

Joshua Harris

Univocity and Analogy : A Comparative Study of Gilbert Ryle and Martin Heidegger

Diametros nr 34, 34-50

2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

UNIVOCITY AND ANALOGY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GILBERT RYLE AND MARTIN HEIDEGGER

– Joshua Harris –

Abstrakt. The work of Gilbert Ryle maintains a notable proximity to the philosophical disposition assumed by the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger. This is due largely to their critiques of the Cartesian tradition of philosophical anthropology. By employing the metaphysical positions of univocity and analogy as a hermeneutical device, this study attempts to draw out the fundamental differences between the projects of Ryle and Heidegger. It is my contention that Ryle is not a phenomenologist precisely because he affirms the Scotist doctrine of the univocity of being. In contrast, Heidegger is a phenomenologist precisely because he disaffirms univocity in favor of a modified version of Thomistic analogy. By recalling this important debate in medieval metaphysics, it is possible to gain important resources for debate between the “analytic” and “continental” camps – at least insofar as those labels correspond to the figures of Ryle and Heidegger in a meaningful way.

Słowa kluczowe: Gilbert Ryle, Heidegger, univocity, analogy.

The work of British philosopher Gilbert Ryle maintains an interesting relationship with fellow giant of twentieth century thought, Martin Heidegger. This relationship, while indeed tenuous and even dismissive at times, marks a significant situation in philosophy—especially regarding the so-called split between “analytic” and “continental” that has arrived as a new sort of philosophical “orthodoxy” in the twentieth century.¹ While it is true that neither thinker writes explicitly in these terms, there are both rhetorical and substantive differences between the two that may offer concrete insight into a fundamental disagreement between the two “traditions” as a whole.

Ryle shares some common ground with Heidegger on the issue of what is usually labeled the metaphysical position of “dualism” between mind and body—defended most notably by philosophers in the Cartesian tradition.² In fact, each man's mutual criticism of this perspective is central to each of their respective

¹ Docini [2007] p. 283.

² Philosophers such as Richard Swinburne, for example, openly accept this label, perhaps due to its simple explanatory power. See Swinburne [1977].

thought projects. For this reason, Ryle has been read as a proponent of phenomenology along with his counterpart, Heidegger.³ My primary purpose in this study, however, is to say that this is not the case. Drawing from his review of Heidegger's *Being and Time*,⁴ I will attempt to show that Ryle's concern for the "things themselves" reveals his affirmation of the Scotist doctrine of the univocity of being: namely, that being is not ultimately analogous in its different applications, but instead

a "unified" concept under which all things *are* in common. This presupposition that underlies Ryle's distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that represents a fundamental departure from Heidegger's project of phenomenology. In short, my thesis is that Ryle's affirmation of univocity distances him from Heidegger's analogical phenomenology.

The structure of this paper takes the form of a defense of the following *modus ponens* argument: First, I will attempt to show that Heidegger's *Being and Time* assumes a fundamentally analogical concept of being. In doing so, he establishes a key principle for phenomenology as a distinct philosophical method and position. Second, I will maintain that Ryle's project (less controversially) assumes a univocal concept of being. It is therefore the conclusion of this study that this fundamental dissimilarity—the difference between analogy and univocity—represents the most substantive disagreement between the respective projects of Heidegger and Ryle.

Before entering into my defense of the two operative premises in this argument, I will briefly outline the relationship between Ryle and Heidegger in order to arrive at possible conclusions as to why Ryle has been called a proponent of phenomenology. Then I will defend the first premise by defining the essential structures of the Scotist position of the univocity of being and Heideggerian phenomenology. After that, I will defend the second premise by exploring Ryle's philosophical project and its indebtedness to this Scotist position. With these clarifications in place, it is possible to arrive at the aforementioned conclusion: namely, that Heidegger's phenomenology is substantively different from Ryle's project because of latter's univocity.

The Relationship between Ryle and Heidegger

The relationship between Ryle and Heidegger is an area of contention—not just for the two philosophers themselves but also for their followers and critics.

³ Lyons [1980] p. 3.

⁴ Ryle [1929] pp. 355–370.

Perhaps the most interesting development of the issue can be found in Michael Murray's article entitled "Heidegger and Ryle: Two Versions of Phenomenology". In this piece, against which I am arguing here, Murray locates what he perceives to be "a substantial affinity between their works."⁵ While I do not necessarily disagree that there is some overlap between the two thinkers, I think it is misleading to attribute a substantive mutuality under the name "phenomenology". But what does Murray mean when he says that Ryle advocates a "version" of phenomenology? In order to begin understanding this idea, it is important to examine the most evident agreement between the two: namely, that the Cartesian separation of mind and body is mistaken.

