# Was Royaumont merely a *dialogue de sourds*? An Introduction to the *discussion générale*

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> J'ai oublié la discussion qui s'ensuivit, sauf ce trait amusant de Jean Wahl lui-même, me disant que, si j'avais fait ma conférence en Angleterre, je me serais fait tuer.[1]

The following is a translation of the transcript of the *discussion générale* (hereafter: *discussion*),[2] which took place on the last morning of the colloquium on "analytic philosophy" at the Abbey of Royaumont, north of Paris, on 8-13 April 1958. The colloquium was presided by Jean Wahl, professor at the Sorbonne since 1936,[3] and organized by him with help from Marc-André Béra.[4] The speakers were obviously meant to represent "analytic philosophy" but, with the exception of W.V. Quine, they were all from Oxford: J.L. Austin, P.F. Strawson, R.M. Hare, Gilbert Ryle, J.O. Urmson, and Bernard Williams. A.J. Ayer, who was at the time moving back to Oxford from London, was also at

[1] Pierre Hadot (2004: 10) is recollecting here the discussion that followed his paper on the limits of language in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, at Jean Wahl's Collège philosophique, in April 1959, one year after Royaumont. Hadot published his paper later on that year (Hadot 1959).

[2] Throughout this paper, references to page numbers without further indications are to the proceedings of the colloquium, *La philosophie analytique* (Anon. 1962). The *discussion générale* is on pp. 330-380.

[3] Jean Wahl (1888-1974), albeit lesser known than figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, was nevertheless a central figure in the development of mid-century French philosophy. He played a crucial role in the rise of "existentialism" (at least within the university), through his teaching at the Sorbonne and his writings, which included *inter alia*, prior to the war the first study in French on Kierkegaard (1938) and after the war: *Petite histoire de l'existentialisme* (1947), *Esquisse pour une histoire de l'existentialisme* (1949), *La pensée de l'existence* (1951) and *Les philosophies de l'existence* (1954).

[4] See here Austin's and Perelman's very last comments in the *discussion*, pp. 379-380, indicating Béra's role. Marc-André Béra (1914-1990) graduated from the École Normale Supérieure before the war. He was director of the Centre culturel de Royaumont prior to the conference, from 1953 to 1957. A minor figure, he published a short superficial monograph on Whitehead (Béra 1948), and he was mainly known for his French translations of English literature.

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Royaumont, but not among speakers. There were two additional speakers from the Continent, the Belgian philosopher Leo Apostel and the Dutch mathematician E.W. Beth, presumably chosen for their affinities with analytic philosophy. Proceedings of the colloquium were published four years later in 1962, with French translations of the papers,[5] and an edited transcript of all question periods along with the *discussion*.[6] Alas, translations were of poor quality, and so was, apparently, the interpretation,[7] a fact that could not have helped mutual understanding. The purpose of this introduction is merely to provide some background information and to dispel a few misunderstandings about the colloquium, so that readers approach the *discussion* with a fresh mind.

## 1. *Dispelling Confusions*

Royaumont had indeed reached at some point quasi-mythical proportions, as even its precise date became controversial.[8] It has been billed as a landmark in twentieth century as important as the notorious exchange at Davos in 1929 between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger, and frequently – grandiloquently – portrayed as a first encounter between "analytic" and "continental" philosophy.[9] If its aim had been truly to bring about a *rapprochement* between these main currents, then Royaumont must certainly count as a failure. Charles Taylor, who had attended the meeting, described it, *en français dans le texte*, as a "*dialogue de sourds*" (1964: 132), while Wolfe Mays commented later on in a more understated way that it "seems to have ended in mutual incomprehension" (Mays and Brown 1972: 2).

It is indeed striking to read, for example, representatives of both sides calling each other "Platonists", when Ryle described in his paper Husserl as "bewitched by his Platonic idea that conceptual enquiries were scrutinies of the super-objects that he called 'Essences'" (p. 67) (1971: vol. 1: 180-181), eliciting

[5] Some of these papers have appeared elsewhere since in their original language, e.g., Austin (1963) and Ryle 1971, vol. 1: 179-196). Merleau-Ponty's exchange with Ryle was also translated (Merleau-Ponty 1992).

[6] Internal evidence shows that the transcripts of the discussions were edited, e.g., Austin refers in the *discussion* (*infra*, p. 231) to a pair of edited out questions by a "M. Meteroc", whose identity remains, incidentally, unknown.

