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The Metaphysical Status of the Objects of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

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RESUMEN

Jaakko and Merrill Hintikka han sostenido que los objetos tractarianos son entidades fenomenológicas. Argumento, primero, que no hay base para su afirmación de que esa lectura es apoyada por la exposición que hace Pears de las raíces russellianas del *Tractatus* y, segundo, que, si bien el análisis funcional de los enunciados sobre colores que los Hintikka le atribuyen a Wittgenstein para resolver la dificultad que el problema de la exclusión de los colores le plantea a su lectura fenomenológica puede salvar el requisito tractariano de que debe verse por el símbolo solo que la atribución de dos colores a un objeto da lugar a una contradicción lógica, no satisface las tesis según las cuales las proposiciones elementales son mutuamente independientes y toda imposibilidad debe ser reducible a una contradicción veritativo-funcional. Defiendo, finalmente, que los textos y testimonios de Wittgenstein no apoyan la opinión de que los objetos tractarianos son ítems dados en la experiencia inmediata.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Wittgenstein, Hintikka, Tractatus, objetos, incompatibilidad de colores.*

ABSTRACT

Jaakko and Merrill Hintikka have contended that Tractarian objects are phenomenological entities. Firstly, I argue that there is no basis for their claim that this reading is supported by Pears' account of the Russellian roots of the *Tractatus*, and, secondly, that, even though the functional analysis of colour statements that the Hintikkas attribute to Wittgenstein in order to circumvent the difficulty posed to their phenomenological reading by the problem of colour exclusion can save the Tractarian requirement that it should be seen by the symbol alone that the attribution of two colours to an object results in a logical contradiction, it does not comply with the theses that elementary propositions are mutually independent and that all impossibility should be reducible to a truth-functional contradiction. Finally, I claim that Wittgenstein's texts and testimonies do not support the view that *Tractatus* objects are items given in immediate experience.

KEY WORDS: *Wittgenstein, Hintikka, Tractatus, Objects, Colour Incompatibility.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the opening propositions of the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* Wittgenstein puts forward a systematic ontology. Even this modest claim would be rejected by recent supporters of a “resolute” interpretation. I wholeheartedly agree with Professor Jaakko Hintikka’s view that merely “therapeutic” readings are sterile and, therefore, I will not consider them in the present paper. I also agree with Hintikka that the concept of a simple object is the royal road to the ontology of the *Tractatus*. In this paper I will be concerned with the *metaphysical* status of objects. What kind of entities are Tractarian simple objects? Are they physical entities? Are they private sense-data? Or are they phenomenological entities, as Merrill and Jaakko Hintikka have forcefully argued?

As it is well known, logical positivists viewed the author of the *Tractatus* as an anti-metaphysical fellow-traveller and a consistent empiricist. Under their phenomenalist reading, the objects which atomic facts are composed of should be identified with sense-data. In the 1960’s positivist readings of the *Tractatus* fell in disrepute. However, in the later 1970’s and in the 1980’s a sophisticated sort of Russellian reading of Wittgenstein’s early philosophy was put forward. We can find a vigorous example of this in Merrill and Jaakko Hintikka’s fascinating book *Investigating Wittgenstein*. The late David Pears’ masterful *The False Prison* also made insightful probes into the Russellian roots of Wittgenstein’s early philosophy. [Hintikka and Hintikka (1986); Pears (1977). See also Pears (1987) and Hintikka (1996)]. Both the Hintikkas and Pears have tracked interesting analogies and marked contrasts between Wittgenstein’s simples and Russell’s objects of acquaintance.

In this paper I will briefly survey these suggestive approaches. An element common to both is that Tractarian simple objects are items given in immediate experience. This view does not necessarily prejudge whether they are subjective phenomenalist entities – sense-data – or objective entities – phenomenological objects, as the Hintikkas would have it, or phenomena in the Kantian sense, as in Pears’ terminology. I will examine the force of some arguments put forward in support of the view that Tractarian objects are phenomenal items of any vintage. In the course of my exposition, I will review some thorny issues that should be harmonized with these arguments and I will explain why it seems to me that it is hard to discharge this duty in a satisfactory way.