When Descartes embarks upon his mission of locating a "certain" foundation for philosophy, he arrives upon his famous dictum, *cogito ergo sum*. This certainty privileges the realm of the "mind", which deals essentially with thought as opposed to an "external world" that exists independently of thought. For Descartes, it is possible to doubt that there is an external world with which we are in contact as "thinking things", but it is not possible to doubt that there must be an existing 'I' that does the thinking in the first place. After all, even thoughts of doubt must come from an existing thinker. In this way, the realm of thought has at least one quality that the external world does not: namely, certain existence. This is no small difference for a philosopher concerned with doing philosophy only on the unshakable foundation of certainty, so perhaps it is not difficult to see why the Cartesian position is traditionally associated with a dualism between mind and body.

In what has become a famous section of *Being and Time*, Heidegger accuses Descartes of losing sight of the most important question that a philosopher can ask: "What is the meaning of being in general?"⁶ For Heidegger, the Cartesian methodology of doubt is helpful—but only if it is applied to every aspect of the project. Whereas Descartes offers a great amount of clarity and precision regarding his understanding of the *cogito*, he does not say anything at all about the nature or meaning of the *sum*. He seems to assume that meaning of existence or being is either already settled or unworthy of philosophical reflection due to its resistance to predication. In either case, Heidegger understands the division between *cogito* and *sum* to be unhelpfully asymmetrical—with too much emphasis on the former. Such an unbalanced perspective leads inevitably to the privileging of thought over all else that *exists* independently of thought. Heidegger's task,

⁵ Murray [1973] p. 88.

⁶ Heidegger [1996] p. 8.

which I will develop later on in this study, begins (and remains) with the meaning of *sum*. His attempt to give primacy to this question “clears the way”⁷ for his *holistic* project of phenomenological ontology. It is Heidegger's contention that a robust understanding of the meaning of being in general makes any sort of dualism between mind and body untenable.

As Murray does well to point out, Ryle's critique of Cartesian dualism “is that of the linguistic portrayal or sentence-frame analysis; his goal is not a science or a clarification of the meaning of Being, but rather a “theory of mind” or philosophical psychology.”⁸ Instead of challenging the entire paradigm of metaphysical language in general, Ryle aims to show that there is a category mistake in understanding mental states to be “occult episodes of which their overt acts and utterances are effects.”⁹ In this polemical manner, Ryle accuses this view of the mind of positing a sort of mystical parallel world of “thought” that somehow interacts with the categorically separate realm of action in the external world. Ryle's alternative is to view this realm of thought as just another manifestation of action – not different in any substantive way from acts in the external world. As I will investigate later, this point is defended with Ryle's famous distinction between knowing-how and knowing-that. At this point, however, it is only important to know that even in his critique Ryle remains confidently in the standard metaphysical discourse.

This is the limited sense in which Heidegger and Ryle share the same goal: namely, that the Cartesian position of substance dualism is symptomatic of a more fundamental philosophical mistake. For Heidegger, this means an explicit reexamination of metaphysics and the meaning of being in general. For Ryle, this simply means exposing a category mistake within an already accepted language of metaphysics. While I believe Murray's article is helpful for locating some commonalities between the two philosophers, I believe it is misleading to attribute the label of phenomenologist to both. In order to see why, it is necessary to come to what I think is the most fundamental disagreement between Heidegger and Ryle: the univocity of being.

⁷ Thomson [2000] p. 317.

⁸ Murray [1973] p. 88.

⁹ Ryle [1949] p. 25.

Analogy, Heidegger and Phenomenology

With the return of metaphysics as a robust field of philosophical inquiry has come a renewed interest in Duns Scotus' doctrine of the univocity of being.¹⁰ This understanding, which some scholars call a “second beginning of metaphysics”, is enormously influential—especially for the many modern projects of philosophy.¹¹ Although it is beyond the scope of this project to do proper justice to Scotus' departure from the Aristotelian-Thomist model, it is important for the purposes of this study to outline it briefly.

The primary goal of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is famously to inquire about “being *qua* being” – or, in other words, the being of beings or being itself.¹² In attempting to locate with precision a proper language to deal with this subject, he quickly realizes that it is impossible to do so in any conventional sense. This is because there is no single predicate that avoids begging the question (as soon as we say being *is* x, there is already a vicious circularity involved). But Aristotle does not abandon his project due to this difficulty. Instead, he suggests that the being of beings can only be named indirectly in its specific instantiations. While he still argues that being is ultimately unified in one “sense” (i.e. everything that is healthy relates to health¹³), this relationship can only be identified equivocally. Thus being *qua* being is intelligible only *via* its specific instantiations and their relationship to one another.

