Shklarite role sheet

**Core Beliefs**

You are a proponent of the philosophy of Judith Shklar as it is outlined in the essay “The Liberalism of Fear”. This essay is the foundation of your beliefs. At some moments in the game, it may be obvious how Shklar’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.

A central position in Shklar’s argument is her definition of liberalism as a political doctrine rather than a philosophy of life. For Shklar, liberalism seeks simply to secure the conditions that are necessary for the exercise of personal freedom. Such freedom is the primary good, and liberal commitments are merely instrumental means for achieving personal freedom. Beyond this, there is no “positive doctrine” that liberals should advance. Government should never define happiness or offer ethical instruction.

Fundamental to the exercise of personal freedom is freedom from cruelty and fear. While you believe that there is no single “greatest good” towards which politics should aim, you believe that cruelty and the fear it inspires are the “greatest evil” which everyone would like to avoid. You believe that fear of cruelty makes people act in ways that diminish society, and for this reason you fear a society of fearful people. While government must retain the power to coerce in order to act, you would like to see this power limited so that it cannot be exercised in an arbitrary or capricious way.

You see the main cleavage in society as between the weak and the powerful. Since government is the most overwhelmingly powerful entity of all, you’re particularly alert to abuses of power, corruption and brutality. History shows you that governments inevitably behave lawlessly and brutally most of the time unless they’re actively prevented from doing so. Because differences in power make cruelty possible, you think it’s vital to ensure that power is not exercised arbitrarily or capriciously, but in conformity with duly-enacted laws limiting the scope of its exercise.

As such, you will be skeptical of attempts to engineer a particular kind of society. You have a strong commitment to keeping the personal and public spheres distinct, and an even stronger commitment to toleration. You are decidedly practical and non-utopian, and deeply suspicious of social engineering. If government power is to be used, you would like it to be used only to prevent abuses of power or relieve the burden of fear, in order to foster a society of well-informed and self-directed adults.

Importantly, Shklar’s liberalism is not necessarily linked to any one religious or scientific doctrine, and it is compatible with a wide variety of political arrangements, so long as they promote tolerance and keep the public and private spheres separate. You believe that private property should be protected because it limits government power. Similarly, you are committed to democracy, because it provides the freedoms necessary for people to (collectively) protect themselves against abuse. Your inclination is to prepare for the worst, and to imagine how power might be misused.

**Major Goal**

Your main objective in the legislative sessions will be to prevent the enactment of legislation that promotes social engineering or tries to set out a vision of the good society. You would like to ensure passage of legislation that limits the power of public officials, and you will be inclined to support any measures that reduce the imbalance of power between individual citizens and government. In general, you support a limited government with limited powers.

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 revised to evaluate development on the basis of eliminating power differentials. 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**

Some other players may label your position “reductionist” or “instrumentalist”. You can respond that you are uninterested in paying the price of others’ utopian ventures, and that most of the great atrocities of the twentieth century were caused by those who were certain they had access to the moral truth about how we should live. You are more skeptical. There are great differences of preference among people, and you are convinced that this great variety cannot be shoehorned into a particular understanding of the good life without a great deal of cruelty and coercion, which you abhor.

You have the potential for a wide range of alliances with different schools of thought, as long as potential allies advocate limited government, promote tolerance and prevent cruelty. The instrumentality of your position is an advantage, as you have (by definition) relatively few deep ideological commitments except those just mentioned. It is likely that you will be skeptical of group rights, because the wide variety of people embraced by the group probably have widely varying preferences and because the group can overwhelm the self-directed individual. By contrast, you are likely to be indifferent to cultural argument against immigration, particularly those based on particular understandings of “the nation” or “the people”.

**Primary Essay:**

Judith Shklar. The Liberalism of Fear. *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, Nancy Rosenblum ed. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21-38.

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| *Point Value* | *Action* |
| 2 | Assembly adopts pluralistic principles of justice |
| 1 | Public and private spheres remain separate |
| 1 | UN HDI based on power differentials |
| -1 | Public and private spheres become integrated |
| -2 | Assembly adopts universal principles of justice |