

Interesting as always! I think you're definitely onto something that our ideas of what ontology is are different.

A few questions:

## 1 What makes a belief justified?

Well I don't think there is justification in the "eyes of God." Or an "owner-less" justification. This or that person considers this or that claim justified. As I see it, logical and semantic norms don't have their True Being outside of us or above us. But I think individuals do tend to enact the transcendence of these norms. As in my idea of what is reasonable or not plays a huge role in how the world *is* for me. I can feel shame or pride in relation to "my" conception of this or that norm. So the norm is not my toy. This fits in with : I don't have experience, experience has me. In the same way, the norms have me, but they have me as I understand them.

*I'd like to understand more about your conception of the forum. I think I understand you see it as a necessary assumption for philosophy, but I don't quite understand what ontological grounds that gives it.*

Ontology, as rational or scientific, is essentially normative or ethical. I am not scientific simply through my relation to the object but primarily through my relations with other people in discussions about the object. I may justify my claims about the object by reference to my acquaintance with it, but those justifications are directed at others in the rational community. But it's not as if the community, which is largely virtual, votes on whether the claim is justified. Each judges for themselves. Indeed, whether they see one another as "rational" is a matter of personal judgement.

For instance, a mathematician may use a new approach to prove an important theorem. The entire living mathematical community may reject this proof. But that mathematician may still consider the justification appropriate, even if others do not rec-

ognize it as such. He may be rational in his own eyes, and he may find his dismissive peers irrational. But all involved perform the forum, intending the *same* proof. They also presuppose the general if imperfect intelligibility of their criticisms. They each understand themselves to be committed to mathematical norms, even if they understand those norms differently.

Now let's imagine two other mathematicians in the future, researching this controversial proof. These researchers argue about whether the proof is valid or not. Note that it's the same proof, the same intentional object, that was discussed in the past. Perhaps the researchers choose different sides. Both write books. A century later, more researchers review the original scandal and these books. They too intend the same proof, take their own position in relation to it. But all along a general success of reference and an intending of the same norms, differently understood, is presupposed.

The forum concept is actually wider than this, especially if one adopts insights from inferentialism. The meanings of words can themselves be understood in terms of inferential norms. Even practical conversation is implicitly if not explicitly normative. Brandom makes a case that we *do* this linguistic normativity before we get good at talking about it. First we talk about the world and simply treat this or that inference as valid. Later we develop an expressive logical vocabulary — which includes the word “inference” — that let's us talk about our talk and obtained an increased normative-logical “community self-consciousness.”

Brandom makes it explicit that philosophy is part of this making it explicit, perhaps its core. I think indirect realism contributes to a “transparent” functioning of the forum. We tend to think of “justification” as secondary to “mirroring.” The “absolute being” of the “trans-phenomenal” or “trans-human” object is a truth-maker. I suspect this is a misreading of our prudent tendency to justify claims in terms of consensus about “facts” strongly associated with direct perception. The eyewitness is a good witness *because* they are an eye-witness. Of course reputation and status plays a role here. As a member of the jury who

“wasn’t there,” I have to judge the testimony of the eyewitness as reliable or not. Individual perception is intensely limited, so much of our belief about the world is formed indirectly, through perception of reports rather than perception of the reported.

*The central role of the forum seems a bit odd. I have ontological attitudes with or without the presence of others. Why do you think it gains the central position?*

In a loose sense, you can have “ontological” beliefs without adopting rational norms. But perhaps you mean that others don’t have to be right there beside you, for you to have beliefs you consider “reasonable.” In this second case, you could be the sole survivor of a nuclear war and still live in the forum simply through your “being held by” rather than “holding” rational norms. This is an edge case, and not the ideal example, but your identification of yourself *as* a rational person is already ethical in the crucial sense.

For another edge case, let’s imagine that you are the survivor of a shipwreck. After a few years, you mostly give up on being rescued. To pass the time, you write philosophy. You do this by writing arguments and explications in a journal that may never be found. You are *living* the normativity I have in mind, and you are writing in a language that is fundamentally readable-by-others. To be “in language” is already to be “in normativity,” so I don’t really need you write philosophy in this example. But I think it makes my point more vivid. The ideal communication community can be ideal or virtual indeed. I agree with criticisms of atomic subject and of private language. In my view, the uncanny character of language is insufficiently appreciated, and I chalk this up to our Cartesian heritage. Was Descartes concerned with what he couldn’t doubt ? Or was he concerned with what *One* couldn’t doubt ?

*If I’m suspicious of the inference of “absolute independent existence” of entities outside of my phenomenal stream, how do other perceivers get a pass around that skepticism? It seems like the natural thing to do would just say there are no exceptions and be a solipsist.*

Some philosophers, because they did not “see” the forum and the interpersonal normativity, have pretended to be solipsists (have made a case for it.) A few have actually suffered from such a belief as a kind of madness.

But I see the world as fundamentally a forum, if there is philosophy. Rational people argue against this forum by means of this forum. This doesn’t make them irrational in my view, but it does make them incoherent in my view. *To argue against the forum is to argue against logic itself.* To “make a case” for solipsism is absurd, for “making a case” involves an appeal to self-transcending normativity.

*Could you lay out the exact problems that you see with inferring “absolutely independent objects”? You mentioned Rorty and I’ve heard you say you can’t make sense of mind-independent reality, but to me it seems like just about the most natural inference there could be.*

I don’t believe in “mind” or “consciousness” as more than misreadings of what I take to be our shared situation, but I think I understand the motive and spirit of your question. My ontology empties the subject to *emphasize* the transcendence of objects. We presuppose rather than infer that objects are “between” us.

I suspect that the “logical substance” of these between-us entities gets misread in terms of a projected absolute solidity. These “absolute objects” are often understood as the obscure cause of “user interface icons” within what I call “the container subject.” This gives us conceptions of “mind,” along with a conception of the experience of objects to be disconnected from their genuine being, which is projected elsewhere.

Instead of “mind-independent” objects, I think we emphasize the transcendence of objects with respect to individual perceivers, discussers, etc. *Anyone* could see the fire-hydrant, if they are in the right place with working eyes. The entity is present for me *as* transcendent — as offering itself conditionally, a standing-open interpersonal possibility of further manifestation.

I can also predict or expect a novel object to manifest perceptually. I claim that little green people live on the dark side of moon perhaps. They are vaguely signitive present already in my claim. But my claim suggests the conditional possibility of perceptual presence. It is empirically meaningful, if also vague.

I don't think "things-in-themselves" explain anything. They'd stand like useless shadows behind the objects we already have between us. But I see why an indirect realist needs them. I'm not saying that you are an indirect realist. My point is that the invention of the container subject tempts us to think we need to "infer" our way out this presupposed bubble. To me these "things-in-themselves" are a new version of Leibniz's pre-established harmony.

The problem with explaining how we share the world is that explanation *presupposes* our sharing of the world through language and logic. Such an "explanation" might be desirable for philosophers who believe we are trapped in mindstuff. They need the absolute objects to "poke" these bubbles so that they create internal representations. In short, a substrate is *glued on* to a plural solipsism, to function as connective matrix and also a truth-maker.