Heavily influenced by this perspective, Thomas Aquinas holds that being should be understood as analogy. For him “being *qua* being, the abstract object of the intellect, participates in subsistent being, which causes it and gives it being.”¹⁴ Because Aquinas is confident that divine revelation has unveiled at least part of who that “subsistent being” (God) is, he is more explicit about the sense in which specific instantiations of being relate to one another. So, even though he maintains a careful distance from Aristotle in this way, the Aristotelian relational language is still operative here. The result is Thomas' *analogia entis*, a metaphysical system in which existing things have their being only insofar as they participate in the divine *Logos* – of whom the incarnate Christ is the exact representation. From this participatory understanding of being, it follows that things *are* in a hierarchical

¹⁰ This trend is especially evident in emerging narratives in “post-liberal” philosophy and theology. This includes most notably the movement of Radical Orthodoxy. See: Pickstock [2005].

¹¹ Pini [2005] pp. 69–110.

¹² Aristotle [1999] 1003b.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 1003a33–35.

¹⁴ Boulnois [2005] p. 604.

structure because they participate in the divine in different ways (i.e. animals are “lower” than human beings because they do not bear the image of God to the same extent). For the purposes of this study, the most important implication of the *analogia entis* is that different things *are* in different ways. Put simply, a human being's existence is not the same thing as an animal's.

While Thomas' metaphysics was and still is heralded today as robust due to its explanatory melding of Hebrew revelation and Greek rationality, the Scotist critique is usually attributed to one specific problem: the existence of evil in a Christian theistic account of reality.¹⁵ While certainly aware that the *analogia entis* does maintain a wonderful explanatory horizon for the created order in a specifically Christian way, the basic Scotist objection is that evil is difficult to explain on such a model. This is because it is very difficult to absolve God of all evil if evil's very existence is directly maintained by its participation (or lack thereof) in the divine essence. Instead of positing being or existence as a name for the uncompromising contingency of creation upon a necessary Creator, Scotus advocates a more neutral understanding. Being, for Scotus, is simply a concept common to all existing things—including God. So, even though God is certainly still the Creator, it is *grammatically* possible to conceive of things as existing without reference to him. Although such a perspective does not escape the problem of evil entirely, it does provide a sort of neutral ground for which God himself is not directly responsible: namely, the univocal concept of being that is shared by all existing beings.

This univocal neutrality, I argue, is exactly the sort of thing that Heidegger's phenomenology aims to abolish in *Being and Time*. Although it is true that Heidegger's governing question about the meaning of being in general may seem as though it implies this univocity as the goal, it is important to note that only analogy can even come close to the sort of language necessary for such a project. Thomas Sheehan remarks cogently:

[T]alk of Being 'itself' can easily lose sight of the analogical character of Being. Heidegger was not after a univocal something that subsists on its own. Over and above the Being of man, the Being implements, nature, artworks and ideal objects, there is no second level of 'Being itself'. Rather, the 'itself' refers to the analogically unified meaning of Being which is instantiated in all cases of Being this or that.¹⁶

¹⁵ Zimmermann [2012] p. 171.

¹⁶ Sheehan [2010] p. viii.

Read in this way, Heidegger's project does share the importance of analogous being with Aquinas. It would be a dreadful mistake, however, to say that he is a Thomist.

Whereas Aquinas unifies his analogous understanding of being by appealing to the absolute contingency of the created order upon its Creator, for theological reasons Heidegger cannot accept this metaphysical structure. In Heidegger's phenomenology, being names the majestic, dynamic process that is always-already both revealing and concealing itself actively as temporality.¹⁷ It encompasses the entirety of not only "objective reality" but also the equally important interpretative activity by which that reality is itself constituted. Heidegger names this interpreter *Dasein* (literally, there-being) in an attempt to understand the conscious self as inextricable from the question of being. Again, this integrative understanding is in direct opposition to any sort of dualism between a subjective mind and the objective world. Instead, being is always manifesting itself and re-manifesting itself on its own terms of unceasing, holistic flux.

When he analyzes things like "mood" and "anxiety", then, Heidegger does not evoke the same sort of sentiment typical of existentialist philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre.¹⁸ The former is not interested in parading his subjectivity about the academy like a heartbroken teenage girl in a high school creative writing class. Instead, he is sketching *analogously* certain fundamental modes of being in general—or perhaps more simply, the ways in which being discloses itself via the interpretive particularity of temporal *Dasein*. For Heidegger, it is misleading to say that "I feel anxiety"; for this simply names an emotive state that characterizes a feeling subject over against its external world. It is more correct to say "being reveals itself as anxious *Dasein*". Unlike Aquinas, Heidegger lacks the metaphysical semantics of necessity and contingency. Still, his language is still profoundly indebted to analogy as both a fundamental methodology and even at the substantive level of ontology itself.