II. THE RUSSELLIAN BACKGROUND OF WITTGENSTEIN’S EARLY PHILOSOPHY

In *The False Prison*, Pears castigated the Hintikkas’ alleged identification of Tractarian objects with sense-data.¹ However, this was an unfair censure. In *Investigating Wittgenstein*, simple objects were not identified with

sense-data, understood as mind-dependent entities, but rather with *phenomenological* entities – the entities which one is primarily aware of –, items which could be denizens of the mind-independent world. Later, in “Wittgenstein and the Problem of Phenomenology”, Jaakko Hintikka [(1966), ch. 10] clarified his view. He warned us against confusing *phenomenology* and *phenomenalism*. Thus, in his usage ‘objects of immediate experience’ must not be taken to refer to sense-data – private entities –, but to the entities given in one’s immediate experience, items that might be members of the common objective world. Therefore, the interpretation proposed by Merrill and Jaakko Hintikka was not so different from Pears’ own, since in *The False Prison* he claimed that the *Tractatus* trafficked with the furniture of “The World as I Found It” – a world that, Wittgenstein contended, would include physical objects like my body and its parts [Wittgenstein (1922), 5.631; henceforth, TLP].

Both Pears and Hintikka share another element in their readings of the *Tractatus*: they stress the Russellian background of Wittgenstein’s early philosophy. In a fine display of scholarship, Pears explained how Wittgenstein criticized the theory of judgement that Russell had essayed in his abortive *Theory of Knowledge*, a criticism from which his own picture theory of the proposition emerged [Pears (1977); see his restatement in Pears (1987), ch. 6]. To make a large story shorter, in his philosophy of logic and language Russell had posited two kinds of objects of acquaintance: on the one hand, the constituents of propositions – particulars, properties and relations –, and, on the other, logical objects, including pure abstract logical forms. Wittgenstein discarded logical objects and, *a fortiori*, the necessity of having acquaintance with those entities. The picture theory was the result of a process of “absorption” of logical forms by the forms of simple objects, in such a way that Wittgenstein’s “Aristotelian” simples redeemed the roles played in Russell’s theory by separate entities, “Platonic” logical forms.

The Hintikkas claimed that this developmental story which Pears masterfully told

makes little sense...unless we assume that Wittgenstein retained the rest of Russell’s views, at least in its main features...[specifically,] unless we assume that [he] retained the idea that simples –the building blocks of forms– were still objects of acquaintance [Hintikka and Hintikka (1986), p. 55].

However, it does not seem clear that this is a mandatory assumption. It is an established fact that the early Wittgenstein gave up abstract Russellian logical forms and assigned to simple objects the role that they played in Russell’s *Theory of Knowledge*. Nevertheless, is there any reason for assuming that simple objects could not play that role unless they possessed all the main characteristic marks of the genuine constituents of Russellian propositions? More specifically, could simple objects not carry out this task without neces-

sarily retaining the particular feature of being objects of acquaintance? A plausible alternative is that it would suffice for them to retain only one crucial feature required by the mechanism of “absorption” of logical forms. It seems that the reading the Hintikkas propose incurs the onus of showing that the role that simple objects play in this mechanism of absorption of forms could not be carried out *unless* they were Russellian objects of acquaintance. Now, is it really necessary to assume that they redeem that job *qua* Russellian objects of acquaintance and not merely *qua* entities which, *in virtue of their very essence*, are to be conceived as having specific *combinatory possibilities*? We are said in *Tractatus* 2.0141 that “[t]he form of an object is the possibility of its occurrence in state of affairs”, i.e., the combinatory powers of an object are fixed by the admissible occurrences that it can have in states of affairs. And these combinatory possibilities are of the nature (i.e., of the essence) of the object [TLP, 2.0123]. Do these claims about the form of objects involve any further commitments regarding their metaphysical nature? I am inclined to think that any affirmative answer to this question should be supported by stronger arguments than those I can come find in the exegetical literature. Any argument for a positive answer should explain away the *prima facie* suggestions of Wittgenstein’s claim that a proposition represents a situation “off its own bat”, i.e. that the only requirement for it to have sense is that its names refer to objects that share the very same possibilities of combination than their referents [Wittgenstein (1961/1979), 4.11.14-5.11.14]. There seems to be no additional requirement concerning the nature of the referents.

