EC 184 Reader Response #2
Due 6 March 2009

I. Reading Source
I have placed two articles for you to read in the Reserve Room of the University Library. They are “Paying Women What They Are Worth” by Mills and “Philosophical Dialogue on Justice: John Rawls on Distributive Justice” by Rawls. You can also find .pdf copies of these articles on the course website.

II. Reading Content
Philosopher John Rawls published A Theory of Social Justice in 1971. His work has been used to justify a society in which government’s role includes a responsibility to equalize incomes for everyone. Since that would require a policy of redistributing income by taxing high earners and transferring funds to low earners, this is referred to as distributive justice. Mills points out that there is a gap in pay for equal work done by men and women—one that cannot be adequately explained by economic theory. For this reader response, consider shifting the focus of Rawls’ work from high/low income to men/women.

III. Reading Response
How might Rawls’ ideas be applied to the gender wage gap? In order to argue that society’s most fair arrangement is one of equal incomes, Rawls argues from a hypothetical view. He asks us to imagine an “original position” in which all persons are subject to a “veil of ignorance.” From both Rawls’ initial argument and from a gender perspective, what is it that they are ignorant about? What sort of distributive justice will people prefer if their original position is one of ignorance? How will their choices differ if the veil of ignorance is removed?

In a real, as opposed to hypothetical world, people are not ignorant about their economic position and income prospects. Under these circumstances, people might choose a social arrangement in which unequal incomes are permitted. According to Rawls, under what conditions could such an arrangement be considered fair and just? Would those conditions change if considered in light of the gender wage gap?

IV. Paper Details
While this paper could be completed without referring to additional sources, if you do use other books or journal articles, they must be referenced within the text (no separate bibliography). In addition to content, the paper will be graded on style, grammar, and clarity. You are encouraged to discuss the paper with your classmates (and me) prior to writing; however, all final papers must be based on your own work.

Please remember: Late papers will not be accepted. A paper is considered late when class has already begun on the day that it is due. Please come to class early or turn it in beforehand in order to avoid a late paper. I accept papers via email.

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