1. The battle of Royaumont

In 1958, a colloquium was held at Royaumont Abbey titled ‘La Philosophie Analytique’. In its attempt to bring French philosophers face-to-face with a certain Anglo-American trend in philosophy, the colloquium was analogous to the attempt, thirty years earlier, to bring together the French and German philosophical establishments at Davos. But where Davos had succeeded in bringing the disciples of phenomenology to the forefront of both French and German academic philosophy, Royaumont has been viewed as an example of miscommunication and misunderstanding. Its mission had been to bring together the two national philosophical cultures in ‘une tentative de dialogue’ (Beck et al., 1962, p. 7). Instead, the colloque de Royaumont presented an array of resources to those who wished to keep the philosophers of the two nations in cultural apartheid. As Charles Taylor notes in his review of its published proceedings, Royaumont can be seen as a ‘dialogue de sourds’ (dialogue of the deaf) (1964, p. 132).

This failure is not as unquestionable as has been presented. In this chapter, it is shown that Royaumont was not simply an encounter between two contesting philosophical factions but rather a battleground of intense complexity, on which the question of what counts as polemics does not necessarily command an identical answer from the various (i.e. more than two) sides involved. In a sense, it is not deafness that characterises the various dialogues that took place, but rather a tendency to listen to something or other as something other...
than what was uttered. At times, what appears as an attack on the doctrines and theses of one side is, in fact, directed elsewhere. Thus, not surprisingly, it is not clear at first sight exactly what one may count as a side here, beyond the particulars of the positions upheld by one or another participant of the colloquium. The question of how the side of ‘analytic philosophy’ is to be defined (and thus, in a predominantly negative manner, differentiated from other sides) is one which emerges, possibly for the first time in the history of analytic philosophy, at Royaumont.

2. Continental ‘analysts’, Anglo-Saxon ‘continentials’

It would be a mistake to construe Royaumont as a polemic encounter between two major forces in philosophy, not only because it is hard to make out a unified analytic side being defended there, but also because there are few proponents of the opposite side to be found present at the colloquium. Already in his introduction to the course, Jean Wahl mentions José Ferrater Mora, who talks of at least three traditions of philosophers: dialectical materialism, the ‘badly defined’ (Beck et al., 1962, p. 9) continental tradition in all its ‘diverse forms’ (p. 9) including phenomenology and existentialism, and analytic philosophy (which, Wahl claims, also goes under the name ‘logical positivism’ or ‘neo-positivism’).

A mere glance at the biographies of the ‘continental’ (i.e. French, Belgian, Dutch, Polish) philosophers present at Royaumont serves to prove that the perceived struggle between an ‘analytic’ and a ‘continental’ approach to philosophy at Royaumont is deceiving. Two ‘continental’ professors presented papers at the conference, Leo Apostel and Evert Willem Beth. They were both logicians and in some way or another akin to the analytic tradition in philosophy: Apostel had been a student of Rudolf Carnap and Carl Hempel, and Beth had been a research assistant to Alfred Tarski. Among the audience, one finds Chaïm Perelman, the Polish philosopher, who was deeply influenced by logical positivism in his studies of the philosophy of law and the theory of argumentation. The Polish philosopher Józef Maria Bocheński’s work ranged from logic to the critique of Soviet Marxism. Philippe Devaux, the Belgian logician and philosopher, had studied with Whitehead and had introduced Whitehead and Russell’s work to France through his translations of their texts. Even