[7] W.V. Quine complained in his autobiography of the poor quality of translations and interpretation, to the point that, out of despair, he "burst[ed] extempore in French" (1985: 272). For his "outburst", see the *discussion*, *infra*, p. 233.

[8] See Overgaard (2010: 900n1).

[9] There was a further conference of the same nature in Southampton in 1969, see Mays and Brown (1972).

from Father van Breda – the man responsible for saving Husserl's library before the war – the reply that Oxford philosophers "hypostatize language … concepts and words", so that they are "excellent Platonists, while Husserl isn't one" (p. 87). Ryle could only reply in turn, correctly, that he did not "hypostatize" anything. This exchange between Ryle and van Breda illustrates what *mutual* incomprehension means.[10] But there is no reason to read the whole volume as one big illustration of it. Moreover, it is quite striking to note that within a year, Charles Taylor had argued at the Joint Session, without so much as an objection from Ayer, that:

> The method of phenomenology and that of linguistic analysis are, therefore, properly understood, quite compatible. (Taylor and Ayer 1959: 109)[11]

Royaumont was the only source of information about analytic philosophy for French-speaking students until 1980,[12] when a new set of papers by analytic philosophers was published in *Critique* (Anon. 1980). If I am allowed a personal comment, the animosity between Ryle and van Breda largely colored our perception, as students, of the relations between "analytic" and "continental" philosophy, as if one or the other had to be wrong, and not really doing philosophy or at least being unbearably bad at it. We were struck by Leslie Beck's notorious claim in the *Avant-propos* to the volume that, when asked by Merleau-Ponty "Aren't our programs the same?", Ryle's answered: "I hope not!" (p. 7). (As we shall see below, Beck's report is incorrect.) Michael Dummett was to compare in *Origins of Analytic Philosophy* (1993) analytic philosophy and phenomenology to the Rhine and the Danube,

[10] Worse, when van Breda also chastised Ryle for what amounts to a caricature of Husserl, Ryle uncouthly replied that he does not care if there had been any resemblance or not (p. 87).

[11] Furthermore, his own objections to Husserl's doctrine of "essences" and talk of an "eidetic science" largely vindicate Ryle's stern assessment. Pointing out that the later Husserl and Merleau-Ponty had moved away from Husserl's early views, Taylor nevertheless admitted that talk of "pure description" of "essences" remained (Taylor and Ayer 1959: 103-104). At all events, Ryle's critique is best understood in terms of the context of the reception of Husserl in Britain – here one should recall that Husserl had lectured in London already in 1922, years before his much-vaunted trip to Paris and, for that matter, the advent of analytic philosophy – and Ryle's critique is very much a critical comment on the first edition of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. See Marion (2003).

[12] And, indeed, for a majority of French philosophers and linguists in the 1960s, as it seems that, e.g., from Benveniste (1963) to Derrida (1973), Royaumont sparked interest in Austin's work, and the old fear of the elimination of metaphysics gave way to another set of concerns. Of course, there were other sources, especially translations arranged by Paul Ricoeur at the Éditions du Seuil, of Frege, Strawson, Austin, etc. Derrida used the translation of *How to do Things with Words* (Austin 1970). Oddly enough, Jean Wahl was also behind a French translation of Wittgenstein's *Blue and Brown Books*, for which he wrote a preface (Wahl 1965b).

[…] which rise quite close to one another and for a time pursue roughly parallel courses, only to diverge in utterly different directions and flow into different seas. (1993: 26)

With hindsight, it felt as if by the late 1950s analytic philosophy had gone with the flow beyond the Rhine gorge, well on its way to the North Sea, while phenomenology – often confused in the context of Royaumont with "continental" philosophy – had already reached beyond the Iron Gates.[13] Thus we felt we had to take sides, with the other side being *de facto* guilty of quackery.

