Arnesonian role sheet

**Core Beliefs**

You are a proponent of the philosophy of Richard Arneson as it is outlined in “Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare”. This text is the foundation of your beliefs. At some moments in the game, it may be obvious how Arneson’s arguments oblige you to speak and act. However, at other times it will likely be unclear how to apply the essay’s abstract principles to current political issues. In such instances, you will need to decide for yourself what to say or do. So long as your speech and actions do not contradict your foundational principles, you will be living up to your role.

**Major Goals**

You believe that distributive equality is best satisfied when each person has an equal opportunity for welfare. For equal opportunity for welfare to obtain, each person must face an array of options that is equivalent to every other person's in terms of the prospects for welfare it offers, where welfare is defined as the satisfaction of self-interested hypothetical preferences. In other words, what would a person’s preferences be under ideal circumstances and given full deliberation? You are committed to the view that people should only be responsible for their own freely chosen actions, which leads you to worry less about inequality resulting from individual choice. In short, whether or not two people face equivalent opportunities for welfare depends on whether they face equivalent arrays of options.

Arneson (and you) take great care to distinguish this position from one that would define distributive equality as equal opportunity for *resources*. This position (advanced by uniform liberals such as Rawls and Dworkin) produces unacceptable results because if we do not include individual talents and skills in the redistribution scheme, the resulting distribution will be dramatically unequal, but if we *do* include individual skills and talents in the redistribution, the resulting distribution will cause inequality in the other direction as the talented will need to contribute relatively more of their time and effort to society (see “Harrison Bergeron”, below).

Unlike some other characters, you have a separate issue of concern. The United Nations will soon review its Human Development Index (HDI), an international ranking of countries according to their level of development. The notion of development that the HDI has traditionally employed is based on capabilities, reflecting the involvement of Amartya Sen. The review, however, means there is a real possibility that that may change. You believe that the HDI should be not be revised but rather should continue to be broadly based on the notion of capabilities. It will be a major victory for you if you can convince the assembly to pass a resolution, written by you, stating as much. The purpose of doing so will be to send a message to the UN in the hope of influence its review.

Note that your resolution does not need to outline the particulars of the HDI in any detail: your concern is with the philosophy of its overall approach. So long as you can convince the assembly to endorse your broad philosophy as it pertains to the HDI, you will have achieved a significant personal victory. But be warned: there may be other players in the game who want the HDI to take a different approach. Remember that you can bargain with factions and other indeterminates, possibly voting to support a measure of theirs in return for their support of yours. More information on the HDI is available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev>. See in particular the section, “Intellectual and Historical Underpinnings.”

**Tips and Strategies**

When voting on raising or lowering national welfare provisions, you will have to decide whether you think the proposal helps to equalize the opportunity for welfare. For example, you are likely to react favorably to proposals targeting populations with below-average prospects, but less favorably to proposals that provide handouts to all citizens. Your position on immigration will be shaped by your view that immigration dramatically improves *immigrants’* opportunities for welfare while at the same time exerting a modest adverse effect on a *society’s* distributive equality (because that society now contains a wider range of prospects for welfare). Similarly, you will evaluate proposals to grant or withhold minority rights instrumentally, on the basis of their propensity to enhance equal opportunity for welfare.

For the reasons mentioned above, you will be reluctant to cooperate with the Uniform Liberalism faction if they suggest equalizing resources. The small government faction is also likely to suggest equalizing resources, understood as property rights. While you might support this position in a hypothetical scenario where property endowments were equal in the first place, if the proposal is simply to codify existing property rights you will likely reject it. When engaging with difference liberalism, you will be skeptical of attempts to enhance group rights if these rights provide different capabilities to different groups, because you believe that each person should face an array of options that is equivalent to every other person’s in terms of the prospects for preference satisfaction it offers.

Should any followers of Amartya Sen’s and Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach be present, you will find you have much common ground. Your only major point of difference is that unlike these thinkers, you do not believe that capabilities have any value independent of the preferences of the people who hold them. Similarly, followers of Michael Walzer’s idea of complex equality provide a fruitful basis for cooperation. In addition, adherents of K.C. Tan’s luck egalitarianism, if present, will share your view that distributive justice should be luck-insensitive and choice-sensitive, though you are prepared to go further and assert that it must also include equal opportunity for hypothetical preference satisfaction.

**Primary Text:**

Arneson, Richard, “Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare”. *Philosophical Studies* 56/1 (1989): 77-93.

**Further Reading:**

Arneson, Richard, “Democratic Equality and Relating as Equals“ *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 40:sup2, (2010): 25-52.

Vonnegut, Kurt, “Harrison Bergeron“ in *Welcome to the Monkey House*, Delacorte Press (1968).

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| ***Point Value*** | ***Action*** |
| **2** | **Targeted increase in welfare provisions (to the most vulnerable)** |
| **1** | **Targeted increase in group rights (to equalize rights)** |
| **1** | **UN HDI based on capabilities** |
| **-1** | **Generalized increase in welfare provisions** |
| **-2** | **Assembly passes a measure adopting difference principle** |