Walzerite role sheet

**Core Beliefs**

You are a proponent of the philosophy of Michael Walzer as it is outlined in Chapter 1 of “Spheres of Justice”. This text is the foundation of your beliefs. At some moments in the game, it may be obvious how Walzer’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.

You believe that the principles of justice are pluralistic. This means that different goods ought to be distributed for different reasons, in accordance with different procedures, by different people. You believe that it is problematic for a single good to dominate multiple spheres of social life. A good is dominant if the individuals who have it are able as a result to command a wide range of other goods. For example, in our present society money seems to be taking on at least some of the properties of a dominant good, in the sense that someone with a lot of money is able to get their way in many other areas of life. You see attempts to establish a single dominant good, such as wealth, merit or virtue, as ideological attempts to suppress the natural diversity of value that should occur within any society. You believe in *complex equality* – the idea that a citizen’s standing in one sphere or with regard to one social good should never be undercut by their standing in some other sphere or with regard to some other social good. So for example, someone’s degree or level of social merit should not be strongly determined by the fact that they have or can access money.

If a single good [such as money] were to become dominant in a society, the only way to ensure equality would be to ensure equal distributions of that dominant good (simple equality). This is practically impossible, and even if it were possible, state power might simply become the new dominant good that people would fight over. Instead, you believe that we should narrow the range within which particular goods are convertible, thus reinforcing the autonomy of separate spheres. The resulting “complex egalitarian” society, where different goods might be monopolistically held but where no particular good is generally convertible, is your ideal society. Though there might be many small inequalities in different spheres, there would be more widespread equality *across* spheres, and social conflict would be more diffuse and particularized.

As a result of this belief in complex equality, you are hesitant to appeal to universal principles of justice. You believe that what is right depends on whom it is right for. **Only a people sharing a common life can decide what is right for them, and as a result meaning will be culturally determined.** Political conflict is shaped by the history of past political conflict, so each distributional choice takes place within a culturally unique context. An implication of this idea is that immigration can dilute a common life. If a state is so big that its people no longer share a common life, the unit of analysis shifts to smaller groups within that state, and we should adjust distributions to meet their requirements.

**Major Goals**

You wish to establish a society where inequalities in one sphere cannot invade other spheres. People should be free to collectively determine the social meaning of different goods, and as long as we have enough distinct spheres and there is no dominant good, the resulting distribution will be roughly equal. Beyond this, you can work with a wide range of factions as long as they are engaged in establishing independent realms of value. Welfare provision strikes you as focusing on the wrong problem, because it’s an attempt to redistribute the dominant good rather than an attempt to limit its scope (which is the solution you would prefer). You favor a restrictive immigration policy to ensure that each society will remain a common world whose people share a common life. You are more ambivalent on minority rights, taking an expansive view in the sense that minorities have a right to not have realms of value invaded by other goods, but taking a minimalist view, in the sense that it isn’t actually important whether minority rights result in equality in the sphere of rights (because in a complex egalitarian system, this inequality will be made up for by another inequality elsewhere.

**Tips and Strategies**

You believe that liberalism devalues community, and that liberals tend to abstract away from the real human characteristics of particular societies. As a result, you will be hesitant to cooperate with any faction if they propose to determine and implement universal principles of justice. To the extent that the small government faction resists these universalizing tendencies, you will be inclined to cooperate with them. However, if they embrace the principle that any particular good should have universal application, you will be inclined to disagree. This might take the form of a heavy emphasis on property rights or wealth, but a subtler example might be the expansion of meritocracy to all areas of life. You would oppose all of these measures because you believe that each good should apply only within its sphere.

Natural allies for your position can be found among the other indeterminates. In particular, if the assembly includes followers of Chandran Kuthakis or Judith Shklar, you might be inclined to cooperate with them because they would share your cautious approach to identifying universal value and your appreciation of the particularity of culture. You could cautiously ally with acolytes of capabilities theorists like Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, if present, because the capabilities approach also seeks to proliferate realms of value. You will have a harder time working with advocates of positions like Derek Parfit’s moral realism and Susan Moller Okin’s subordination of culture to rights, because you see these views as imposing the tyranny of a single value across a range of spheres.

**Primary Text:**

Walzer, Michael (1983). “Spheres of Justice,“ Ch. 1 “Complex Equality,“ Basic Books.

**Further Reading:**

**Kymlicka, Will (2001) “Communitarianism.“** *Contemporary Political Philosophy : An Introduction*. Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/equality/>

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/communitarianism/>

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| ***Point Value*** | ***Action*** |
| **2** | **Assembly adopts pluralistic principles of justice** |
| **1** | **Immigration restricted** |
| **-1** | **Immigration enlarged** |
| **-2** | **Assembly adopts universal principles of justice** |