With hindsight, we need not take so narrow and so dramatic view of the matter. To begin with, not only the labels "analytic" and "continental" are notoriously problematic in themselves, but these labels were not established back then: participants clearly used the word 'continental' in accordance with its *geographical* meaning,[14] and none of the invited speakers had self-consciously developed an "analytic" philosophy; it is not even clear at first blush under which definition philosophers so far apart as Austin and Quine should fit.[15]

Moreover, the audience was predominantly French and Royaumont can hardly have been planned as a gathering of an opposing force of "continental" philosophers. Among the French were *mandarins* such as Ferdinand Alquié, Lucien Goldmann, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, René Poirier and Éric Weil. Still, the audience was not exclusively French: it notably included *inter alia* two Poles, the historian of logic Józef Maria Bochénski and the philosopher of law and seminal figure in argumentation theory, Chaïm Perelman, along with a further pair of Belgians: Philippe Devaux, who had translated Russell and written on Alexander and Whitehead, and Herman Leo van Breda, already mentioned. There were also a number of English-speaking philosophers that hardly could qualify as "analytic", such as H.B. Acton, Alan Gewirth – who describes himself in the *discussion* as a "neutral observer" (*infra*, p. 246) –, Alan Montefiore and Charles

[13] The proximity (or lack of) between analytic philosophers and phenomenologists at Royaumont has been discussed in some amount of detail in Ovegaard (2010), Vrahimis (2013a, chap. 4) and Vrahimis (2013b), with the implication that Dummett's metaphor was inappropriate. It seems to me rather obvious that, any perceived proximity notwithstanding, Royaumont's actual failure is but a clear indication that by then the two traditions had clearly moved apart; otherwise, there would have been some measure of mutual understanding. But Overgaard seems more intent to argue against Dummett's suggestion that one can "re-establish communication only by going back to the point of divergence" (1993: 193). This is an issue that cannot be tackled here.

[14] It is possible, however, that the confusion between the geographical meaning of 'continental' and a cooked-up philosophical meaning comes from Royaumont, when some of the participants unwittingly described themselves as *continentaux*. Royaumont could thus be seen, if that were the case, as a milestone in the history of this artificial divide.

[15] It takes Hanjo Glock a whole book to argue the point (Glock 2008). Incidentally, it is hardly ever pointed out that the expression 'analytic philosophy' was coined by R.G. Collingwood in *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (1935: 141f.).

Taylor. There were, however, no German philosophers[16] and only one Italian, Andrea Galimberti, who intervenes briefly in the *discussion* (*infra*, pp. 243-244).[17] Clearly, such a motley crew could not be properly described as representative of "continental philosophy", not even according to a geographical meaning.

The presence of Merleau-Ponty, van Breda and a few others such as Gaston Berger[18] also gives the clearly false impression that analytic philosophers squared off against a team of phenomenologists, as if 'phenomenology' would be quasi-synonymous with 'continental' philosophy, an obviously bogus claim. As it happens, none of the other figures listed above, not even Wahl who had lectured on Husserl and Heidegger, could be described, *even by a stretch*, as phenomenologists. Thus, the debate following Ryle's provocative paper, "Phenomenology versus 'The Concept of Mind'" – including the striking display of mutual incomprehension cited above – should *not* be confused with Royaumont as a whole, of which it formed in the end only a part. What has to be questioned is the wish to see it as characteristic of the whole.

It looks, therefore, as if Royaumont, rather than being conceived as a confrontation between "traditions" or "schools", was simply planned, as Ferdinand Alquié pointed out in the *discussion*, as an opportunity for some French philosophers to learn about that newfangled affair, "analytic philosophy":

> One of the main goals of this colloquium is for us "continentals" to become acquainted with analytic philosophy. (*infra*, p. 235)

The war had created a generational gap and there were hardly any cross-Channel exchanges since, precisely at a time of momentous developments within "analytic philosophy". Of the older pre-war generation, only Louis Rougier had published his *Traité de la connaissance* (1955), but, as Arthur Pap (1956) quickly pointed out it, the book was merely a reflection of the logical positivism of the early 1930s, and written in ignorance of more recent developments. He was moreover an outcast because of his political views.[19] Stanislas Breton

[16] With the possible exception of Erich Weil, born in Germany, who had written a thesis on Renaissance philosophy under Ernst Cassirer in Berlin in 1928. But he had emigrated to France already prior to the war, and can hardly be seen as pertaining to post-war German philosophy. He submitted a further thesis in 1951 at the Sorbonne, with Jean Wahl on the jury. At the time of Royaumont, he had a chair at Lille.

[17] The transcript does not provide a first name for Galimberti and Andreas Vrahimis (2013b: 183n28) mistakenly took him to be Umberto Galimberti, who would have been 16 years-old at the time of Royaumont.

[18] Gaston Berger had written one of the first French books on Husserl (Berger 1941). In the 1950s, he was responsible for philosophical appointments across France, and played in that capacity an important role in the post-war institutionalisation of phenomenology in that country.

