what we might want to call the Cartesian obsession. Husserl wishes to establish a secure philosophical starting point based on an
“absolute givenness, absolute Gegebenheit,” where, he says, we can “lower our anchor on the shore of phenomenology.” A little later on, continuing this metaphor and adding an alliteration to it, he says that he hopes to be able to “gain a firm foothold on this new territory, in dem neuen Lande festen Fuss fassen können.” He claims that there is no transcendence in this domain and hence no lack of givenness, and so we can safely begin our philosophy here. It is only “through a reduction, which we wish to call phenomenological reduction, that I attain an absolute givenness,” bereft of any transcendence at all. He says that even if I put myself, the world, and my experience of myself into question, I can still retain the “pure phenomenon” of such experiencing and its targets as a domain of philosophical inquiry.

It would be easy for us to disparage this philosophical move, but I would like to find some value in it. What Husserl is trying to show is the following. When we describe, for example, the givenness of a perceived object as an identity in a manifold of presentations and empty intentions, we are not just doing psychological description. It is not just a contingent, empirical fact that material things are presented to us in this way. There is a necessity to this form of presentation, just as there are necessities in the way imagined or remembered objects are given or in the way that states of affairs or propositions are given. The necessity in such forms of presentation is more like logical necessity than like an empirical, psychological generality. Many philosophers – not all, but many – will admit that logic is different from psychology, but they may not have adverted to the fact that there is something in the way things present themselves that is also different from what the natural science of psychology examines. The structures of presentation, the modes of givenness, die Modi der Gegebenheiten, are more akin to logic than to psychology. This difference became vividly present to Husserl, and he tried to express it by the
doctrine of the phenomenological reduction, by showing that even if the empirical world and the empirical ego are put out of action, there would still be a domain left over for philosophical investigation, just as their would still be a domain of logical necessity. The way in which the elements in a manifold of presentation are linked with one another and with the thing that they present is analogous to the way that propositions or components of propositions are linked together with one another and with the objects of reference that lie behind and within them.

Why do the forms of presentation have this affinity with logic? Because both logic and presentation and intention are related to truth. Husserl speaks a lot about knowledge, *Erkenntnis*, in *The Idea of Phenomenology*, but I suggest that it would have been better if he had spoken about truth instead. The term *knowledge* has something of a psychological tone to it; we may be inclined to think of bits of knowledge in the mind and of our psychological efforts to attain knowledge, but the term *truth* is obviously more subtle. Husserl formulates the psychological attitude by saying that for this viewpoint, “Knowledge is a fact of nature, *die Erkenntnis ist eine Tatsache der Natur*, it is an experience of some cognitive organic beings, it is a psychological factum, *ein psychologisches Faktum.*”10 It would be harder for him to say that *truth* is a fact of nature, an activity of organic beings and a psychological fact. Truth connotes an achievement and it involves responsibility. It obviously also involves the dimensions of error, ignorance, confusion, and empty intending, all of which need to be explored in the philosophical treatment of truth, as forms of absence and untruth or falsity that accompany and entangle our attempts to discover and understand things.

Truth, of course, occurs in one form when we articulate things categorically and make rational inferences, that is, when we engage in the truth of correctness; this is the kind of truth
that logic primarily deals with. But truth also comes into play in the truth of disclosure, which is prior to and different from the truth of correctness, and this is the kind of truth that phenomenology primarily examines. Both forms of analysis are different from what psychology studies, because psychology does not deal with truth as such. It would be a category mistake to see it as doing so. Psychology may try to deal with knowledge but it doesn’t deal with truth.

What Husserl does in these steps and in this template is to establish his own philosophy as a distinct intellectual project, one that both secures and tries to understand the achievement of truth, which occurs before phenomenology comes on the scene, even if it finds its completion in phenomenology. Husserl wishes to enter philosophy in a critical and methodical way. He does not just find himself philosophizing and provoking others, as Socrates did; he tries to justify himself as doing so, not by appealing to the authority of an oracle but under the aegis of being truly scientific and responsible, of bringing to completion and authenticity the science and responsiveness that are already at work in human life. He wishes also to help others to understand what he is doing and to join him in this venture. Just giving a name to his turn to phenomenology, calling it the “reduction,” is an important rhetorical and pedagogical step, because it highlights this event even as it designates it, and it makes it an explicit issue for our consideration.