The Hintikkas contend that Pears’ discussion “is tacitly predicated on the assumption that the objects of the *Tractatus* are essentially the same as Russell’s objects of acquaintance” [Hintikka and Hintikka (1986), p. 55]. I could find only one doubtful passage in Pears writings which might lend support to this claim. In *The False Prison* Pears wrote: “The only...available acquaintance was with the objects named in [a proposition]” [(1987), p. 130]. However, it is significant that Pears immediately goes on to emphasize that the only task Wittgenstein assigned to this kind of available acquaintance with objects was that “it picked up their possibilities of combination” [*ibid.*]. I take it that Pears is suggesting that in this available acquaintance of sorts the only requirement is that the entities in question should have certain combinatory possibilities ingrained in their very essence, *without prejudging whether these entities are physical objects, phenomenal entities of any stripe, or whatever*. Pears seems to be advancing this very suggestion when in 1977 he writes:

There is also another respect in which [Wittgenstein’s picture theory] is unlike Russell’s: it contains no more than the necessary features of reality. *It is not necessary that reality should consist of specific types of objects with specific*

forms. All that is necessary is that it should contain some objects with some forms" [Pears (1977), p. 105 in Shanker (ed.) (1986). Italics added.].

Be that as it may, it seems clear that Pears contrasts Russell's and Wittgenstein's views even on the particular issue of the nature of the building blocks of forms. This was Pears' diagnostic in 1977:

Wittgenstein's picture theory of proposition is a one-world theory [i.e. not a Platonist two-world one]... *not because it is an empiricist theory*, but because it explains logical truth as a natural development of contingent sense, *without any resource drawn from elsewhere* [*ibid.*, p. 96. Italics added.].

In *The False Prison* Pears is more explicit on the differences between Russell's and Wittgenstein's varieties of logical atomism. For instance, he emphasizes the gulf between Russell's empiricist stance, according to which the notion of acquaintance provides the criterion of the simplicity of objects, and Wittgenstein's non-empiricist stance, according to which objects are simple in so far as, in virtue of their lack of internal complexity, they do not generate logical connections between the atomic states of affairs in which they can occur [Pears (1987), pp. 63-64]. Even on the specific question of whether the developmental story presupposes that the objects of the *Tractatus* are essentially the same as Russell's objects of acquaintance, Pears is adamant that this is not the case. For instance, he opposes the different ways in which Russell and Wittgenstein accounted for the jump from the naming of objects to the putting together of sentences with a complete sense:

Russell had tried to account for it by making a further appeal to acquaintance and representation... [Wittgenstein'] view was that a form is the possibility of a certain combination of objects, and he thought that these possibilities are taken up and expressed by language, *not by acquaintance and naming* but by a kind of osmosis that he describes in the picture theory [*ibid.*, p. 116. Italics added.].

In support of their construal of Pears's developmental story, the Hintikkas quote the first paragraph of *Tractatus* 5.552:

The "experience" that we need in order to understand logic is not that something or other is the state of things, but that something *is*: that, however, is *not* an experience.

They claim that this implies that we must have acquaintance with objects in order to grasp logical forms. However, it seems that, given the context of the 5.55's, it is more plausible that the quoted paragraph hints that we know on an a priori basis that there must be simples, although I cannot see any further implication concerning the need of achieve immediate acquaintance with

them. I assume that the issue at stake concerns some kind of knowing-that, not some kind of knowing-of. In his characteristically cryptic style, Wittgenstein encapsulated in proposition 5.552 his rejection of Russell's claim, in *Theory of Knowledge*, that "there is certainly such a thing as 'logical experience', by which I mean that kind of immediate knowledge other than judgement, which enables us to understand logical objects" [Russell (1984), p. 97.]. Russell contended that acquaintance with pure logical form is prior to understanding logic. Even more, he asserted that this kind of acquaintance is also implied "as soon as we can understand a sentence" [*ibid.*, p. 99.].² Wittgenstein's picture theory of the proposition freed him of any such sort of involvement. He retorted that understanding logic does not require *any* experience – the experience that something *is* is *not* a genuine experience. *A fortiori*, understanding logic does not require any experience with such contrived Russellian facts like that it is the case that something has some dual relation to something.

Proposition 5.552 ends with this enigmatic remark:

Logic is prior to every experience –that something is *so*. It is prior to the question 'How', not prior to the question 'What'.

When we read it in the context of Wittgenstein's criticism of Russell's postulation of the existence of logical experience, the point of the remark starts to become clear: logic is prior to the content of empirical propositions, including those concerning *how* something is related to something, but it is not prior to the *What*-question. The reason is that, as it is stated in 6.124, the propositions of logic carry only one pseudo-empirical presupposition: "they presuppose that names have meaning and elementary propositions sense".