Because phenomenology in a thoroughgoing sense is attuned to the idea that "the access of meaning is part of the meaning itself,"¹⁹ I think it is quite safe to say that any appeal to a final, univocal account of being is hard to come by in such a paradigm. Interestingly, though, this very point has come under attack in Philip

¹⁷ Heidegger [1996] p. 224.

¹⁸ Heidegger is famously opposed to Sartre's existentialist paradigm of "existence precedes essence" because it falls prey to the same sort of Cartesian dualism he wishes to bury. See: Heidegger [1993] pp. 232–233.

¹⁹ This quote is extremely helpful for understanding the primary functioning principle of phenomenology. Levinas [2003] p. 527.

Tonner's recent book, *Heidegger, Metaphysics and the Univocity of Being*.²⁰ In it, Tonner makes the opposite claim: that Heidegger's understanding of being is not analogous at all but ultimately univocal. The most notable premise upon which the argument hinges is that Heidegger's conception of temporality functions similarly to Scotus' concept of univocity. Although it is couched in a non-metaphysical language of "thinking" – as opposed to traditional "philosophy" – this notion of temporality ultimately characterizes all existing things without an appeal to analogy: "*Dasein's* temporality is revealed as the transcendental horizon for the understanding of being. As such, *all* being is understood in terms of time. To that extent, being is *univocally* understood in terms of time and being itself is temporal."²¹

Although I certainly acknowledge that Heidegger's understanding of temporality does provide an overarching horizon for all existing beings, I must concur with Sheehan against Tonner for one simple reason: namely, that a phenomenological account of temporality is unique in the sense that it is composed of *possibility*. Possibility in Heidegger is a difficult concept that is easy to butcher, but it is extremely important to any thoroughgoing phenomenology. The idea is, most simply, that things are in the world only insofar as they are there *for something else* and ultimately for *Dasein*. Keeping in mind the earlier phenomenological dictum that the access of meaning is part of the meaning itself, any understanding existing beings must include a certain possibility for the "accessor", *Dasein*.

Heidegger's famous example of the hammer in *Being and Time* is an excellent illustration of this point.²² It would be very odd, he argues, for the craftsman to assess his hammer as an objectively present thing that stands in opposition to his subjectivity. A craftsman never "stops" to think about what the hammer is in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. This would be a difficult and unnecessary task! Rather, the craftsman "knows" his hammer only insofar as his ham-

²⁰ It is interesting to note that, although Tonner disputes the notion that Heidegger's concept of being is ultimately analogical, he concedes the fact that Husserl's is. Following Gilles Deleuze, Tonner argues that Husserl's transcendental ego functions in much the same way as Aquinas' God – as a focal point to which all "things" are in relation. I am in agreement with Tonner on this latter point, and this also serves as a preliminary justification for the idea that – for the current purpose, at least – phenomenology is fundamentally analogical in orientation. See: Tonner, [2010] p. 80.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

²² "[H]ammering with the hammer neither *grasps* these beings thematically as occurring things, nor does such using even know the structure of useful things as such. . . . 'Practical' behavior is not 'a-theoretical' in the sense of lack of seeing. The difference between it and theoretical behavior lies not only in the fact that in one case we observe and in the other instance we act, . . . Rather, observation is a kind of taking care just as primordially as action has its *own* kind of seeing." Heidegger [1996] p. 69.

mer maintains a certain possibility—namely, the possibility of fulfilling the craftsman's activity of the craft. Sure, if the hammer malfunctions or performs a function that is somehow out of the ordinary, the craftsman may stop and examine it—perhaps even looking for certain properties. But this new reflective attitude that the craftsman adopts in relation to his hammer is likewise constituted by a new possibility of “fixing” or perhaps “admiring”. The phenomenological perspective is still maintained—just in terms of new possibilities.

For Heidegger, this account of beings as *for the possibility of x* extends to not only tools but literally everything that *Dasein* encounters. Even something as apparently arid or benign as mathematics can never be a simply “objective” (as opposed to subjective) enterprise of which the interpretive mode of possibility is not a part. So, while temporality provides a certain clearing in which possibilities are to be made intelligible, it seems difficult to escape the idea that such a temporality cannot be “arrived upon” in any meaningful way without the specific instantiations of the possibilities themselves. Thus, the linguistic discipline of analogy is essential to the phenomenological enterprise.²³

For these reasons, then, I must conclude that any univocal account of being cannot be accommodated by a thoroughgoing phenomenology such as Heidegger's. Premise one remains: If Ryle has a univocal account of being, then Ryle is not a proponent of Heideggerian phenomenology. I will now attempt to provide a defense of premise two, which happens to be the main thrust of this paper overall: that Ryle maintains a univocal account of being.