[19] If we exclude the decidedly marginal figure of Marcel Boll, Louis Rougier was the only rep-

had not yet published his *Situation de la philosophie contemporaine*, which was at any rate ill-informed about what he called "scientific philosophy", given that the dozen or so pages devoted to it (1959: 32-45) are little more than a rambling discussion of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. As a matter of fact, French-speaking philosophers had access to only one paper containing information on recent developments within analytic philosophy, by Albert Shalom (1956-7).[20] Jean Wahl had always shown open-mindedness towards philosophy in English-language countries,[21] and it is rather obvious that he had to be the one who organized the meeting, although he clearly disliked what he heard on that occasion.

## 2. *Towards a Proper Diagnosis*

Even if not exactly an encounter between "analytic" and "continental" philosophers, but roughly between English and French philosophers, was Royaumont really a *dialogue de sourds*? There are reasons to think that it was at least not *merely* one. Before coming to that, it is worth trying carefully to diagnose what went wrong.

Taylor had already commented quite rightly that "both sides were insufficiently prepared, and knew too little about the other to engage in a really fruitful dialogue" (1964: 133). On the one hand the guests, with the obvious exception of Ryle, simply felt that their job was to explain what they are doing and answer questions, not engage in any criticism of any philosophy on the continent, but at time they seem caught off guard, as if they did not expect

resentative of the Vienna Circle in France, and his reputation after the war as a *pétainiste* certainly did not help to endear French philosophers to logical positivism. One could reply here that they also notoriously brushed aside Heidegger's politics, because it suited them to do so, and Wahl, a Jew who was interned at (and escaped from) Drancy during the war, exemplifies this double standard. Rougier and Wahl also did not see eye to eye for personal reasons since Wahl's first appointment at Lyon in 1930. See Berndt and Marion (2006: 27-28).

[20] A paper by Ayer (1958) translated by Philippe Devaux also appeared in *Dialectica* at the same time as Royaumont. The first footnote of Shalom (1956) lists a number of British philosophers whom Shalom met while writing his paper. Shalom, who is mentioned by Austin in the *discussion* (*infra*, p. 251), was born in Egypt and educated at Cape Town and Paris, and he was in the late 1950s *chercheur* at the CNRS, where he remained until 1965. He then moved to McMaster University in Canada for the remainder of his career. He should be noted for having published the very first paper on Wittgenstein in France (1958), before the better-known (Hadot 1959).

[21] Wahl was indeed widely read in English-language philosophy: his doctoral thesis had been on *Les philosophies pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique* (1920), dealing with British and American currents against Bradley's monism, including William James' pragmatism, and he published in 1932 an influential book *Vers le concret. Études d'histoire de la philosophie contemporaine. William James, Whitehead, Gabriel Marcel* (1932). It is worth noting, therefore, that Wahl was interested in English-speaking philosophers that were for the most part simply by-passed by analytic philosophy.

some of the questions, relating to their alleged "method" and presumed wholesale rejection of philosophy of the continent. On the other hand, their hosts were evidently for the most part not up to date, and often voiced what are but barely veiled prejudices. To take only one example, René Poirier's comment on the insufficiencies of "linguistic analysis" in ethics – his contribution to the *discussion* comprises a compendium of such prejudices:

> I should say, however, that one could probably not get rid of moral nihilism by purely grammatical means. (*infra*, p. 242)

Of course, no definitive "refutation" is to be had in philosophy, so all that one can hope for is to provide strong enough an argument undermining the other position, and there is no reason to think that analytic philosophers could not provide such arguments in ethics.

Ignorance breeds prejudice and if some participants actually refrained from speaking their mind,[22] there were hostile remarks on both sides. However, Ryle's emblematic reply to Merleau-Ponty, mentioned above, was *not* one of them. As it has been noted many times by now,[23] Merleau-Ponty's question to Ryle (p. 95) was not about any commonality between their respective programs, but between Ryle's and Russell's pre-war philosophy. And Ryle's negative answer, a few pages later in the transcript (p. 98), was of course the correct one. It would have clarified this point to Merleau-Ponty, and was not a direct put down of his repeated entreaties to recognize that their respective programs are not so far apart (pp. 93-96).