III. THE PROBLEM OF COLOUR EXCLUSION

An interpretation according to which Tractarian simples are phenomenological objects of any vintage has to cope with the knotty problem of the incompatibility of colours. Wittgenstein asserts that only a logical necessity exists. This kind of necessity is encapsulated and revealed "by the symbol alone" in truth-functional tautologies (Tautologicity Thesis). This thesis is intimately linked with another crucial contention: that elementary propositions are logically independent of each other (Independence Thesis). In *Tractatus* 5.6371 Wittgenstein discusses a *prima facie* instance of this kind of violation of the Tautologicity Thesis. Is the proposition 'A is red and A is green' not an example of an impossibility that cannot be reduced to a truth-functional contradiction? We must recall that Husserl claimed that impossibilities of this kind are unequivocal examples of synthetic *a priori* propositions.³

Wittgenstein retorts that 'A is red and A is green' is in the last resort a logical impossibility:

the simultaneous presence of two colours at the same place in the visual field is impossible, in fact logically impossible, since it is ruled out by the logical structure of colour.

Since, according to Wittgenstein, an object is simple only if the occurrence of its name in elementary propositions does not induce logical relations between them, it may be presumed that this reference to "the logical structure of colour" implies that colours are not simple objects. Furthermore, since in 'A is red' and 'A is green' two incompatible qualities are predicated of the same object, the propositions cannot qualify as being elementary. In fact, this is what Wittgenstein parenthetically intimates in the final paragraph of 6.3751:

(It is clear that the logical product of two elementary propositions can neither be a tautology nor a contradiction. The statement that a point in the visual field has two different colours at the same time is a contradiction.)

Furthermore, in the *Notebooks* he had been adamant that, since the logical product 'A is red and A is green' is a contradiction, its components do not qualify as elementary propositions:

If the logical product of two propositions is a contradiction, and the propositions appear to be elementary propositions, we can see that in this case the appearance is deceptive. (E.g.: A is red and A is green.) [Wittgenstein (1961/1979), 8.1.17].

The passing reference in 6.3751 to "the logical structure of colour" is intriguing. It strongly suggests that Wittgenstein's attempt to match the Tautologicity Thesis with the *prima facie* counterexample posed by colour incompatibilities rested on a promissory note to the effect that a further analysis of the structure of colour might be developed such that, when colour attributions were analysed in their most basic components, it should be seen by the symbol alone that a proposition like 'A is red' entails that A is not green. Let us call this *desideratum* the Requirement of Perspicuity. However, Wittgenstein did not carry out this piece of his programme in the *Tractatus*. When he finally strived to develop it in the middle period, he came to the conclusion that it was a hopeless enterprise and consequently gave up the Independence Thesis.

Although Wittgenstein did not develop this part of his programme in the *Tractatus*, in the second paragraph of 6.3751 he did point to a possible reductive route:

Let us think how this contradiction appears in physics: more or less as follows – a particle cannot have two velocities at the same time; that is to say, particles that are in different places at the same time cannot be identical.

The Hintikkas argue for a very plausible construal of this passage: they are of the opinion that here Wittgenstein is presenting a mere “solvable analogue” to the problem in the field of physics. However, the wording of the corresponding paragraph in the *Notebooks* might suggest that Wittgenstein had in mind a stronger, reductive idea:

A point cannot be red and green at the same time; at first sight there seems no need for this to be a *logical* impossibility. But the very language of physics *reduces* it to a kinetic impossibility. We see that there is a difference in structure between red and green.

And then physics arranges them in a series. And then we see how here the true structure of the objects is brought to light.

The fact that a particle cannot be in two places at the same time does look more like a logical impossibility [Wittgenstein (1961/1979), 16.8.16. Second italics added.].

The fact that Wittgenstein speaks of a “reduction” of a phenomenological impossibility to a kinetic impossibility, together with the reference to “the true structure of objects”, suggests that he had in mind a reductive analysis. It is significant that, in his “Critical Notice” of the *Tractatus*, Ramsey understood Wittgenstein’s manoeuvre as a attempt at reductive analysis, although he keenly saw that it was doomed to failure [Ramsey, 1923, pp. 41-42 in Shanker’s collection].