Ryle's Univocity

Ryle begins his most well-known book, *The Concept of Mind*, with an analysis of the aforementioned “myth” of Cartesian dualism. Calling it “the official doctrine” of most philosophy in his era and before, he polemically engages it:

With the doubtful exceptions of idiots and infants in arms every human being has both a body and a mind. Some would prefer to say that every human being is both

²³ Before moving on, it seems appropriate to engage one possible objection that appears in Tonner's book: namely, that Heidegger's early work on Scotus explicitly affirms the doctrine of univocity. See Heidegger [1973] p. 15. If this were true, it would still not affect my case in light of the mature Heidegger of *Being and Time* (and later). If 1.) Tonner admits that Heidegger's notion of temporality remains essentially Husserlian, and 2.) Husserl's project is thoroughly analogical, then it seems to be a mistake to locate a univocal concept of being in temporality. This is a difficulty that renders the point about the early Heidegger's affinity for Scotus somewhat irrelevant (for the sake of this essay). See Tonner [2010] p. 66.

a body and a mind. His body and mind are harnessed together, but after the death of the body his mind may continue to exist and function.²⁴

There are more than a few details to unpack from this seemingly simple quote, but perhaps the most important for these purposes is the dubious origin of the dualism in question. As Ryle goes on to say, the mind-body distinction is relevant not only in terms of an isolated issue of theoretical metaphysics, but in a whole host of other classic distinctions (i.e. subjective-objective, private-public, etc.).

According to Ryle, the best way to understand the reasons for holding such a view of human identity and consciousness is as a myth that accomplishes “a lot of theoretical good, while they are still new.”²⁵ To illustrate this curious point, he draws on the classical metaphor of the mind as a ruling body or political superior. This picture of mind as naturally distinct from the body is employed in certain schools of ancient philosophy in order to legitimate a certain kind of regime in which a few leaders could efficiently rule their *polis*. The wise leaders represent the mind, of course, and the body politic represents the body. In this way, the theory accomplishes a certain good (for the aristocrats) even if it does not necessarily correspond with reality. For Ryle, such an accidentally progressive result of philosophical theories can also occur towards the ends of philosophy itself, as well.

For Ryle, then, philosophy operates like the natural sciences – with a progressive account of knowledge that builds upon its antecedents. This “scientific” philosophy is interesting not only because of its explicit affinity for the empirically focused Anglo-American tradition of analytic philosophy, but also because it informs Ryle's critical attitude towards phenomenology proper. Again in *The Concept of Mind*, he dedicates a section to what he calls “phenomenalism”.²⁶ In it, he makes two remarks about this burgeoning philosophical movement – one of admiration, and one critical.

“One of the commendable motives of this theory was the desire to dispense with occult agencies and principles. . . . Its holders found that current theories of perception postulated unobservable entities or factors to endow things with properties which sensations were debarred from revealing.”²⁷ Here, Ryle simply means the classical notion of “substance” or “essence”. Because he understands

²⁴ Ryle [1949] p. 11.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 234. Here, Ryle refers to “phenomenalism” as merely another name for phenomenology – more specifically, as the philosophical methodology which relies on the aforementioned point made by Levinas: “the access of meaning is part of the meaning itself.”

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 235.

phenomenalism to be concerned with the manner in which things appear rather than the unchanging thing-ness of the thing appearing, there is no room for these kinds of “occult principles” on this paradigm. Perhaps it is not difficult, then, to see why Ryle maintains some overlap with this sort of philosophical approach. Like the mysterious “other realm” of the mind as opposed to the body, ideas such as substance and essence assume a sort of mythical status in relation to the rest of reality. Because Ryle critiques this dualism as an empty illusion, it easily follows that he is also critical of these classical ideas as well. In this limited sense, then, Ryle again has mutual ground with philosophical phenomenalism.

Yet while this agreement ought not to be dismissed altogether, there is a sense in which it could appear more interesting than it really is. It is true that the phenomenological method does do away with finalized substance and essence by understanding the “thing” as something like a differentiated appearance. But if this is supposed to be a distinctive feature of phenomenalism, then it is difficult to see how such a philosophy gets beyond the more traditional British empiricist projects of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. David Hume and even his predecessors famously critique the ancient ideas of substance and essence in a strikingly similar manner.²⁸ It seems that Ryle's supposed affinity with what he calls phenomenalism is better understood as a rather ordinary overlap with his empirical methodology.

