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cally determined and more distributed throughout the society than it is in this novel.

Meanwhile, the fact that Le Guin bases life on Anarres upon a level of scarcity even greater than that existing on our planet today means that her vision of anarchy does not contemplate a world in which society no longer has to fear material want. It is hard to realize the potential of an anarchist society if it is constantly struggling simply to survive in a hostile natural environment. And as we have seen, extreme scarcity can threaten the integrity of the anarchist project in the most fundamental way by putting individuals into positions in which they have to compromise their freedom. In the twenty- first century, we may not have achieved the condition which a generation ago Murray Bookchin called "post-scarcity," but it remains a possibility that must be considered. To the extent that Le Guin envisions not merely deprivation but life-threatening scarcity, her view of Anarres may become increasingly remote as material prosperity spreads.

Still, Le Guin's success in her attempt to embody anarchism in *The Dispossessed* is substantial. Although the anarchism itself is traditional, its presentation is thorough and its attraction clear. And the result is not naive. She has examined more challenges to the anarchist experiment on Anarres than most anarchist writers have been willing to contemplate. Even more than 30 years after the novel was written, it stands as one of the most remarkable studies of anarchism within fiction. From reading the novel, one can still learn a great deal about the promises of this political form as well as the threats it faces.

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of the society on Terra, in which hope and a drive to fuller life have been crushed by pollution and war. Moreover, unlike the Hainish, for whom all types of society have been tried and an altruism based on guilt has arisen, the Odonian way of life affords little place for altruism or guilt, neither of which is seen as productive. Le Guin would not say that society on Anarres has achieved utopian status. She would not even say that, given all the challenges to anarchism, it ever could. But it can claim the distinction of being the most utopian society in the imaginary universe of the novel, the closest to embodying the ideals of freedom and cooperation. Moreover, we are intended to extrapolate from the fiction to our own world at least to the degree that we try to imagine anarchy in an actual society.

The final conclusion concerns the future viability of anarchism in *The Dispossessed.* Central to the vision of the book is its grounding in traditional anarchism. But anarchism has its own history, and recent developments have changed its appearance. Although this is not the place to review them all, two are especially important—first, that power is not necessarily repressive, and, second, that society now faces the prospect of abundance rather than scarcity as the rule. One of the grand intellectual projects of the last forty years, in part a result of poststructuralism, is the redefinition of power as being always dispersed throughout any society. Consequently, many now consider it an oversimplification to think of power as operating from the top down and revolution as pressure exercised from the bottom up. Once power is seen as spread across the society and operative in networks rather than through a pyramidal structure, opposition to oppression may be local and contingent in a variety of ways. Thus, the novel's scene of the revolutionary rally and its violent suppression by the government of A-Io may be a vision from a past that many anarchists would no longer see as relevant to their sense of politics. It would be an interesting thought-experiment to imagine an anarchist society in which the permanent revolution was less hierarchi-

Abstract

In *The Dispossessed,* Ursula K. Le Guin embodies a complementary form of anarchism on the planet Anarres. Just as in the scientific theory of the protagonist, Shevek, time is both sequential and simultaneous, so too the individual freedom and social responsibility needed for anarchism to succeed are unified by promising, which itself presupposes sequence and simultaneity. Le Guin examines several challenges to this theory of anarchy: crises that disrupt the complementarity of freedom and responsibility; fear; the desire for power; incompatible ideologies; and hopelessness. Despite the exposure of its limits, however, anarchy survives as the best political option in the novel.

Introduction

Ursula K. Le Guin has claimed that *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* is an attempt to embody anarchism, which, in her words, is "the most idealistic, and to me the most interesting, of all political theories" (*Wind's Twelve Quarters* 232). Although the anarchism of the novel has been investigated by numerous critics before, especially in the years immediately following its publication (see Smith 77—96 and Urbanowicz 110—117), I wish to revisit the topic in an attempt to examine how closely Le Guin ties the political theory of anarchism to the novel's scientific theory of time's complementarity, how aware she is of threats to this "most idealistic" social organization, and how well her vision of anarchy has held up over the thirty plus years since the novel first appeared.

