Faction Role Sheet: Uniform Liberalism

You are a member of the uniform liberal faction. You are a proponent of the ideas found in “A Theory of Justice,” by John Rawls, and “Justice for Hedgehogs” by Ronald Dworkin. These chapters are the foundation of your beliefs, your thinking, and your behavior. Sometimes it may be obvious how Rawls’ and Dworkin’s principles require you to speak and act. Other times, however, it may be unclear how to apply these principles to current political issues. In such cases, you’ll need to decide for yourself what the arguments advanced by Dworkin and Rawls require you to say or do. So long as your speech and actions don’t contradict these principles, you will be living up to your role.

Rawls and Dworkin argue that justice is conceptually prior to utility. This means that society may not violate individual rights in the name of efficiency. Well-ordered societies are regulated by public (widely shared) principles of justice, and these systems of justice should be evaluated by the consequences they produce. Rawls proposes that the principles of justice producing the best consequences will be those that people would agree to in a hypothetical state of ignorance, unaware of their own position in society. In this “original position,” citizens choose rules of justice from behind a “veil of ignorance,” and the rules agreed to by all will consequently be fair. Rawls calls this conception of justice “justice as fairness,” and derives three principles from it. First, each person should have a claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, so long as this is compatible with such liberties being provided to all citizens. Second, any proposed social or economic inequalities can only be enacted if the offices to which they attach are open to all (“equality of opportunity”). Third, such proposed inequalities must be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (“difference principle”).

Uniform liberals like Rawls and Dworkin advocate equality of resources, because they believe that natural endowments of talent and intelligence are morally arbitrary, and should not influence resource distribution. Dworkin in particular argues that a legitimate government must treat all its citizens with equal respect and concern, which imposes egalitarian constraints on any distribution. Genuine equality, on this reading, consists of equality in the value of the resources that each person commands (“equality of opportunity”) rather than equality in the outcomes achieved with these resources. Unequal shares of social goods can thus be fair, as long as they result from voluntary decisions. Equality requires treating persons as *equals* (with equal concern and respect) rather than treating people *equally* (in precisely the same way). A well-ordered society will publicize these principles of justice, so that all citizens accept the principles of justice and know that the others do as well.

You will not lack potential allies in the simulation. Dworkin verges on luck egalitarianism (though he didn’t accept the label himself), and in general your commitment to equal respect and concern will find a sympathetic hearing from any luck egalitarians present. Much common ground also exists with capabilities theorists such as Nussbaum and Sen, if present, though ultimately you reject their focus on capabilities in favor of resources. Similarly, followers of Richard Arneson will disagree with your emphasis on resources. Acolytes of Shklar’s “Liberalism of Fear” should be reliable allies on most points, but communitarians like Alasdair Macintyre and Michael Walzer (if present) will present particularist objections to your reliance on the veil of ignorance and the original position.

While you believe in the redistribution of resources to foster equality of opportunity, you are deeply skeptical of a pure welfare state because you believe that in practice such systems permit the economy to be controlled by a coterie of wealthy private actors, and tend to generate a demoralized underclass. Rather than merely redistributing income (which will of course need to be done), you believe in redistributing opportunity. While a welfare state is an improvement on laissez-faire capitalism, it cannot fulfil the requirements of justice as fairness to the same extent as would democratic socialism or a property-owning democracy, because both of these approaches advocate for widespread property ownership, enabling even the least-advantaged citizens to manage their own lives within a context of rough social and economic equality. Rawls and Dworkin encourage us to view the recipients of welfare not as objects of charity or compassion but as those to whom reciprocity is owed, simply as a matter of basic justice. On this point you should find reliable allies in the difference liberalism faction. Because you only want to permit economic inequality when it can improve the conditions of the least well off, you favor modest increases in existing welfare provisions.