However, while this agreement is surely relevant to the respective projects at issue, it is Ryle's disagreement with phenomenalism that has far more impact for the sake of his philosophy as a whole. He writes in that same section that phenomenalism mistakenly “supposed that having a sensation is itself a finding of something, . . . since we can observe only sensible objects, propositions about gate-posts [Ryle's example] must be translatable to propositions about sensible objects.”²⁹ Instead of liberating itself from the classical myths of substance and essence, it remains steadfastly within their linguistic confines. The only difference is that—instead of admitting the unobservable phenomena—it attempts to translate all propositions about gate-posts into propositions about sensible objects. Whereas an ancient would have said that the gate-post has a certain essential property that

²⁸ Hume argues in his *Treatise on Human Nature*: “When we gradually follow an object in its successive changes, the smooth progress of the thought makes us ascribe an identity to the succession. . . . When we compare its situation after a considerable change the progress of the thought is broken; and consequently we are presented with the idea of diversity: In order to reconcile which contradictions, the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible, which it supposes to continue the same under all these variations; and this unintelligible something it calls a *substance*, or *original and first matter*.” Hume [1978] p. 220.

²⁹ Ryle [1949] p. 236.

we cannot necessarily see, the phenomenologist says instead that the very notion of that “essential property” is itself an experiential phenomenon.

But what exactly is Ryle's problem here? The answer is, simply, that there *is no such thing* as a “sensible object” in the first place. This is a category mistake because it is non-sensical “to call a sensation 'veridical' [or] mistaken.”³⁰ A sensation simply is as a neutral given – without constitutive influence regarding the existing thing in question. It cannot be true or false because truth and falsehood gain their respective meanings from the world itself. This perspective already hints AT a univocal account of being in that it refers to truth and falsehood of things *independently* of their phenomenological sensation or appearance. In order to explore this point further, however, it is necessary to examine Ryle's notable epistemological distinction between knowing-how and knowing-that.

“Knowing-How and Knowing-That” is Ryle's most explicit attempt again to problematize the Cartesian dualism between the “purely intellectual” act of thought and “external” acts of considering propositions. Following Aristotle, Ryle argues that “philosophers have not done justice to the distinction which is quite familiar to all of us between knowing something is the case and knowing how to do things.”³¹ To illustrate this point, he gives the analogy of a chess player. When we say that a chess player is “clever”, we do not simply mean that he knows more propositions than a “stupid” player – as though stupidity and cleverness were merely descriptive terms referencing the amount of things known by each possessing subject. If this were the case, then we would reach an awkward conclusion: namely, that the stupid player would become clever simply by virtue of memorizing a list of the best possible moves. Ryle argues that this is not cleverness at all, but simply a robotic adherence to a set of known propositions.

On behalf of the “intellectualist” Cartesians, he anticipates an objection to this understanding: could it not be the case that the stupid player's memorization of certain moves is not knowledge at all but simply “verbal habit”? To this, Ryle responds with two points. Even if the stupid player takes the time to learn – not just memorize – the moves available, he would still need to (a) tell himself the appropriate move at the moment when it was needed and (b) act accordingly when the move occurs to him. Because this is the case, he concludes that “the application of maxims, etc., is certainly not any mere contemplation of them. Equally certainly it can be intelligently or stupidly done.”³² This idea – that propositions are known

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 237.

³¹ Baillie [2002] p. 200.

³² Ibidem, p. 202.

in a certain way—is the fundamental idea of what Ryle means by “knowledge-how”.

Although some philosophers have accused Ryle of reducing all knowledge to knowledge-how,³³ this is surely not the intent of his project. Whether or not he is logically clear and consistent with his definition of knowing-that, it is safe to say that this kind of knowledge is best understood with the metaphor of possession or accumulation. The chess player's unique disposition of intelligence is knowing-how, to be sure, but he must also *have* a sort of database of moves that fall under the category of knowing-that. Like tools in his arsenal, he wields them cleverly in order to win the game—but in order to do that, he must possess them in the first place.

Again, this seems to be further evidence of Ryle's adherence to a univocal account of being. The language of possession demands a sort of atomic, independent presence for both the possessor and the possessed. It would be incorrect to say, for example, that the chess player *is* his arsenal of moves. On the contrary, the chess player *is* the chess player on account of his being different enough from the moves to be able to possess them. The same could be said from the opposite perspective. The chess moves *are not* the chess player; they exist quite happily without him in many possible worlds. This is because they are different enough from the player to be possessed. Therefore knowledge-that is not an analogical disposition of the chess player's integrated reality—far from it. It is instead the self-sufficient, atomic content that is only contingently possessed by the knower. True to the “Logical Atomist mood,”³⁴ Ryle is interested in things-in-themselves. This latter focus is of interest to his analysis of Heidegger himself in his review of *Being and Time*.

