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Wittgenstein's *Objects* and the Theory of Names in the *Tractatus*

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RESUMEN

La suposición de que el *Tractatus* de Wittgenstein propone una cierta metafísica ha dado lugar a una controversia sobre el estatus ontológico de los *objetos tractarianos*. Se ha debatido, por ejemplo, si estos objetos consisten sólo en particulares o tanto en particulares como en universales; si son entidades físicas, fenoménicas o fenomenológicas; y si corresponden a los objetos de conocimiento directo de Russell o a los fenómenos y la sustancia de Kant. En este ensayo, apoyo la opinión de Ishiguro de que estos objetos, al ser conceptos formales, son ontológicamente neutrales y, por lo tanto, que no son identificables con ningún tipo ontológico de entidades. Desarrollaré la coherencia de este punto de vista centrándome en la dependencia proposicional del significado de los nombres tractarianos. Después de mostrar por qué algunos argumentos en favor de atribuir una teoría russelliana del significado a estos nombres no funcionan, muestro por qué la explicación de Ishiguro de los objetos y nombres tractarianos proporciona una mejor explicación de la inalterabilidad de estos objetos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Wittgenstein*, *Tractatus*, *objetos tractarianos*, *Ishiguro*, *significado*.

ABSTRACT

The supposition that Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* advances a certain metaphysics has given rise to a controversy over the ontological status of his *Tractarian objects*. It has been debated, for instance, whether these objects consist only of particulars or of both particulars and universals; whether they are physical, phenomenal, or phenomenological entities; and whether they correspond to Russell's objects of acquaintance or Kant's phenomena and substance. In this essay, I endorse Ishiguro's view that these objects, being formal concepts, are ontologically neutral and thus are not identifiable with any ontological kind of entities. I elaborate on the coherence of this view with the propositional dependence of the meaning of Tractarian names. After showing why some arguments for ascribing a Russellian theory of meaning to these names do not work, I demonstrate why Ishiguro's account of Tractarian objects and names provides a better explanation of the unalterability of these objects.

KEYWORDS: *Wittgenstein*, *Tractatus*, *Tractarian Objects*, *Ishiguro*, *Meaning*.

I. INTRODUCTION

The supposition that Wittgenstein, in his *Tractatus* [1974, henceforth also “TLP”], advances a certain metaphysics or “systematic ontology” [García Suarez (2014), p. 30] has given rise to a question about the nature of the basic entities, the *Tractarian* objects, that make up this alleged metaphysics. We can distinguish between two major views on this question: the *ontology-specific view*, which claims that these objects have a specific ontological status; and the *ontology-neutral view*, which claims otherwise.

Proponents of the ontology-specific view, however, disagree on the specific ontological status of the objects. Mainly, they disagree on whether these objects consist of particulars only [Copi (1996); Anscombe (1967); Griffin (1997)] or of both particulars and universals [Allaire (1966); Hacker (1972); Hintikka and Hintikka (1986)]; whether they are physical, phenomenal, or phenomenological entities [see discussions of García Suarez (2014) and Tejedor (2001)]; and whether they correspond to Russell’s objects of acquaintance [the logical positivists – see Griffin (1997) pp. 4-5; Hintikka and Hintikka (1986)] or to Kant’s phenomena [Pears (1987), vol.1] or substance [Proops (2004)]. The ontology-neutral view, on the other hand, follows the *formal view* developed by Ishiguro (1969), (1981), (1989a), (1989b) and supported in various ways by other scholars that included McGuinness (1974), (1981) and Winch (1987) [See Tejedor (2001), p. 286]. According to this view, the concept of a Tractarian object is a formal one which is definable solely in terms of the object’s formal properties (referring to the object’s combinatorial possibilities). And being such, the instantiations of this concept can be of any ontological type.