Still, Ryle's railings against Husserl can hardly be excused. He was after all one of the very few British philosophers with any command of the phenomenological tradition prior to the war, and his negative attitude towards it goes a long way towards explaining the ignorance in which it was kept in Britain for a long time. Although commenting on Beck's misleading anecdote, Hanjo Glock was not off the mark about Ryle's attitude at Royaumont:

> Ryle seemed interested less in establishing whether there was a wide gulf between analytic and "Continental" philosophy than ensuring that there would be (Glock 2008: 63).

[22] For example, Jean Wahl himself, who harbored deep prejudices against analytic philosophy, that surfaced on occasion, e.g., in the epigraph to this paper or when he described "Anglo-Saxon philosophy" in his *Tableau de la philosophie française*, as "tangled up in and weighed down by idle positivist chatter (chatter against chatter) and naturalism" (1972: 177).

[23] See Glendinning (2006: 73), Overgaard (2010: 901-902), Vrahimis (2013a: 150), Vrahimis (2013b: 178). Culprits who swallowed Beck's account hook, line and sinker include Simon Critchley (2001: 35) who went as far as to compare Ryle's rejection to Thatcher's refusal of Delors's plan for European Union.

Even Austin also appears curtly to dismiss phenomenology in the *discussion*, if it is what he meant when speaking of a method "which is rather fashionable at the moment on the continent" (*infra*, p. 252). One should notice, however, that Austin was equally uncharitable, since his claim was that *no* actual method, including *his own*, would, *for the moment*, help us tackling metaphysical problems.

Ryle's attitude notwithstanding, it would be wrong to follow Taylor (1965: 133) and put the blame squarely at the foot of analytic philosophers. Jonathan Rée provides us with one extreme case of this:

> It was hardly a meeting of minds: the French hosts manifested a respectful curiosity about "Anglo-saxon philosophy" and "the Oxford School", but the "Chorus of Oxford analysts" huddled together in self-defense, as if they feared some kind of intellectual infection form the over-friendly continentals. (Rée 1983: 15)

Wishing to mock analytic philosophers, Rée refers here to the beginning of the question period following Leo Apostel's paper, but the transcript actually contradicts him. Reading it, we find that Austin elicited a round of applause by what was indeed derisively described as "le choeur des analystes d'Oxford" (p. 230), because he *praised* Apostel's paper for being, albeit critical, very much in the spirit of analytic philosophy. It is thus nonsense to describe this choir shouting "hear, hear", in terms of Oxonian "self-defense" in fear of "some kind of intellectual infection from the over-friendly continentals". It was obviously a mark of *respect* for the Belgian philosopher, which was, expectedly, followed by a series of searching questions by Austin. As a matter of fact, both Apostel and Beth engaged the debate with analytic philosophers in their papers, and "continentals" were largely absent from the following discussions, as if they too were "insufficiently prepared, and knew too little".

It should also be pointed out that it is also quite wrong to describe "continentals" as having manifested a "respectful curiosity". We already saw Father van Breda's *fin de non recevoir* addressed to Ryle, but he does it again in the *discussion*, when Ayer draws the distinction between scientific and conceptual/philosophical enquiries:

> First of all, I would like to express my satisfaction at having heard my friend Ayer accentuating the negative attitude of analytic philosophy towards all undertakings of continental philosophy … It is the truth, pure and simple, I believe, that there are many continentals who do not have any real interest in your philosophy. I would dare say that it is the same thing for you regarding the continentals. (*infra*, p. 226)

The first sentence of this comment is, again, incorrectly reported by Rée as if Ayer's (1983: 15), but the reader can verify that there is no basis for this attribution. Ayer merely points out (*infra*, p. 221) Russell's intention to rid philosophy

of bogus notions, but to construe this as entailing a rejection of metaphysics as a whole – or the whole of continental philosophy – is to commit a *non sequitur*: after all, Russell never rejected metaphysics wholesale and he is known to have argued *inter alia* for rather peculiar metaphysical theses such as "space has six dimensions" or to have postulated the existence of "sensibilia" as unsensed sense-data.[24] Analytic philosophy has some of its roots on the continent and it has, *pace* van Breda, numerous, by now well-investigated, points of contact with his own phenomenological tradition.