Furthermore, naming the move into philosophy as the reduction might also have helped Husserl deal with his own philosophical distress at the time. He was particularly anxious to avoid skepticism and psychologism, and he was hard put to it to show how his own work, as developed in *Logical Investigations* and in many other detailed explorations that he had successfully carried out, was different from psychology. Ulrich Claesges, in his introduction to
Husserliana XVI, the full 1907 course to which our text was the introduction, says that Husserl was trying to formulate a “unified theoretic starting point (Ansatz: onset?) . . . without which the many particular analyses of the previous years would have had to remain unsatisfactory.”\textsuperscript{11} We might say that Husserl was trying to do what Kant does in his \textit{Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals}: to establish the \textit{dimension} within he will pursue his philosophy. In fact, twice in our text Husserl says that “philosophy lies in an entirely different dimension” and he says that this dimension must be “distinguished” from that of any natural science.\textsuperscript{12} Kant wants to distinguish in principle the domain of moral imperatives from the domain of the natural desire for happiness, and Husserl wants to distinguish in principle the philosophical understanding of truth as such from our various attempts to search for particular kinds of truth.

We might draw another analogy and say that Husserl was trying to provide himself with something like therapeutic counseling, and he was trying to do it all by himself. He needed to make a distinction between two things that caught him in a bind, a conflict that he could not resolve. Like a patient who cannot distinguish between a present event and a past trauma, or like someone who cannot distinguish between his father and his employer, Husserl was unable to distinguish adequately between philosophy and psychology, and the very naming of the reduction achieved an identification that helped him see two things where he had previously felt or feared only one. He was able to dislodge his phenomenology from something that it resembled and with which it was confused. It is true that the \textit{Prolegomena} to his \textit{Logical Investigations} were a sustained attempt to avoid a psychologistic reduction of logic; the distinction between philosophy and psychology is already brewing in \textit{Logical Investigations}. In the introduction to the second volume of the \textit{Investigations}, he explains what he calls “the difficulties of pure
phenomenological analysis” by appealing to the “unnatural direction of intuition and thought which phenomenological analysis requires.” But if at this early stage the distinction between phenomenology and psychology was already brewing, it was still not formulated. In the *Investigations* he sometimes still calls his own work a kind of psychology, certainly an eidetic one, and he uses the same term for his analysis of numbers in the *Philosophy of Arithmetic*. But in *The Idea of Phenomenology* he systemically distinguishes his phenomenology from psychology by speaking explicitly of the “reduction,” the leading back or pulling back, by which one turns from natural science of any kind to philosophy.

There are a lot of perplexities associated with the idea of the transcendental reduction, especially when it is taken in conjunction with the Cartesian motif. The difficulties are especially related to the question whether and in what sense Husserl belongs to that strange and exotic tribe called the German Idealists. Is Husserl allied with Fichte? Does he really think we construct the world in which we live? I would suggest that these philosophical problems about idealism can be best handled by a reformulation. Instead of speaking about a special kind of a reflection and a new kind of attitude, we would do well to speak about a new kind of vocabulary and discourse, one proper to philosophy and phenomenology. I think that the issues associated with the move into philosophy are made more tangible and more tractable if we take them as adjustments in language and not adjustments in attitudes. It is true that we need a new perspective, one different from the “natürliche Denkhaltung”\textsuperscript{15} that we start with, but we can get a more secure handle on this new, philosophical perspective, and we can be more convinced that it is something real, by considering it as an adjustment in our discourse than by considering it as a shift in attitudes alone.
Husserl himself often observes that our language needs to be adjusted when it becomes used for philosophy. I suggest that if we focus primarily on reflections and changes of attitude, we get too caught up in internal twistings and turnings of the mind, and we get the impression that philosophy is a kind of solitary or even solipsistic achievement. We seem to think that we must somehow turn around inside ourselves and stare at our own acts and sensibility, and that these contortions have to be executed in such a confined and cramped space. If, in contrast, we focus on words and language, the philosophy we arrive at remains more obviously involved with other people, it is more public and less gymnastic, and we have something more palpable or at least audible to work with. Instead of saying, for example, that we have to carry out a new and mysterious kind of reflection, we can say that when we enter into philosophy we have to trope the words we use and give them a new significance; we bend or twist the words and not our attitudes. We try to get others to see the point of what we are saying; we don’t try to get them to execute exotic intellectual acrobatics. In fact, the successful use of philosophical language, and the successful understanding of philosophical language, would imply that we have carried out something like the transcendental reduction; we don’t do the reduction first and then find the words for it.