Ryle begins his review without mincing words: “I suspect that this advance [of phenomenology] is an advance towards disaster.”³⁵ Although he also offers some praise to go along with his criticism, Ryle is not shy about distancing himself from Heidegger's grand project. There are numerous reasons for this, but the most interesting for my purposes is the presence—or lack thereof—of knowledge-that (or things themselves). Things *qua* things must be preserved in Ryle's system so

³³ Jane Roland, for example, argues that Ryle “never makes explicit the 'logical status' of 'knowing that'.” See: Roland [1958] 379n. John Hartland-Swann makes a similar case, saying that Ryle's distinction (especially knowing-that) is “fundamentally unstable and cannot survive analysis.” See: Hartland-Swann [1956] 111. While these critiques are interesting, I do not address them here because the consistency of his argument is not fundamental to my case against Ryle's status as a phenomenologist.

³⁴ Lyons [1980] p. 28.

³⁵ Ryle [1929] p. 355.

that his knowledge-how/knowledge-that distinction can maintain its integrity. Without the conceptual resource of things-in-themselves, it is impossible for Ryle to justify the status of knowledge-that because there is simply no need for it. Knowledge-how would be quite sufficient for describing all knowledge. This lapse into monism is the “disaster” of which Ryle speaks.

In his analysis of Heidegger's own account of knowledge, he offers the following critique:

But while it is a dangerous metaphor to speak of acts having "meanings" or of things as being the "meanings of acts", it is a fatal error to speak of a thing known as the correlate of a knowing-act as if that implied that we could get to the heart of the thing by analysing our experience of knowing it. A twin is a correlate to a twin but operations upon the one are at most operations upon the other one's twin, not operations upon the other one himself.³⁶

Here, the problem is manifest. By reducing all knowledge to the “primitive” adverbial language of being-in-the-world, it is extremely difficult to speak of knowing “things” at all—unless, of course, one is willing to admit that knowledge is simply reducible to a different disposition of *Dasein*. This is simply not a philosophical move with which Ryle is even remotely comfortable. “Being-in-the-world surely implies that underlying our other reactions and attitudes there is knowledge. We 'have-' or are "in-the-world" only if we know that at least one 'something' exists.”³⁷

Even if he does depart from the Cartesian dualism that provides much of the objective ground for science, Ryle's affinities still lie firmly with the classic empiricist narrative of progress and accumulation of knowledge. As I have already argued, the Scotist doctrine of univocal being is the most fundamental metaphysical presupposition for this epistemological imagination. Because being is a universally binding concept which all existing things have in common, there is no need to refer to any such necessary being (i.e. the Thomist God or Heideggerian *Dasein*) as constitutive of things. This common understanding of the being of beings liberates individual things from the monist inclination of the analogous knowledge-how. In its place, it postulates being as a neutral concept that simply names something like the presence of a thing—indifferent to the knower's action in the world.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 369.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

This is the sense in which the Kantian “thing-in-itself” depends on this understanding.³⁸ Following Kant and the narrative of modern science, then, Ryle maintains a univocal understanding of being. The Rylean account of knowledge-that depends on it. Because a thoroughgoing phenomenology relies upon an analogical understanding of being, it is the case that Ryle is himself not a phenomenologist as Heidegger is.

Conclusions

I have attempted to show in this study that Gilbert Ryle is not a phenomenologist because he holds to a univocal concept of being. It is true that he has been grouped together with Heidegger under this label because each man is a fierce critic of the Cartesian separation between mind and body. Upon further examination, however, it seems that this mutuality is barely more than superficial. Whereas Heidegger's project is an entire revamping of the language of metaphysics altogether, Ryle's is a more subdued critique that simply attempts to salvage both parts of his epistemic distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that.

The metaphysical position of the univocity of being is mutually exclusive with phenomenology because the latter is only possible as a project only via the language of analogy. Instead of appointing one concept of being to all existing things as a sort of *genus*, phenomenology follows Aristotle and Aquinas by naming being indirectly in its specific instantiations. Although the phenomenologist does not share the Thomistic language of a single “necessary being”, it does relativize being according to its phenomenal appearance. For Heidegger, this means understanding things in terms of their manifold possibilities for *Dasein*.

I have also attempted to show that Ryle's break with Heidegger is most fundamentally his affirmation of the Scotist doctrine of the univocity of being. This is evidenced in his various critiques of phenomenology—especially in his review of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Ryle is wary of phenomenology's “reductionist” tendency to collapse the entire enterprise of knowledge into the realm of mere disposition. As an alternative, he advocates an epistemological position of both knowledge-how and knowledge-that. It is the latter that marks his specific departure from phenomenology and analogy because it requires the existence of free-standing entities that can simply possess their being without reference to its phenomenal appearance.