In this essay, I endorse Ishiguro’s formal view. Among the arguments used to defend this view, I focus on its coherence with a certain account of Wittgenstein’s names in the *Tractatus*, according to which the meaning of these names is dependent on propositional contexts. After presenting the textual evidences for this account, I reply to some arguments maintaining a Russellian account of these names. In the last section, I show how Ishiguro’s formal view, relative to other views, makes better sense of Wittgenstein’s description of his objects as *unalterable*.

II. NAMES AND PROPOSITIONAL CONTEXTS

The supposition that Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, subscribes to a Russellian theory of meaning for his names bears significantly on how

the nature of Tractarian objects would be conceived. For if Wittgenstein did subscribe to such then his objects would be identifiable through ostension, which requires no propositional contexts. It would then make sense to inquire whether Tractarian objects correspond to Russell's objects of acquaintance or to some other types of entities that are identifiable in the same way as Russell's objects of acquaintance are, which generally may be of the nature of being physical, phenomenal, or phenomenological.

Russell is known for his adherence to the *referential theory of meaning* with regard to his simple signs, according to which what gives meaning to a simple sign is the object it corresponds to. As Russell explains: "All analysis is only possible in regard to what is complex, and it always depends, in the last analysis, upon direct acquaintance with the objects which are the meanings of certain simple symbols" [Russell (1956), p. 194]. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, is known for his *picture theory of propositions* in the *Tractatus*, according to which a proposition has a sense only if it pictures a possible state of affairs in reality [TLP 4.01, 4.06, 2.203, 2.221]. Wittgenstein's elementary proposition, the simplest kind of proposition, consists of simple signs called *names* [TLP 3.202]. These names are correlated with the objects consisting the state of affairs the elementary proposition represents [TLP 3.21]. As Wittgenstein writes: "A name means an object. The object is its meaning" [TLP 3.203]. In light of these considerations, it is natural to suppose that Wittgenstein's picture theory of propositions implies a referential theory of meaning for his names.

The referential theory of meaning has been criticized by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* [(1953), henceforth, "*Investigations*" or "PI"] through his so-called *use theory of meaning*, which states that the meaning of a word is its use in a particular linguistic setting or "language-game." As Wittgenstein writes in the *Investigations*: "For a large class of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" [PI, sec. 43]. Contrary to the referential theory, the use theory maintains that a linguistic sign may still be meaningful even if it does not refer to any object [See PI, sec. 40].

The conjunction of these two considerations – that (a) both Russell and the Early Wittgenstein (the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*) subscribe to a referential theory of meaning for their simple signs; and (b) the use theory of meaning of the Later Wittgenstein (the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations*) rejects the referential theory of meaning – makes it natural to

suppose that Russell and the Early Wittgenstein share the same theory of meaning for their simple signs. And consequently, it is natural to suppose that the presence of the “use” concept in the *Investigations* means its absence in the *Tractatus*.

What identifies the object to which a simple sign refers for Russell is our direct acquaintance with the object. And for Russell, this process, also called *identification by ostension* or *ostensive definition of signs*, does not require, and thus is independent of, propositional contexts. As Russell notes: “When you are acquainted with that particular, you have full, adequate, and complete understanding of the name, and no further information is required” [Russell (1956), p. 202]. But the case is exactly the opposite in the *Tractatus*, for Wittgenstein clearly states in TLP 3.3 that “only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning” and in TLP 3.314 that “[a]n expression has meaning only in a proposition.” Thus, though the meaning of a name in the *Tractatus* is the object it refers to (as stated in TLP 3.203), a name, however, only has meaning, or only refers to an object, *in the context of a proposition*. Given this, a Tractarian object, therefore, is *not* identifiable by means of ostension.