I have compared Husserl and Kant, and I would like to draw an analogy between Husserl and Plato. The overriding theme in Plato’s dialogues is the nature of the philosophical life and philosophical thinking, but Plato contrasts philosophy mainly with political life and political thinking. The “foil” for philosophy in Husserl is science (especially psychology) and ordinary life, but the main foil for philosophy in Plato is politics, whether the politics is experienced by the citizen or by the ruler or lawgiver. Political life is the analogue in Plato to the natural attitude
in Husserl, and in Plato Socrates (or his replacements) is the one who has carried out the transcendental reduction. Now, the citizen and the ruler or lawgiver are themselves already engaged in the truth of things. They are part of a city and not a herd, and so their laws, customs, and actions are geared toward truth. If the citizens and rulers were not involved with truth, the sophists would not be metaphysically possible, nor would Socrates. But the citizens and rulers are involved with truth in a partial and pragmatic way, not in a definitive and exhaustive manner, and they do not think about truth as such; they do not stand back and reflect on the intentionalities that make up human life, or on the intentionalities that make up a rational, evidential life. In this they resemble the modern natural scientist, who pursues the truth of things but does not reflect on what the achievement of truth is, not even if he is a psychologist. One has to stand back from politics and enter a theoretic life, just as one has to stand back from physics, biology, mathematics, and psychology, and one must enter a new kind of theoretic life, if one is to speak coherently about truth and its deviations. Socrates is helping the city by what he does because he is clarifying what the citizens and rulers are after, but it might well seem to the citizen and ruler that he is upsetting the established order. Husserl, likewise, is helping science, but it might well seem that he too is throwing everything into disorder and skeptical doubt because he does not allow science and its established conclusions to be the last word.

The life unreservedly dedicated to the discovery of truth comes at things in a radically different way than the life that is engaged in legislation, action, and judgment. Socrates is the paradigm of the philosophical life and his interlocutors represent, in different ways, the people involved in the natural attitude. Husserl resembles Socrates in his own way; he is involved not in any particular science, but in the science with no holds barred, the science that looks at all
science, itself included. This venture is not an attempt at a super science, but the action of a philosopher who draws no limits to his investigation. He is concerned with the whole. He knows that this unrestricted inquiry will have to justify itself in a way that physics or psychology, as worldly sciences, do not need to justify themselves as adventures in truth, and it is this self-justification that Husserl tries to work out in his theory of the phenomenological reduction.

Plato, of course, writes about Socrates as engaged in conversation with other people. But Husserl is also involved in something like conversation, as difficult as it may be to see this. These five compositions that comprise *The Idea of Phenomenology* are, after all, lectures, and from time to time this fact comes through in them. He occasionally addresses his audience in the second person plural and speaks in the first person plural,\(^\text{17}\) he makes use of metaphors, as we have seen, and he even sometimes verges on the dramatic. For example, he says that the flow of conscious experience is like a Heraclitean flux, and he asks, “What sort of statements can I make here? Now, as I look on, I can say, ‘This here! *dies da!*’ This thing is, undoubtedly.”\(^\text{18}\) Toward the end of the fifth lecture he says that consciousness is not a bag or a box, it is not a *Sack* or a *Schachtel*.\(^\text{19}\) Rather, things are given to us as identities in a manifold of presentations and appearances, and the philosophical trick is to describe the correlations between the thing and what we do to make it present and presentable to ourselves and to others: “Is it not also evident, that in the house-phenomenon a house itself appears, and for this reason is it called a house-perception. . . . ”\(^\text{20}\) Husserl’s remarks make clear to us that the relation between a thing and its appearances is a topic of the greatest philosophical interest. He helps us examine how the thing is present in the view we have of it from here, and he also helps us see how we find terms to
speak about its appearances and its appearing, as opposed to speaking about the thing itself,
which is the target of our ordinary discourse.

Husserl did not write dialogues, and he was something of a pedantic professor in the way
he taught and conversed with others, but he did use language in thinking, even in his
philosophical thinking. He could not have thought in any other way. His transcendental
reduction can fruitfully be interpreted as his attempt to distinguish his philosophical discourse
from the use of language we are involved in when we live our social, personal, and scientific
lives.

Endnotes

   (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958 [1950]).

2. Ibid., 20.

3. Ibid., 37.

4. Ibid., 55. See p. 34, “Sehen wir näher zu, was so rätselhaft ist und was uns in den
   nächstliegenden Reflexionen über die Möglichkeit der Erkenntnis in Verlegenheit bringt, so ist es
   ihre Transzendenz.”


7. Ibid., 44-45.

8. Ibid., 45.

9. Ibid., 44.

10. Ibid., 19.


16. In the *Crito*, for example, Socrates speaks and argues as a philosopher while Crito, who is trying to get his friend Socrates to run away, speaks and argues as a good citizen and a decent man. In the *Republic*, we have a description of the city as it would be constituted by philosophers, while in the *Laws* we have a description of a city that makes room for philosophy but is not taken over by it. As V. Bradley Lewis puts it, “Where the *Republic* presents a philosophic regime, the *Laws* presents a regime with philosophy.” See “The Nocturnal Council and Platonic Political Philosophy,” *History of Political Thought* 19 (1998), 16.


18. Ibid., 47.

19. Ibid., 74.

20. Ibid., 71-72.