IV THE HINTIKKA’S PROPOSAL: PROS AND CONS

In *Investigating Wittgenstein*, Merrill and Jaakko Hintikka challenged the received interpretation of the problem of colour exclusion which I have summarized in the previous section. Their basic contention was that the traditional hermeneutic approach to the problem rested on an assumption which Wittgenstein did not accept: that colour ascriptions are, in their very logical form, subject-predicate propositions, so that ‘A is red’ and ‘A is green’ should be translated into a logical symbolism as ‘ $R(a)$ ’ and ‘ $G(a)$ ’, respectively. If we assume that this symbolization shows the logical form of the two propositions, then it obviously results that, on the one hand, these propositions are logically incompatible and that, on the other hand, the Tautology Thesis would be violated, since their logical product is not a truth-functional contradiction and their incompatibility is not patent “in the symbol alone”. Now, the Hintikkas suggest an alternative analysis:

we may assume, as a thought-experiment, that the general concept of colour is to be represented in language, not by a class of colour-predicates, but by a function c which maps points in a visual space onto a colour space. Then the respective logical forms of 'this patch is red' and 'this patch is green' would be $c(a) = r$ and $c(a) = g$, where r and g are two separate objects *red* and *green*, respectively [Hintikka and Hintikka (1986), p.123].

This kind of functional analysis is an ingenious suggestion and, as far as I know, it is the most forceful attempt to accommodate the difficulty posed by colour exclusion within the framework of a phenomenological or even a phenomenalist interpretation of the ontology of the *Tractatus*. Nevertheless, I am doubtful that it could successfully face the gamut of problems posed by the incompatibility of colours, or, more generally, by the mutual exclusion of two determinates of the same determinable. After 1929, when Wittgenstein once again addressed these problems, he concluded that any attempt at a solution compatible with the logical atomism of the *Tractatus* would be a lost cause. Anyway, I propose to examine the merits and shortcomings of the alternative analysis which the Hintikkas suggest.

An obvious advantage of the proposed analysis is that it satisfies the Requirement of Perspicuity. Under the proposed functional analysis, there is one sense in which Requirement of Perspicuity is met: the colour incompatibility is made manifest by the "logical fact" that genuine functions can have only one value for the same argument. The Hintikkas rightly emphasize this point. In spite of this internal advantage of the functional analysis put forward envisaged by the Hintikkas, it is questionable whether it complies with the two remaining requirements that should be satisfied by any analysis of colour attributions in keeping with the ontology and the philosophy of logic of the *Tractatus*. As we have seen in the former section, these two constraints are imposed by the Independence Thesis and by the Tautologicity Thesis.

First of all, even though the Hintikkas satisfactorily show that there is a decent sense in which the functional analysis of colour ascriptions would satisfy the Requirement of Perspicuity, it is hard to see how that analysis could be aligned with the Tractarian thesis that any two elementary propositions should be logically independent of each other. The functional analysis reduces a phenomenological impossibility to a "logical" impossibility of sorts, the impossibility that a function might have more than one value for the same argument. It is in this sense that the incompatibility pops up in the symbol alone. Nevertheless, it seems that the Hintikkas suggest that the functional analysis would also satisfy the Independence Thesis:

All we need to explain here is how Wittgenstein might have thought that he could reconcile the status of colours as objects with the mutual independence of atomic propositions. The analysis we mentioned is enough to show that such an

explanation can in principle be quite straightforward [Hintikka and Hintikka (1986), p. 127].

However, I am puzzled by this supposed reconciliation, for the problem with the functional analysis is that even in the new notation ' $c(a) = r$ ' and ' $c(a) = g$ ', the referents of ' r ' and ' g ' do not qualify as simple objects and the propositions cannot be deemed to be elementary. The objects r and g could not be Tractarian simple objects, because, in virtue of their very nature, they induce logical connections between the states of affairs in which they can occur. Moreover, since the two propositions exclude one another, they do not qualify as elementary propositions. If it is correct to conclude that the functional analysis does not comply with the Independence Thesis, then it would be inappropriate to present it as a part of an interpretation of the *Tractatus*. The Hintikkas seem to admit this when they write: "the most we can claim here is that the construal of colour as a function mapping points in visual space into the colour-space is in keeping with the spirit of Wittgenstein's thinking..." [*ibid.*, p. 124].