For these reasons, Ryle should not be called a phenomenologist. However consistent or inconsistent his definition of knowledge-that stands, it does place

³⁸ Zizek [2009] p. 113.

him in the atomist tradition of twentieth century philosophy. Although it is certainly beyond the scope of this paper to examine the historical trends of philosophy called “continental” and “analytic”, perhaps this sort of divergence has the potential to shed some light upon the fundamental disagreements of the two. Insofar as continental philosophy follows Heidegger's commitment to exploring the contingent conditions upon which the meanings of even the most perennial philosophical concepts rely,³⁹ it cannot accommodate a strictly univocal understanding of being. This seems to be true of not only the phenomenology and existentialism of the mid-twentieth century but also to later developments in hermeneutics and post-structuralist discourse. Conversely, although analytic philosophers are obviously not blind to such contingent conditions, their resistance to subsuming meaning itself to mere analogy assumes the opposite position of univocity.⁴⁰

By being articulate about this fundamental difference maintained between the philosophical projects of Gilbert Ryle and Martin Heidegger, it is possible to garner a fuller understanding of both—as individual philosophers and as representatives of two wide-ranging traditions of philosophy. While I am not pretending to have anything like the last word on the subject, I hope this study can contribute towards a more robust dialogue.

Bibliography

- Aristotle [1999] – Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, Penguin Classics, New York 1999.
- Baillie [2002] – James Baillie, *Contemporary Analytic Philosophy*, Pearson, New York 2002.
- Boulnois [2005] – Olivier Boulnois, *Reading Duns Scotus: From History to Philosophy*, “Modern Theology” (21:4) 2005.
- Docini [2007] – Nevia Docini, *The Analytic/Continental Divide: Entities and Being*, “Soochow Journal of Philosophical Studies” (16) 2007.
- Gutting [2012] – Gary Gutting, *Bridging the Analytic-Continental Divide*, [in:] *The Stone*, “The New York Times” (Feb.) 2012.
- Hartland-Swann [1956] – John Hartland-Swann, *The Logical Status of 'Knowing That'*, “Analysis” (16.5) 1956.

³⁹ In a recent article for the *New York Times*, Gary Gutting characterizes at least part of the task of continental philosophy: “to probe *beneath* the concepts of everyday experience to discover the meanings that underlie them, to think the conditions for the possibility of our concepts.” See: Gutting [2012].

⁴⁰ For example, in his “debate” with Jacques Derrida, John Searle argues that “writing can and must be able to function in the radical absence of the sender, the receiver, and the context of production.” Searle [1977] 199.

- Heidegger [1993] – Martin Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, [in:] *Basic Writings*, Harper Collins, New York 1993.
- Heidegger [1996] – Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY 1996.
- Heidegger [1973] – Martin Heidegger, *Duns Scotus' Theory of the Categories and of Meaning*, Depaul University, Chicago, IL 1973.
- Hume [1978] – David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1978.
- Levinas [2003] – Levinas, *Meaning and Sense*, [in:] *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA 2003.
- Lyons [1980] – William Lyons, *Gilbert Ryle: An Introduction to his Philosophy*, Humanities Press, New Jersey 1980.
- Murray [1973] – Michael Murray, *Heidegger and Ryle: Two Versions of Phenomenology*, "The Review of Metaphysics," (27.1) 1973.
- Pickstock [2005] – Catherine Pickstock, *Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance*, "Modern Theology," (21.4) 2005.
- Roland [1958] – Jane Roland, *On Knowing How and Knowing That*, "The Philosophical Review" (67.3) 1958.
- Ryle [1929] – Gilbert Ryle, *Sein und Zeit by Martin Heidegger*, "Mind," (38.151) 1929.
- Ryle [1949] – Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Hutchinson & Co., London 1949.
- Searle [1977] – John Searle, *Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida*, "Glyph," (1) 1977.
- Sheehan [2010] – Thomas Sheehan, *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, Transaction, New Brunswick, NJ 2010.
- Swinburne [1977] – Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1977.
- Thomson [2000] – Iain Thomson, *Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger's Destruktion of Metaphysics*, (8.3) 2000.
- Tonner [2010] – Philip Tonner, *Heidegger, Metaphysics, and the Univocity of Being*, Continuum, New York 2010.
- Zimmermann [2012] – Jens Zimmermann, *Incarnational Humanism: A Philosophy of Culture for the Church in the World*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 2012.
- Zizek [2009] – Slavoj Zizek, and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2009.