On immigration, the efficiency concerns that are often cited in opposition to arguments for open borders will not trouble you. Far more serious will be the heterogeneity of these newcomers’ understanding of justice. To the extent that immigration will make prevailing conceptions of justice less widely shared, you will be inclined to oppose it. This may mean that you may favor immigration from states with similar political cultures, and if so, you will find ready allies in the communitarian camp. However, there is no logical reason why application of the difference principle has to end at a country’s borders. If we interpret justice as fairness to apply among all human beings, then the case for strict immigration controls is greatly weakened, as is the case for similarity. You will have to decide if Rawls’ and Dworkin’s principles require open borders even if this diminishes our shared political culture and sense of justice. At the limit, you would certainly object to a level of immigration that reduced the state’s ability to guarantee fully adequate basic liberties.

Because uniform liberals like Rawls and Dworkin reject utilitarianism, you strongly disagree with restrictions on the rights of some citizens in order to bring about a better overall situation. For similar reasons, you will be skeptical of any attempt to expand minority rights to the point that members of the majority would not embrace in the original position. You find it unlikely that any citizen in the original position would choose either restricted *or* expanded minority rights over justice as fairness. In general, privileges or advantages for members of particular groups are precisely what the original position and veil of ignorance are invoked to avoid, so you will view attempts to carve out benefits (or drawbacks) for particular groups with great skepticism. This will put you at odds with the difference liberalism faction, though you will find at least some common ground with the small government faction on this point. However, your commitment to the difference principle implies that you could accept differential minority rights if (and only if) such proposed inequalities would redound to the benefit of the least-advantaged members of society.

A major theme in your response to all three of these issues will be satisfaction of the difference principle. In general, you will only be willing to allow inequalities that benefit the least-advantaged members of society. A major victory would be to enshrine this objective in a resolution passed by the assembly. This resolution would then guide debate on all three points at issue in a direction that you approve of. Importantly, you will have to define who exactly the least-advantaged members of society are. Rawls is ambivalent on this point (see A Theory of Justice Ch. 2 § 16), so you will need to decide how to actually phrase the resolution. The difference principle seems innocuous, and its focus on helping the least-advantaged is likely to have broad appeal to other factions, even in cases where the principle would actually frustrate those factions’ concrete objectives.

A fourth issue of concern to you concerns the role of speaker. The first thing the assembly will do, before even its first session, will be to hold a vote to determine who will occupy this role. As the speaker determines which resolutions are voted on and when, this is a position of power, and it will only benefit your faction if one of you becomes speaker. As soon as you finish reading this role sheet you should consult with your faction about which of you will stand to run for the role of speaker. That person should then prepare a short speech making the case for why he or she would be a fair-minded and benevolent speaker, which they will need to give in the last class before the first game session. Because other factions are likely to nominate their own candidates, the main goal of the speech should be to convince indeterminates of your case.  
  
Note that some roles may not know that the speaker will be elected, and you will be giving up an advantage if you publicize this in advance. You should therefore not discuss the election of the speaker beyond your own faction members before the start of the game.

Other issues may come up in the game. An important element of interacting with indeterminates will be to determine if they have objectives of their own that you could support in exchange for them supporting yours. Here as elsewhere you will need to decide for yourselves which measures your principles allow you to support. Remember that any resolution before the legislature can be amended or modified, which in some cases may allow you to support a motion that initially appears unacceptable.

**Victory Objectives**

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| **Points** | **Objective** |
| 1/right | The assembly passes a proposal enshrining an additional right consistent with your philosophy, after a member of your faction gives a speech demonstrating why the measure is consistent with your philosophy |
| 1 | The assembly adopts any change related to immigration after a member of your faction gives a speech demonstrating why the measure is consistent with your philosophy |
| 2 | The assembly adopts the difference principle |
| 1 | The assembly passes a resolution moderately increasing welfare provisions (if the difference principle is not adopted) |
| -1 | Minority Protections increase |
| -1 | The assembly decreases welfare provisions |

**Primary Texts**

Rawls, John. A Theory of Justice. George Sher (ed.) *Moral Philosophy:*

*Selected Readings* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 453-72.

Dworkin, Ronald. Equality. *Justice For Hedgehogs* (Cambridge, Mass.:

Harvard University Press, 2011), 351-64.