In fact, as it is well known, when Wittgenstein failed to produce a satisfactory analysis in "Some Remarks on Logical Form", he drew two conclusions. In the first place, he gave up the Independence Thesis, which was an essential building block of his early philosophical system.⁴ This is another way of arriving to the conclusion that, if the functional analysis does not vindicate the logical independence of colour attributions, then, in spite of any other merits it might have, it cannot aspire to be presented as an *exegetis of the Tractatus*. Be that as it may, we might inquire whether the functional analysis can be harmonized with the remaining constraint, the Tautologicity Thesis. It seems to me that there are good reasons to presume that a negative answer should be given to this question. I have remarked that this thesis is of a piece with the Independence Thesis. And, since ' $c(a) = r$ ' and ' $c(a) = g$ ' are not logically independent of each other, it would be hard to show that their logical product could be reduced to a truth-functional contradiction.

The Hintikkas are conscious of this difficulty, but I must confess that from the start I have been puzzled by the way in which they address it. They claim that if we adopt the functional analysis, colour incompatibilities do not generate non-logical impossibilities. Even so, the question remains as to whether the resulting logical impossibilities can meet the Tractarian requirement that they should be transformable into truth-functional contradictions. The Hintikkas claim that, upon reflection, the difficulty is not insurmountable:

truth-functional dependencies did not constitute for Wittgenstein the rock bottom layer of logical relationships. This role he assigned to the "logic" of combinations of objects and of their "pictorial" representation in language. Hence the analysis of colour as a mapping from points into a colour-space does not, according to Wittgenstein's ultimate views in the *Tractatus*, need any particular

reduction to a truth-functional form. What is needed is the general reduction of all logical forms to the forms of simple objects [Hintikka and Hintikka (1986), pp. 127-128].

It seems to me that two elements, one insightful and the other misleading, should be distinguished in this proposed resolution of the difficulty. The insightful idea is that, for Wittgenstein, contingent sense is the bedrock of logic. For him, logical truths are neither propositions whose characteristic mark is general validity nor other-wordly truths. In the *Tractatus*, logical truths are tautologies, and tautologies are rooted in factual propositions. They arise when factual propositions are combined in some particular truth-functional ways. Therefore, even though the bottom layer of logical truth was contingent sense, its characteristic mark is tautologicity. Thus, the misleading ingredient in the quoted text is the claim that the “logical” impossibilities reflected in the functional analysis – or, for that matter, in any other suggested analysis – do not need a reduction to a truth-functional form. According to the *Tractatus*, all necessity or all impossibility is logical necessity or logical impossibility, and the characteristic mark of any logical necessity or impossibility is its transformability into a truth-functional tautology or into a truth-functional contradiction. In this sense, the required reduction cannot be conceived of as merely a “particular reduction”. It is a general reducibility requirement imposed by the Tautologicity Thesis, and the problem remains that the impossibility reflected in the functional analysis is not transformable into a truth-functional contradiction.

It might be thought that, even though items like *r* and *g* do not qualify as simple objects, in the last resort an analysis could be found which would reveal that the logical product of two propositions attributing the same colour to one object is reducible to a truth-functional contradiction. However, Wittgenstein came to a second conclusion in the middle period that proved lethal to this expectation. He realized that the attempt to treat colour impossibilities in truth-functional terms led to a blind alley. As he recognised in “Some Remarks on Logical Form”, the truth-table for two propositions ascribing different colours to the same object would contain an inadmissible “extra” line, the top line TTT, which would represent an impossible combination. It is worth noting that Wittgenstein reached these two negative conclusions even though at this stage of his philosophical career he came to reject a subject-predicate rendering of colour attributions and tried a kind of functional analysis in terms of a system of coordinates in which a patch is assigned a colour in one place at one time. Thus, the manoeuvre of substituting a functional analysis for a subject-predicate analysis proved not to be an advantage in order to solve, within the framework of logical atomism, the problem posed by colour incompatibilities. The only remaining way out was to give up the In-

dependence Thesis. Wittgenstein accepted this conclusion in “Some Remarks on Logical Form”:

The mutual exclusion of unanalyzable statements of degree contradicts an opinion which was published by me several years ago and which necessitated that atomic propositions could not exclude one another [Wittgenstein (1929), p. 168].

In December 1929, in a conversation with Schlick and Waismann, he went a further step and replaced logical atomism with holism. But this is another trite story.