Aside from Ishiguro (1969), pp. 22-23, a number of scholars consider TLP 3.3 as a direct echo of Frege’s contextual principle, which Frege states as: “only in a proposition have words really a reference... It is enough if the proposition taken as a whole has sense; it is this that confers on its parts also their content” [Frege (1953), sec. 60]. And consequently, these scholars claim that it is not only the Later Wittgenstein who subscribed to the Fregean contextual principle but the Early Wittgenstein as well. Dummett, for instance, remarks: “...I said briefly that Goodman’s nominalism sprang from his failure to understand Frege’s doctrine that only in the context of a sentence does a name stand for anything. This remark of Frege’s, as quoted by Wittgenstein both in the *Tractatus* [3.3] and in the *Investigations* [sec. 49], is probably the most important philosophical statement Frege ever made...” [Dummett (1956), p. 491]. There are also the Hintikkas who write: “The principle was accepted both by Frege (‘only in a proposition have words really a meaning,’...); and by Wittgenstein (‘only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have a meaning,’ *Tractatus* 3.3)” [Hintikka and Hintikka (1986), p. 46].

Now, to say that it is propositional sense that identifies the reference of a name is the same as saying that what identifies the reference of a name is the use of this name in a propositional context. What this

means, precisely, is that the *Tractatus* also has a “use” concept. And indeed, as Wittgenstein himself states in the *Tractatus*: “In order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense” [TLP 3.326]; “If a sign is *useless*, it is meaningless” [TLP 3.328]. Thus, just like in the *Investigations*, the use of a name identifies reference too in the *Tractatus*. The only difference between the two “use” concepts, as Ishiguro (1969), p. 21 points out, is that the one in the *Tractatus* is restricted to identifying reference, whereas that in the *Investigations* concerns a whole lot more. But this is only because the *Tractatus* is merely concerned with the analysis of truth-bearing expressions (the “propositions”); whereas the *Investigations* is also concerned with other types of expressions like exclamations, commands, questions, etc. [See *PI*, sec. 27]. Consequently, it is not that the Early Wittgenstein and Russell share a referential theory of meaning which the use theory of meaning of the Later Wittgenstein opposes, but that the Early Wittgenstein and the Later Wittgenstein share a use theory of meaning (inspired by the Fregean contextual principle) that opposes Russell’s referential theory of meaning.

III. MEANING OF NAMES: OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

Despite the occurrence of passages in the *Tractatus*, such as TLP 3.3, which clearly contradict a Russellian theory of meaning for names, several scholars still maintain that the *Tractatus* does subscribe to such a theory by citing passages in the *Tractatus* or other views allegedly held by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* that lend support to their view. Let us, in what follows, critically examine several attempts in this regard.

Pears (1987) argues that TLP 3.3 does not totally reject the view that Tractarian objects are identifiable independently of propositional contexts but only qualifies it. Pears contends that Tractarian objects are initially identified by ostension; and that it is only afterwards that they are identified by their propositional contexts. He explains: “... a name may first be attached to an object in something like the way envisaged by Russell, but thereafter it will represent the object only so long as the possibilities presented by the propositions in which it occurs are real possibilities for that object” [Pears (1987), pp. 102-103]. He further claims that once a name is attached to an object via ostension, “the intrinsic nature of the object will immediately take over complete control and determine the correct use of the name on later occasions” [*ibid.*, p. 10]. He thinks that this must be so otherwise Wittgenstein’s adherence to *logical*

realism in the *Tractatus* will not make sense. Pears understands this alleged logical realism of the *Tractatus* as claiming that the logical structure of language is derived from the structure of the world, or that logic is ontologically grounded.

But how does this point of Pears cohere with Wittgenstein's rejection of Frege's and Russell's *logical objects* or *constants* [TLP 5.4: "At this point it becomes manifest that there are no 'logical' objects' or 'logical constants' (in Frege's and Russell's sense)."]? On the one hand, Ishiguro reads this rejection as indicating Wittgenstein's total rejection of logical realism. She argues that Wittgenstein turns the thesis of logical realism upside down, in that for Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* it is language that imposes logical structure on the world, not the other way around. She writes: "If there is any relation between the world and logic of one molding the other, the direction seems to be the reverse. It is not the essence of things in the world that shapes logic, it is the logical form of the propositions that gives the essence of the world. 'To give the essence of the proposition means to give the essence of all description, therefore the essence of the world' (My italics... 5.47)" [Ishiguro (1989), p. 22]. On the other hand, Pears believes that what Wittgenstein is rejecting here is simply the Platonic brand of logical realism espoused by Frege and Russell. And for Pears, what Wittgenstein is advancing as an alternative is an Aristotelian brand of logical realism in which the logical structure of the world is embedded (or immanent) in the objects [Pears (1987), pp. 23, 26].

