The Record-Based Turn

Record-Based Ontology begins with a simple refusal: facts, objects, selves, worlds, and outcomes should not be treated as primitively given merely because some physical difference exists somewhere in reality.

This refusal is not idealism. It is not skepticism about the external world. It is not the claim that records create reality. It is a demand for individuation.

Before we say that there is one fact, one object, one self, one outcome, or one world for a finite system, we should ask what makes a difference count as one of these things.

1. Difference is not yet facthood

A physical difference may exist without becoming a fact for any finite record-bearing system.

Some differences are real but inaccessible. Some are too unstable to matter. Some vanish without leaving any usable trace. Some never enter a channel through which they can affect memory, inference, action, measurement, experience, or later comparison.

Other differences persist. They leave traces. They become accessible. They constrain what can happen next. They become records.

RBO starts from this distinction:

> A difference becomes definite for a finite system when it enters a stable record-structure capable of being accessed, retained, compared, corrected, and used to constrain future updates.

This is the record-based turn.

2. Records do not create reality

RBO does not say that the world is made by observers, language, archives, or consciousness.

A record is not necessarily a human memory or a written document. It may be a scar, a fossil imprint, a detector state, a stored bit, a bodily disposition, a legal file, a neural trace, a thermometer reading, a background-radiation pattern, or a redundant environmental encoding.

What matters is not the material form of the record. What matters is its role.

A record is a stabilized physical or informational difference that can preserve relevance across later states.

Records do not bring physical reality into existence. They individuate what becomes definite for finite systems within physical reality.

3. Stability, access, and update

For a difference to function as a record in the relevant sense, three conditions matter.

Stability. The difference must persist long enough to matter. A fluctuation that vanishes without retention may be physically real, but it does not become a usable record.

Accessibility. The difference must be available through some physical channel of coupling, retrieval, perception, measurement, memory, or inference. Accessibility is not belief or attention. It is a structural relation between a system and a record.

Update-constraining power. The difference must be capable of changing what later states can inherit, expect, compare, correct, remember, infer, or do.

A record is therefore not passive storage. It is stabilized relevance with consequences.

4. RBO-0

The basic principle of Record-Based Ontology can be stated as follows:

> **RBO-0.** For any finite record-bearing system A, what counts as a definite fact, self, outcome, or observer-world for A is individuated by the stable records accessible to A, persistent across A's relevant integration window, and capable of constraining A's subsequent updates.

This principle is not a new physical law. It is a rule of ontological individuation.

It does not say how the total physical state evolves. It says when a difference becomes definite for a finite system.

5. Why this matters

The record-based turn becomes useful wherever ordinary ontology overcounts or under-explains definiteness.

It matters for personal identity, because the self need not be treated as a primitive ego-substance persisting behind experience.

It matters for objecthood, because ordinary objects are not exact microphysical identities but stable equivalence classes across changes and perspectives.

It matters for shared worlds, because objectivity is not a view from nowhere but the reconciliation of local records under public constraints.

It matters for history, because the past is accessed through present records and disciplined reconstruction.

It matters for quantum measurement, because a physical difference becomes an outcome only when it becomes a stable, accessible, update-constraining record for a finite system.

6. The founding claim

RBO can be summarized in one sentence:

> **Records do not create reality; they individuate definiteness for finite systems.**

Everything else follows from testing how far that claim can go without losing discipline.

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Project: Record-Based Ontology.
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