

Project Name: Self-Ownership and Equality

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Project Summary:

People are concerned with the rapidly increasing income gap worldwide, and equality has become central to political debates. Although people define equality differently, most of them agree that *the principle of equality* means that society must distribute resources or welfare as evenly as possible. I investigated various philosophical theories for and against this principle in this research. In the first six weeks of my research, I spent most of my time reading books and papers on equality. My reading list included the works by John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Gerald Cohen, Michael Sandel, and Robert Nozick. I also had weekly meetings with my mentor to discuss my questions on the reading and possible topics for my writing. I wrote a paper on Rawls in the last three weeks of the research. My mentor gave me valuable comments and suggestions on my writing.

My paper is a critique of Rawls's Original Position. The Original Position is a method of deriving the principles of distributive justice. It hypothesizes a group of citizens who assemble to make a contract determining the principles of justice for the community they live in. Those citizens are under "the Veil of Ignorance," which means they are stripped of information about their natural endowment, social class, propensities, conceptions of the good, and other attributes. Rawls argues that whatever principles people in the Original Position prefer are the just ones, and they would choose a set of egalitarian principles.¹ My paper states that the Original Position should be rejected because (1) its underlying assumption is problematic, and (2) its implication is both undesirable and counterintuitive.

I plan to do an independent study to further research the topic of equality if my schedule allows.

Faculty Mentor: Scott Sehon

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¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1999).