V. WITTGENSTEIN’S TEXTS AND TESTIMONIES

Some texts and testimonies by Wittgenstein himself have been adduced in support of the view that the objects of the *Tractatus* were phenomenal items. In the *Notebooks* that Wittgenstein kept during the Great War there are several annotations in which he plays with the idea that the simple objects required by logical analysis might be sense-data [Wittgenstein (1961/1979), 3.9.14, 6.5.15, 7.5.15, 24.5.15, 25.5.15, etc.]. However, he did not adopt this view definitively and he counterbalanced it by envisaging the opposite possibilities that the simples might be medium size things – like a clock – [*ibid.*, 20.5.15, 14.6.15, 15.6.15, 16.6.15, etc.], points of the visual field [*ibid.*, 6.5.15], or the material points of physics [*ibid.*, 21.6.15]. Therefore, he did not arrive to a settled view at this stage of his philosophical development. This is an indecision he expressly regretted:

Our difficulty was that we kept on speaking of simple objects and were unable to mention a single one [*ibid.*, 21.6.15].

Wittgenstein is even more evasive in the *Tractatus* with respect to the metaphysical nature of objects. There are passages that have been presented as evidence for a phenomenalist or phenomenological interpretation, such as 2.0131, in which he speaks of “a spatial object”, “a speck in the visual field”, “musical notes” and “objects of the sense of touch”. The opponents of that kind of interpretation have retorted that he deploys these items as mere analogies or illustrations and not as literal examples [cf., for instance, Kenny (1973), p. 73; Pears (1987), p. 77]. In this respect, it might be significant that, when in 4.123 the colour blue is considered as an object, Wittgenstein explains that this use of the word ‘object’ is a “shifting use” (*schwankende Gebrauch*). I understand the so-called “objects” in these cases to play the role of mere illustrations.

Furthermore, the opponents of the identification of simples with sense data, or, for that matter, phenomenological objects, have replied that, whereas such entities are contingent and fleeting, the objects of the *Tractatus* are enduring and immutably necessary existents [TLP, 2.021]. In order to make their phenomenological interpretation compatible with the necessary existence of the objects, the Hintikkas have proposed an ingenuous construal. They claim that, when Wittgenstein says that objects are the unalterable substance of the world, he is not speaking of the persistence of objects *in time*, but of the inalterability of them *across all possible worlds*. Any other conceivable world must consist of combinations of the objects which are given to us in *this* actual world. When Wittgenstein speaks of the substantiality of objects, they claim, he is not concerned with a causal, temporal, or physical necessity. Since the only necessity that exists is logical necessity, he is concerned with the logical necessity of the existence of objects. In order to appreciate Wittgenstein's meaning, the Hintikkas add, try to point and say, 'That object does not exist'. Admittedly, that would be a pragmatic contradiction. What it shows is that, in the utterance in question, the demonstrative 'that' has a logical behaviour analogous to that of a Russellian "logically proper name". However, if their interpretation were correct, we might not say 'This experience I am having *could not* have existed'. The problem seems to be that, if the simple objects are like individuals in the modal system S5,⁵ they might not be phenomenal entities because, if they were, we could not have had the experiences we, in fact, had. Carruthers, who agrees with Malcolm that the necessary existence of objects is a stumbling block for any phenomenalist reading, puts the point aptly: even though the Hintikka's gambit is consistent with the *Tractatus*, it is intrinsically implausible because it arbitrarily reduces the scope for contingency [Carruthers (1990), pp. 77-78].

The fact of the matter is that, while Wittgenstein shows in the *Notebooks* indecision about the nature of the simples, his attitude in the *Tractatus* was a *calculated detachment*, as revealed by Malcolm testimony in his *Memoir*. Malcolm asked Wittgenstein whether any example of a simple object had occurred to him when he was writing the *Tractatus*:

His reply was that at that time his thought had been that he was a *logician*: and that it was not his business, as a logician, to try to decide whether this thing or that was a simple thing or a complex thing, that being a purely empirical matter [Malcolm (1958), p. 86].

Note that, *pace* the Hintikkas [Hintikka and Hintikka (1986), pp. 73 and 79], Wittgenstein's response does not merely imply that he had not had in mind *particular examples* of Tractarian objects. If the Hintikkas' reading were correct, Wittgenstein could have replied that the simples were phenomenological entities such as visual tables, knocks on the door, point or specks in the visual

field, and so on. Moreover, what Wittgenstein replied to Malcolm was not specifically that he thought that it cannot be *said* whether any given entity is an instance of an object. After all, many things said in the *Tractatus* are declared to be ineffable things. His answer was that at that time he thought that ascertaining whether anything was simple or complex was an empirical matter, not a logico-philosophical undertaking.