There are further instances of open hostility both in the *discussion*,[25] and elsewhere during the meeting,[26] that cannot be blamed on the invited speakers. There is a simple explanation for this hostility, which is *the elephant in the room*: *metaphysics*. Indeed, analytic philosophy was by then largely associated in France with the anti-metaphysical agenda of Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle. A French translation of Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (1956) appeared a year after Rougier's *Traité de la connaissance* (1955), and it might very well be that their combined effect was to keep that fear alive. By the late 1950s, however, the principle of verifiability at the basis of the logical positivists' "elimination of metaphysics" had been abandoned, as Gewirth pointed out in the *discussion* (*infra*, pp. 247-248). He was also perceptive enough to notice that the Oxonians such as Ryle or Austin could not avail themselves of this principle and had nothing to replace it with. But no one else picked up on this important point. This is what one means when one says that hosts too were "insufficiently prepared, and knew too little".

It is telling, therefore – and the *discussion* makes it quite clear – that analytic philosophers felt under pressure to provide reasons for their rejection of metaphysics. Only Poirier, it seems, had noticed the existence of Strawson's "descriptive metaphysics" (*infra*, p. 241), and no one discussed Quine's critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction, which re-opened the door to metaphysics. This critique loomed large in the background, given that the debate often revolves, throughout the meeting, around the "two kinds of knowledge" thesis. Lack of preparation is the culprit here again.

The Oxonians' answers turned out to be rather conciliatory, but unsatisfactory in the eyes of their hosts. While Austin's long reply on this point (*infra*, pp. 229-231) says in essence that ordinary language philosophers are, in his es-

[24] Both in Russell (1914b).

[25] For example, when Éric Weil describes the "analytic" approach to philosophical problems – to withdraw from the conceptual to the semantic level, as Quine put it (*infra*, pp. 225-226) – as "the easiest" but not "necessarily the most fruitful" (*infra*, p. 243).

[26] For example, Father Bochénski's quip on Quine's views as "simplistic, absurd and mythological" (p. 185).

timate, nowhere near a position from which they could discuss metaphysical problems, Ryle clearly saw that they were asked to provide some "general formula, which would make the audience shudder" (*infra*, p. 228), admitted that he had none to offer, and that he could only talk of philosophers having to examine

> […] the structures and the interconnections of the conceptual schemes, more particularly in the case in which we sense a certain difficulty in connecting a given part of our conceptual schemes with another one. (*infra*, p. 228)

Here, it is rather the guests – if one excludes Ayer, who refrained at any rate from stating the obvious concerning his own position – that look accommodating and respectful. As a matter of fact, these replies by Ryle and Austin form one of the interesting aspects of the *discussion*, documenting as they are their own view on metaphysics.

A corollary to this is the threat posed by analytic philosophers to the notion of "intuition". Russell had criticized Bergson on intuition in *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914a: 32-37), translated into French by Philippe Devaux in 1929,[27] but as it turns out both Alquié and Wahl were strongly influenced by Bergson. Phenomenologists would have cause to worry too, given Husserl's own use of '*anschauung*' and his doctrine of the "*Wesensschau*",[28] although Husserl's notion of intuition wasn't meant to refer to a special capacity of the mind or a special sort of "experience". Wahl's last book was on *L'expérience métaphysique* (1965a), where, typically, analytic philosophy is summarily dismissed in less than two pages with a captious argument on the meaning of 'analytic' (1965a: 10-11). His notion is akin Bergson's "metaphysical intuition", and Alquié, who was mainly an historian of philosophy, made central use of the latter in, e.g., his studies of Descartes (1969) and Spinoza (1981). In the *discussion*, this issue was predictably raised by Alquié:

> It seems to us [Frenchmen] that we have to choose between a method that takes language as a guide and analyses it, and a method, which, on the contrary criticizes language in the name of intuition. (*infra*, p. 236)

Alas, Ryle did not address this point when answering Alquié (*infra*, pp. 244-245).[29]

Hosts appear, therefore, to have focused on the thesis that analytic philoso-

[27] This translation was re-edited in 1971, and the corresponding passage is in Russell (1971: 45-49).

[28] This was, not surprisingly, the topic of Lévinas' first book (1930), the first book in France on Husserl's phenomenology.

