

## Why Reflective Equilibrium? III: Reflective Equilibrium as a Heuristic Tool

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**ABSTRACT.** In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), John Rawls introduces the concept of “reflective equilibrium.” Although there are innumerable references to and discussions of this concept in the literature, there is, to the present author’s knowledge, no discussion of the most important question: *Why* reflective equilibrium? In particular, the question arises: Is the method of reflective equilibrium applicable to the choice of this method *itself*? Rawls’s drawing of parallels between Kant’s moral theory and his own suggests that his concept of “reflective equilibrium” is on a par with Kant’s concept of “transcendental deduction.” Treating these two approaches to justification as paradigmatic, I consider their respective merits in meeting the reflexive challenge, i.e., in offering a justification for choice of mode of justification. In the first part of this enquiry (Eng 2014a), I raised the issue of the reflexivity of justification and questioned whether the reflexive challenge can be met within the framework of *A Theory of Justice*. In the second part (Eng 2014b), I outlined a Kantian approach that represents a paradigmatic alternative to Rawls. In this third and final part, I shall argue that Rawls’s reflective equilibrium cannot justify the choice of itself and that in the broader perspective thus necessitated, we cannot escape the metaphysical issues integral to the Kantian approach.

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