Pears bases his claim on a certain statement in TLP 6.124 which states: "It is clear that something about the world must be indicated by the fact that certain combinations of symbols – whose essence involves the possession of a determinate character – are tautologies." Wittgenstein, in this connection, regards tautologies as by-products of the structure of language [TLP 6.126]; and Pears thinks this is because for Wittgenstein "the essential structure of our language is imposed on it by the ultimate structure of reality, which is a grid with simple objects at its nodal points" [*ibid.*, p. 28]. This reading of the putative statement in TLP 6.126, however, is challenged by Ishiguro:

What Wittgenstein intends to say is surely quite different... This sentence is a continuation of a passage on which Wittgenstein claims that propositions of logic have no subject matter... In other words, there are no logical objects, logical properties, or logical structure that propositions of logic are about, and which can be found in the world as tables, colour or structures of machines can be. The only connection propositions of logic have with the world is that the former shows various scheme of elementary

propositions linked by logical connectives that are always true, and it is presupposed that these elementary propositions have things in the world as their subject matter. Wittgenstein is saying that what these tautologies, i.e. propositions of logic indicate about the world can at most be only that [Ishiguro (1989), p. 29].

For Pears, what propositions of logic indicate about the world is that the world has a structure that it imposes on language and that this structure forces language to generate tautologies. By contrast, Ishiguro argues that the only connection propositions of logic have with the world is that the former shows various schema of elementary propositions linked by logical connectives that are always true, and that it is presupposed that these elementary propositions have things in the world as their subject matter.

What makes Ishiguro's reading, in this regard, preferable is that it coheres well with Wittgenstein's view of propositions of logic having no subject matter — likewise stated in TLP 6.124. Under Pears' interpretation, such propositions would have a subject matter: the logical structure that the world, which for Russell consists of the logical forms, constants, properties, etc. When Wittgenstein rejects the logical objects of Russell, it is thus more consistent to suppose that Wittgenstein likewise rejects the thesis of logical realism altogether, and not just a version of it. Consequently, it is more logical to suppose that TLP 3.3 is a total rejection of the view that Tractarian objects are identifiable independently of propositional contexts, and not just a partial one.

The Hintikkas, for their part, claim that when Wittgenstein mentions "this" and "that" in TLP 5.61, Wittgenstein is "producing Russell's terminology almost *verbatim*" [Hintikka and Hintikka (1986), p. 47]. Russell considers the demonstratives "this" and "that" as paradigm examples of logically proper names, for they are uttered only in the presence of what they point to. If Wittgenstein uses them in the Russellian sense, then that will somehow indicate that he shares Russell's theory of meaning for his names. TLP 5.61 states:

Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits. So we cannot say in logic, 'The world has this in it, and this, but not that.' For that would appear to presuppose that we were excluding certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case, since it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world; for only in that way could it view those limits from the other side as well. We cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot *say* either.

Given the context, the words “this” and “that” in the second sentence refer to possibilities in the world, as the following third sentence considers the implication of the second sentence as “excluding certain possibilities.” But what is possible in the world of the *Tractatus*, and which logic deals with, is the obtaining or the non-obtaining of a state of affairs or combination of objects to form a state of affairs [TLP 2.012, 2.0121]. Accordingly, Wittgenstein’s “this” and “that” do not correspond to Russell’s, for Wittgenstein’s refer to states of affairs or combinations of objects, and not to isolated objects such as Russell’s objects of acquaintance.

