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A PHENOMENAL DEFENSE OF REFLECTIVE EQUILIBRIUM

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Abstract: The method of reflective equilibrium starts with a set of initial judgments about some subject matter and refines that set to arrive at an improved philosophical worldview. However, the method faces two, trenchant objections. The Garbage-In, Garbage-Out Objection argues that reflective equilibrium fails because it has no principled reason to rely on some inputs to the method rather than others and putting garbage-in assures you of getting garbage-out. The Circularity Objection argues that reflective equilibrium fails because it has no principled, non-circular way of sorting whatever is put into the method. The moves required to avoid both objections are instructive. Reflective equilibrium requires a metajustification, and we offer one that appeals to the epistemic goods that underwrite a view known as phenomenal conservatism. Reflective equilibrium calls on us to start with what *seems* most likely to be true and to alter that collection of judgments in the ways that *seem* most likely to get us to the truth. Proceeding in this way is epistemically defensible and unavoidable. Hence, reflective equilibrium is not just good, it's phenomenal.

Keywords: reflective equilibrium, phenomenal conservatism, seeming, Rawls, metajustification

How do we come to know or justifiably believe philosophical claims? There are a number of competing methodologies in contemporary philosophy. The option closest to counting as the status quo typically goes by the name 'reflective equilibrium.' For example, this is the method illustrated most often in introductory philosophy courses. It's also probably closest to the way that philosophers *actually* reason, despite what they say on paper about being a priori intuitionists, perceptualists, foundationalists, etc.

Despite its widespread deployment, reflective equilibrium has its share of critics. In this paper, we offer a defense of this methodology. First, we show how reflective equilibrium can avoid the two most serious objections in the current literature: the Garbage-In, Garbage-Out Objection and the Circularity Objection. The first argues that reflective equilibrium fails because it has no principled reason to rely on some inputs to the method rather than others and yet putting garbage-in assures you of getting garbage

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