In any case, it would be safer to give the last word to Malcolm himself. He later explained Wittgenstein's reply in these terms:

According to this account it was Wittgenstein's conception when he wrote the *Tractatus* that it required an *empirical* investigation to determine whether any given thing was simple or complex. One would have to study the phenomena of *physical nature, or of sensation or of sense-experience* [Malcolm (1986), p. 34. Last italics added.].

Thus, according to Malcolm, the implication was not that the simples were phenomenological entities, even though Wittgenstein thought that it was not his business to give any specific examples. What Wittgenstein thought was rather that it is an *a posteriori* matter to establish the metaphysical status of objects. Without a prior study of the phenomena, it should remain an open question as to whether they are physical objects, sensations or sense-data.

The writings and testimonies of the middle period seem more favourable to a phenomenalistic or a phenomenological interpretation. The Hintikkas rest great importance on a text from the *Philosophical Remarks*: "I do not have a phenomenological language, or 'primary language' as I used to call it, in mind as my goal" [Wittgenstein (1975), I, 1]. They contend that Wittgenstein was contrasting here his aim at that time with the Tractarian project: the design of a phenomenological language in which we might report what is primarily given in experience. However, it is very plausible that Wittgenstein was not differentiating his aim then from the *Tractatus* project, but rather from the goal he had had earlier this same year. This is the opinion that Rush Rhees, editor of *Philosophical Remarks*, expresses in his introduction. Brian McGuinness, editor of *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, concurs with Rhees on this matter.

The most impressive testimony in support of a phenomenalistic or phenomenological reading appears in Wittgenstein's Cambridge lectures of 1930-32, edited by Desmond Lee [Wittgenstein (1980)]. In the course of explaining the first propositions in the *Tractatus* to Lee, Wittgenstein said that the objects were things such as colours, spots in the visual field, etc. However, this assertion cannot be taken without caution. In the first place, it contradicts what he answered to Malcolm at Ithaca. In the second place, this and other texts and testimonies of the transitional period are not decisive, because, as the Hintikkas admit elsewhere, "Wittgenstein is not always a com-

pletely reliable witness concerning his earlier views" [Hintikka and Hintikka (1986), p. 129]. Moore reported that Ramsey told him that, when he visited Wittgenstein in his period as a school-master in Austria, "in reply to his questions as to the meaning of certain statements [in the *Tractatus*], Wittgenstein answered more than once that he had forgotten what he had meant by the statements in question" [Moore (1954), p. 3]. Carruthers gives a plausible explanation of the cause of the unreliability of Wittgenstein's own testimony:

Eleven years elapsed between the completion of the *Tractatus* in 1918 and the first of the recorded remarks in 1929, during which time Wittgenstein *not only* did very little philosophy, but found thinking about his own work extremely slow and painful. Notice also that the writing of the *Tractatus* seems to have been highly intuitive, with much apparently going unsaid, even in Wittgenstein's own thoughts. He may therefore, in later years, have had difficulty in thinking his way back into the full complexity of his earlier text – specially given the restless and forward-looking nature of his mind [Carruthers (1990), p. xiii].

In conclusion, in the middle period, when Wittgenstein agenda was close to that of the Viennese positivists, he embraced a phenomenalist stance, but he was aware that it forced him to give up the Independence Thesis and to substitute holism for logical atomism.

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NOTES

¹ Landini (2007), p. 29, concurs with Pears in attributing to the Hintikkas "a questionable history" according to which the objects of the *Tractatus* are Russellian sense-data. But see Hintikka (1996), ch. 10, where he clarifies the distinction between phenomenology and phenomenism.

² This seems to be Pears' reading too: "There is another respect in which [the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*] is unlike Russell's: it contains no more than the necessary features of reality. It is not necessary that reality should consist of *specific types of objects* with specific forms" [Pears (1977), p. 105 in Shanker's collection. Italics added.].

³ Both Schlick and Wittgenstein resolutely rejected this claim of Husserl's [cf. Schlick (1930/31) and Wittgenstein (1979)].

⁴ These are well-known points that were aptly commented in Allaire (1959). Other good expositions are in Hacker (1971/1985); Kenny (1973), ch. 6; and Austin (1980).

⁵ For a defence of this identification, see Ishiguro (1969) and Morris (2008).

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