Malcolm, on the other hand, claims that “what Wittgenstein meant in the *Tractatus* by ‘knowing an object’ was close to what Russell meant by ‘being acquainted with an object’” [Malcolm (1986), p. 10]. Malcolm is referring to TLP 2.0123, which states: “If I know an object I also know all its possible occurrence in states of affairs. (Every one of these possibilities must be part of the nature of the object. A new possibility cannot be discovered later.)” Wittgenstein speaks here of knowing an object as knowing all the combinatorial possibilities of the object. But Russell never speaks of “being acquainted with an object” in this way. For Russell, each (sense-datum) particular “stands entirely alone and is completely self-subsistent” [Russell (1956), p. 201]. If Tractarian objects cannot exist independently of their occurrences in states of affairs, Russellian particulars can. “Knowing an object” in TLP 2.0123 should be taken in the *logical sense*, for it is only in the province of logic where every possibility is accounted for [“In logic nothing is accidental: if a thing can occur in a state of affairs, the possibility of the state of affairs must be written into the thing itself.” TLP 2.012]. This is unlike Russell’s “knowledge by acquaintance” which is obviously taken by Russell in an *epistemological sense*. As one cannot epistemologically know all the possible occurrences of objects in states of affairs, such knowledge can only be a logical one.

Lastly, Anscombe reads the “elucidations of names” in TLP 3.263 as referring to “acquaintance with the objects these names refer to.” Her reading of such enables her to accuse Wittgenstein of lying: “But it is fair to say that at the time he wrote the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein pretended that Epistemology had nothing to do with the foundations of logic and the theory of meaning, with which he was concerned. The passage about ‘elucidation’ of names, where he says that one must be ‘acquainted’ with their objects, gives him the lie” [Anscombe (1967), p. 28]. TLP 3.263 states: “The meanings of primitive signs can be explained by means of elucidations. Elucidations are propositions that contain the primitive signs. So they can only be understood if the meanings of those signs are

already known.” Anscombe, based on her commentary, understands the phrase “the meanings of those signs are already known” as “we have already been acquainted with the references of those signs.” Ishiguro (1969), pp. 28-29, and Winch (1987), pp. 10-11, however, are keen in pointing out that Anscombe’s reading renders TLP 3.263 as totally circular and thus unilluminating. For under this reading, TLP 3.263 would first assert that we can only know the reference of a primitive sign by first understanding the proposition in which this primitive sign occurs, and then assert that we can only understand the proposition in which this primitive sign occurs by first knowing the reference of the primitive sign by itself — that is, outside of a propositional context.

The alternative reading provided by Ishiguro and Winch of TLP 3.263 regards elucidations as propositions in which names are used rather than mentioned. Accordingly, when we understand the sense of an elucidation, we simultaneously understand the reference of a name occurring therein. TLP 3.263 thus merely emphasizes the fact that understanding the sense of an elucidation and knowing the reference of a name occurring in the elucidation are not two logically separate steps. Based on this, the putative phrase is better understood as “we already know how those signs are used in propositions.” Aside from making TLP 3.263 non-circular, the interpretation of Ishiguro and Winch coheres well with TLP 3.3 (“Only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning.”), which immediately follows TLP 3.263. Furthermore, there would be no need of accusing Wittgenstein of lying.

IV. MEANING AND TRACTARIAN OBJECTS

Given our analyses above, what then needs to be worked out is how to account for the nature of Tractarian objects within the parameters of the use theory of meaning for names in the *Tractatus*. And this precisely is what Ishiguro has set herself to do. She writes: “What 3.3 expresses is a general thesis about expressions and the objects they designate, which plainly derives from Frege’s *Foundations of Arithmetic*... Wittgenstein’s notion of simple objects made him take this view even more seriously. One cannot look for the references of Names independently of their use in propositions” [Ishiguro (1969), p. 22].

