

## ABSTRACT OF

F. Tersman, *Reflective Equilibrium - An Essay in Moral Epistemology* (doctoral dissertation), Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993.

In recent literature concerning the possibility of moral knowledge, it has been popular to apply coherentist accounts of epistemic justification to moral beliefs. This strategy is commonly associated with the notion of "reflective equilibrium" since the introduction of this term by John Rawls. The attempt to apply coherentism to moral beliefs is discussed in this essay under the label "the idea of reflective equilibrium".

An account of the idea of reflective equilibrium is developed and defended. Several issues are addressed: what the role of the notion of reflective equilibrium is; what the relationship is between the state and the procedure of reflective equilibrium; what concept of coherence is involved; what the significance is of the distinction between wide and narrow reflective equilibrium; what capability the idea has of accounting for common ways of moral reasoning; what the methodological status of an account of epistemic justification is.

A popular objection to the idea of reflective equilibrium is that coherence among one's moral beliefs does not indicate that they are true since radically different sets of beliefs may be equally coherent. On the basis of a discussion of the relationship between epistemic justification and truth, it is argued that the relevance of this objection is doubtful. Moreover, it is argued that, at a certain level of coherence, and given a set of plausible assumptions about meaning, belief and coherence, the claim that radically different sets of beliefs may be equally coherent is implausible.

Finally, some arguments are developed in support of the skeptical thesis that moral beliefs are significantly less justified than many nonmoral beliefs given the account of the idea of reflective equilibrium developed in this essay.