[29] Alquié and Ryle agreed on one point, however, namely that what goes by the name of philosophy "on the continent" more often than not reduces to history of ideas – a common complaint even today. On the other hand, analytic philosophy is commonly perceived as "ahistorical".

phy is synonymous with 'elimination of metaphysics', and the associated idea that an analysis of language would provide grounds for the impossibility of any metaphysics. As Jules Vuillemin was to put it, derisively, analysis was perceived as "destructive of Life and Truth".[30] Chaïm Perelman, acting as chair, focused the *discussion* on what seems to be the mistaken view that there is one common method shared by all analytic philosophers (*infra*, pp. 215-216),[31] and the rejection of metaphysics merely played, as pointed out, the role of the elephant in the room. Guests did little to dispel this confusion. In a sense, they "huddled together" as Rée suggested (but not for the reasons he alleges), being mindful of fratricidal strife and emphasizing common ground. This prevented them from being fully explicit about some of their divergences about method. For example, the divide over the distinction between ordinary and formal language, a topic raised in Beth's paper, was carefully avoided. As Ayer puts it here:

> […] we are convinced that philosophy is not capable of competing directly with science, that it is a second-order activity, so to speak, meaning by this that it does not bear directly on facts, but on the way one talks about facts. And this is why, although we are, as you have been able to see, deeply divided on other issues, we find ourselves in complete agreement on this point. There is no reason to consider what the French call "la réflexion philosophique" is thinking that bears directly on facts, and not on the way one describes facts. (*infra*, pp. 222-223)

Quine also emphasized a common interest in language, in the most superficial way:

> In any case, I believe that a common trait unites us: that our activities are focused on language. (*infra*, pp. 225)

With Austin and Ryle almost caught off guard, having very little to say about metaphysics, superficial statements of unity such as these merely *confirmed* prejudices, precisely at a stage when more refined comments about differences were called for to undermine them.

One can thus see the *discussion* as documenting some of the reasons why a *rapprochement* was not possible at that particular stage. If anything, Royaumont had the effect of prolonging this period of mutual incomprehension. Metaphysics was never, from Russell to Strawson, entirely absent from analytic

[30] Vuillemin (2015: 19). Vuillemin's paper, written *circa* 1966-68, is in part a belated reaction to Royaumont. It is of interest inasmuch as Vuillemin is quite explicitly siding against his own camp.

[31] Perelman did ask an interesting question, at a later stage, namely: "Would one need to carry on a similar 'analysis' for languages other than English?" (*infra*, pp. 227), to which Austin answered positively (*infra*, p. 231-232).

philosophy, and focusing on an anti-metaphysical agenda gives us a skewed picture, even more so today given that metaphysics has now returned to its central position, while "philosophy of language" has concomitantly fallen off the pedestal.[32] The latter still retains an important role, but the revolutionary days in which it could be wielded against bad metaphysics are over; they even were at the time of Royaumont. On the other hand, few on the continent would recognize themselves today as heirs to Bergson or Husserl on "intuition" and "essences", and, needless to say, the fad for existentialism has long gone. Given that much historical work on both analytic philosophy and the phenomenological movement has also been done that emphasized commonalities over points of divergence, we are now able to step back and take a fresh look at the *discussion*, noticing, of course, how it focused on this ill-begotten issue, but also looking for more interesting material to extract from it.

## 3. *The discussion and History of Analytic Philosophy*

Royaumont is also a precious document for historians of analytic philosophy, that has been poorly exploited simply because it is in French, and I would like briefly to conclude by providing two specific examples, taken from Austin's and Ryle's remarks, of the sort of details that make the *discussion* so rich a historical document – its translation being for this reason very much welcomed.

It is true that most of what Austin and others said during it is already known from what they had written elsewhere, for example when Austin replies to Perelman's opening remarks, presenting (*infra*, p. 218) his well-known suggestion in "A Plea for Excuses", that philosophers should try and reach agreement on "what we should say when" (Austin 1979: 182) or reprising and even expanding a bit (*infra*, pp. 218-219) on an equally well-known passage, also from "A Plea for Excuses", in which he claimed that ordinary language already

> […] embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth marking. (Austin 1979: 182)

Still, this repeated testimony underlines the depth of Austin's debt to John Cook Wilson, on an important point of interpretation, where one usually credits Moore or Wittgenstein.[33] As Cook Wilson put it:

[32] See, e.g., (Williamson 2007).

[33] On Cook Wilson and his influence on Oxford philosophy, including Austin, see Marion (2000) and Marion (2015).