To begin with, a formal concept is definable solely by their functions. Being so, their instantiations are identifiable only in the context of satisfying such functions. If we define, for example, a heart in terms sole-

ly of its function of pumping blood, then something can only be a heart when it performs such a function. In the case of the Tractarian objects, their functions, which also correspond to their formal properties, refer to their combinatorial possibilities in constituting states of affairs. Given this, one cannot identify a Tractarian object independently of its occurrence in a state of affairs. Correspondingly, the names of objects combine to form (elementary) propositions. In the same way, we can only identify the reference of a name in the context of a proposition, for the name's use in the proposition represents a function of the object it refers to. Suppose, for example, we say "x pumps blood." Since we know that the function of the heart is to pump blood, we thus know that "x" is identical to "heart." What makes "x" here identify the organ called "heart" is how it is used in the proposition, which here signifies the function of the heart. What all these mean is that the use of a name in a proposition signifies the role of an object in a state of affairs.

When we say that a Tractarian object is a formal concept, we thus mean that its instantiations are definable only in terms of functional properties, which is basically the same as saying that the name identifies its reference (the instantiation) through its use in a proposition. [There are thus two levels of speaking of Tractarian objects: as formal concepts and as instantiations of these concepts.] Since this proposition is taken to be elementary, these properties must, therefore, be simple or irreducible. It is in this regard that Ishiguro likewise refers to Tractarian objects as "instantiations of irreducible properties" [*ibid.*, p. 48]. Furthermore, as what we can only be known of Tractarian objects is that they are instantiations of some irreducible properties, Ishiguro likens Tractarian names to *dummy names*: "What the dummy names are used to identify are nothing more nor less than an instantiation of the description or predicate which follows" [*ibid.*, p. 46]. But more importantly, what this means for Ishiguro is that it is, therefore, not proper to ask about the ontological type of Tractarian objects. She writes:

That is why it is not right to ask questions of the kind, "Is an object a physical thing or a sense data?" any more than to ask "Is a subject of proposition a physical thing or a sense data?" Obviously it could be either! It is also as wrong to ask, "Is an object a particular or a universal?" as it is mistaken to ask: "Is a subject a particular or a universal?"... Being an object is, as 4.128 says, a formal concept, to be carefully distinguished from proper concepts. What kind of thing it is cannot be expressed by a (propositional) function of our (object) language. It is not a kind of thing at all [*ibid.*, p. 26].

Some scholars have provided analogies to better illustrate this notion of the Tractarian objects. McCarty (1991), pp. 71-2, for instance, compares a Tractarian object to a corporate office. According to McCarty, a corporate office like that of an executive is definable solely in terms of its functions or services in relation to the corporation. It does not comprise a natural kind like a separate blood group or race. One distinguishes one office from another, say a secretary from an executive, not in terms of height, color, weight, and the like, but only in terms of functions. A Tractarian object is like that, explains McCarty. It does not comprise a natural kind like particulars, universals, sense-data, and what not. As nobody is intrinsically or inherently a secretary or a corporate executive, nothing is intrinsically a Tractarian object. As one only becomes a secretary upon assuming certain roles, something only becomes a Tractarian object upon assuming a combinatorial role in the formation of a state of affairs.

Grayling (1988), p. 49, on the other hand, likens Tractarian objects to chess pieces. Following McCarty's distinction between natural kinds and functional kinds, Grayling explains that being a chess queen, for instance, is not being an entity of a natural kind but solely of a functional one. For a chess queen is distinguished from a chess bishop solely in terms of its permitted moves on the chess board. Nothing is inherently a chess queen for something only becomes so when it assumes the role of moving in some determinate ways on the chess board. Thus to debate on whether a chess queen is a piece of wood, glass, or plastic is to confuse the functional with the natural kind.

