

Carla Bagnoli: Rawls' realistic utopia: toward the construction of a normative community

John Rawls' theory of justice is supported by a conception of rational justification that is arguably 'constructivist', and its fulcrum is the original position. In later works, Rawls acknowledges the Kantian roots of this form of justification, but he also emphasizes its distinctive features in contrast to Kant's and other varieties of rational justification. Such features purport to explain the promise of Rawls' political constructivism in reconceiving the tasks of the theory of justice beyond distributive issues, and toward a "realistic utopia". This paper reconstructs the metamorphoses of Rawls' constructivist conception of rational justification throughout his work, and attempts an assessment of its subsequent construals by exploiting a contrast between constructivism and contractualism. Such a contrast revolves around the issue of the bonds and bounds of the normative community to be constructed.