[…] a philosophical distinction is *prima facie* more likely to be wrong than what is called a popular distinction, because it is based on a philosophic theory which may be wrong in its ultimate principles. This is so far from being appreciated that the reverse opinion is held and there is a tendency to regard the linguistic distinction as the less trustworthy because it is popular and not due to reflective thought. The truth is the other way. Reflective thought tends to be too abstract, while the experience which has developed the popular distinctions recorded in language is always in contact with the particular facts. (Cook Wilson 1926: 874-875)

Here, Austin says:

We simply discover facts that those who have been using our language for centuries have found worth noting, have retained in passing as worthy of note, and preserved within the evolution of our language.

[…] if a language perpetuated itself in the speech and the writings of civilized men, if it had been serviceable in all circumstances of their lives across ages, it is likely that the distinctions it draws, just like the connections it establishes in its multiples turns of phrases, are not entirely devoid of any value. At least one will discover in it familiar things […] worth being noted, and which seem to me to be, at the end of the day, infinitely richer in variety and common sense […] than the sort of reverie in which I used to abandon myself between lunchtime and five o'clock, when I was spending my energy trying to solve riddles of the universe, just as our fine teachers had encouraged us to do. (pp. 333-334)[34]

It is to be regretted that participants did not debate this Cook Wilson-Austin point in any depth, since it obviously impinges on the very possibility of establishing *via* an "intuition" or "experience", metaphysical distinctions that the hosts apparently wanted to safeguard.

Austin is also adamant here that "analysis" as he understands it is not a mere superficial study of language, such as grammar or phonetics; it has almost the un-Wittgensteinian ambition, to paraphrase the *Tractatus*, 6.52, to touch the problems of life:

[…] the diversity of expressions that could be used draws our attention on the extraordinary complexity of situations in which we are called upon to speak. That is to say that language sheds light on the complexity of life.

I believe that it becomes evident from all of this, that our study does not end at *words*, whatever one understands by this: I suppose that one thinks here about what phoneticians, semanticists, grammarians do. But I would never wish to imply that this is what we are doing. We use words to learn about the things we talk about when we use words. Or, if one finds this definition too naïve: we use words in order better to understand the totality of the situation in which we find ourselves using them. (*infra*, p. 218)

[34] Austin also repeats the point later on *infra*, pp. 231-232.

It seems to me that this is a precious testimony about Austin's ultimate philosophical ambitions.

I have already quoted Ryle quasi-Collingwoodian comment on the philosopher's task to describe underlying "conceptual schemes" and tensions between or within them (*infra*, p. 228). Ryle is here explicitly referring to Quine's use of that expression earlier in the discussion (*infra*, p. 225), but he is not repeating Quine's point. Ryle's comment is rather an echo of his inaugural lecture, "Philosophical Arguments" (1945), when he wrote that:

> The philosopher may, perhaps, begin by wondering about the categories constituting the framework of a single theory or discipline, but he cannot stop there. He must try to co-ordinate the categories of all theories and disciplines. (Ryle 1971, vol. II: 195)

This was written, however, as a comment on Collingwood and his idea of metaphysics as the study of "constellations of absolute presuppositions" in *An Essay on Metaphysics* (1940). If it was not clear at first blush, that Ryle actually agreed with it, this passage confirms it: although he did not wish to recognize any influence from Collingwood (Ryle 1970: 13), it seems Ryle was, on this very point, influenced by him.[35] It is thus worth recalling that Collingwood's *Essay on Metaphysics* was explicitly written as a reply to Ayer's critique of metaphysics in *Language, Truth and Logic*: according to Collingwood, every theoretical activity is composed of chains of questions and answers, with a set of absolute presuppositions standing at the beginning of them, of which it is the task of a metaphysics to investigate. Metaphysics is thus "descriptive" in this sense,[36] but it is also within its remit to study tensions within such "constellations" and how they might be revised by a change from one "constellation" to another (Collingwood 1940: 48, n. 73). This is the idea that finds an echo in Ryle's comment in the *discussion*, an idea that could have gone a long way to mend the rift between some of the participants at Royaumont; a rift that was, as we saw, inflated for dramatic purposes, with the unhappy consequences that we all know too well.[37]

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[35] William Lyons (1980: 13) takes the above-quoted passage (Ryle 1971, vol. II: 195) as reminiscent of the logical positivist program of a "unified science", but the context makes it plain that he is taking his lead from Collingwood.

[36] See D'Oro (2002).

[37] I would like to thank Aude Bandini, Nick Griffin and Guido Bonino for help in writing this paper, and the latter also for kindly inviting me to write it.

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