One advantage of this understanding of the nature of Tractarian objects, among others, is that it makes better sense of Wittgenstein's description of such objects as being "unalterable" [TLP 2.021, 2.024, 2.024]. The unalterability of Tractarian objects, for some scholars, is decisive in refuting the identification of Tractarian objects with phenomenal entities such as Russell's ephemeral sense-data. Malcolm, for instance, writes: "The simple objects of the *Tractatus* could not include 'sense-data.' Sense-data are supposed to be 'fleeting': they quickly alter, come and go. The simple objects are not like that: they are enduring and unchanging (2.0271)" [Malcolm (1986), p. 10] [See also Griffin (1997), p. 150; Ayer (1986), p. 22; and Klemke (1971), p. 117]. The Hintikkas, however, do not agree with Malcolm in this regard. They think that the unalterability of objects means their "atemporality" or their not being in time. They write: "Wittgenstein's conception of existence amounts to momentary or, more accurately, atemporal being. Because of their atem-

porality, the substantiality of simple objects is not affected by the alterability or even by the coming-to-be and disappearance of objects in time” [Hintikka and Hintikka (1986), p. 69]. Given this, they claim that “the temporal ephemerality of sense-data and of many other objects of acquaintance does not disqualify them in the least from being substantial in Wittgenstein’s sense” [*ibid.*, p. 70].

On the one hand, Malcolm’s reading would make Tractarian objects akin to the unchanging Platonic forms, which is strange since that would mean that the world that the *Tractatus* talks about has nothing to do with the actual world. On the other hand, the Hintikkas’s reading seems contradictory: that something atemporal or not being in time can at the same time be temporally ephemeral. Such obscure or problematic conclusions, however, are not necessary. Ishiguro’s alternative reading avoids them. She explains the unalterability of Tractarian objects in terms of the permanent role of their names in identifying them:

‘Reference’ is a semantic category with its peculiar logic. The bearer of the name ‘Socrates’ no longer exists, but the name has reference. So long as the name plays the role of identifying the man that once existed, it will always have a reference. Just as references of names are permanent in our language, so according to Wittgenstein objects are unalterable and persistent (*bestehend*) (2.0271). [Ishiguro (1969), pp. 40-41]

What determines the role a name plays in identifying its reference is its propositional context, or the sense of the proposition in which the name occurs. Now so long as there are propositional contexts in our language where a name plays the role of identifying its reference, regardless of whether its bearer no longer exists, its reference – a Tractarian object – remains unalterable. Another way of putting this is as follows: so long as there are propositional senses which continue to identify the reference of a name, the reference, which is the object, remains unalterable. The distinction between the *bearer* and *reference* of a name clarifies it further. Take, for instance, the proposition “Socrates was the teacher of Plato.” The sense of this proposition has it that the reference of “Socrates” is the man that once existed. Despite the fact that “Socrates” no longer has a bearer – for the man named by “Socrates” no longer exists – it still has a reference, for the sense of this proposition “Socrates was the teacher of Plato” continues to identify the man who once existed.

Remarkably, this is precisely how Wittgenstein later speaks of his Tractarian objects in the *Philosophical Remarks*: “What I once called ‘objects’, simples, were simply what I could refer to without running the risk

of their possible non-existence; i.e. that for which there is neither existence nor non-existence, and that means: what we can speak about *no matter what may be the case*" [Wittgenstein (1975), p. 72]. What we speak about is the reference of what we speak about. No matter what may be the case, that is, whether what we speak about exists or not, it (the reference) continues to be what we speak about. The reference, in this case, is unalterable.

V. CONCLUSION

In sum, Ishiguro's formal view that Tractarian objects are formal concepts or instantiations of irreducible properties proves to be more coherent than those ascribing a definite metaphysical status to these objects on the basis of its ability to account for the fact that the meanings of their names are proposition-dependent. As formal concepts are definable solely in terms of their functions, Tractarian objects are only identifiable in terms of the uses of their names in propositions. The uses of their names, accordingly, represent their combinatorial possibilities, which comprise their formal properties. As names occur in elementary propositions, the instantiations of Tractarian objects are also described as instantiations of irreducible properties. This account of the nature of Tractarian objects in terms of the meaning of their names has the further advantage of making sense of Wittgenstein's description of the objects as "unalterable." Instead of explaining it in ontological terms, either as beyond change or time, Ishiguro explains it in purely semantic terms—that objects remain as references of names so long as there are propositional contexts that identify these objects as references of these names.

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