Complementary Anarchy

In her attempt to embody anarchism, Le Guin constructs a highly traditional anarchist society on the planet Anarres. Drawing on the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century anarchist writers Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, she imagines a society without the three great enemies of freedom: the state, organized religion, and private property. The most important functions usually performed by these institutions of course continue on Anarres. The Production and Distribution Coordination (PDC) runs the economy of the planet. Religion continues to exist—although not as an institution but as a mode, that is, as a way of viewing or experiencing the world. And people have food, clothing, and shelter as well as a modest number of personal possessions they pick up or create along the way. But no government, church, or ruling class coerces people into acting against their will. Social and political power is seen as inherently repressive and so is reduced to a minimum. Anarres, then, is a traditional anarchy in these respects; however, Le Guin adds two other significant features to her embodiment. First, she imagines human life on Anarres as constantly challenged by the physical environment. The planet is dry and prone to drought; its plant and animal life forms are few in number; and its only real wealth derives from the minerals it mines to trade with Urras, its sister planet and political enemy. When times are at their worst on Anarres, the sustainability of human life is genuinely threatened. Thus, if the anarchy on Anarres is utopian—and in some senses it is surely intended to be—it is so against the environmental odds. (See Jameson 221—230.) The second striking feature of Le Guin's anarchist vision is its dependence on the logic of complementarity. So central is this complementarity to her view of anarchy that it becomes a crucial theme in the novel.

at least group) survival, on the other, the traditional anarchist argued that the instinct for group survival was the more historically factual and, so, could be used to ground the anarchist project. Le Guin has herself been accused of humanism, understood (however rightly) as an outdated ideology.[4] However, at least in this novel her humanism does not extend to privileging the goodness of humanity. Shevek may risk all for the benefit of advancing his society scientifically and politically, but he is countered by self-interested characters such as Sabul and Rulag, political schemers such as Pae and Shifoilisk, and the hopeless Keng. More importantly, Le Guin never promises that the reform of anarchy on Anarres being attempted by the Syndicate of Initiative will succeed. At the end of the novel, things on Anarres may have broken loose a little, but a backlash from those stuck in the rut of convention remains a possibility. At most, one could argue that Le Guin believes that the instincts of group survival and mutual aid are powerful forces in society and make the prospect of anarchy enticing, but that is a far cry from saying that a healthy anarchy of the traditional type is sustainable. The forces of self-interest, fear, and despair do not disappear in a world free from the repressive forces of the state, organized religion, and private property.

A second conclusion is that, despite all the challenges it encounters, within the context of the novel complementary anarchism is clearly preferable to any other type of social order. The society of Anarres is less oppressive than the capitalist society of A-Io and the communist society of Thu. Its people are the most free and at the same time the most willing to work with others for the mutual good. As embodied in Shevek, the society is also filled with hope for a more perfect anarchist society both in the sense of its openness to the rest of the populated worlds and, especially, in the sense of its renewed commitment to permanent revolution. In its hopefulness, it is the polar opposite

[4] See, for example, Fekete. For a defense of Le Guin, see Thomsen.

even the extremely potent means of complementarity, is powerful enough to reconcile all human interests, encompass all motives, and weld together all ideologies into a workable unification. The utopia of Shevek's dreams is not accessible to all because from many perspectives it is too remote, even unthinkable. Much of the universe is not ready, and may never be ready, for inclusion in an anarchist utopia.

Le Guin's Embodiment of Anarchism in Perspective

Le Guin's thought-experiment on complementary anarchy is extremely sophisticated. On the one hand, the case for complementarity as the logic of anarchy is both original and powerful. Just as Marxism is based on the logic of a dialectic that gives shape to history, so, too, Le Guin's anarchy is based on a logic that depends on a theory of time. And the resulting society is sufficiently attractive to provide the utopian possibility within the novel. On the other hand, the internal and external challenges to complementary anarchy are treated head-on in the novel. Le Guin presents them in their full array and with enough substance that they must be taken seriously. Consequently, one is led to contemplate the viability of an anarchy so conceived. Although the conclusions to be derived from this attempt to embody anarchism no doubt vary from reader to reader, I end with three that seem both relevant and significant.

The first involves humanism. According to Todd May, traditional anarchist theory was founded on the humanist principle that once freed from the oppression of the state, of religion, and of capitalism, human nature would show its essential goodness in the forms of cooperation and mutual aid (63—66). In the conflict between the instinct for individual survival and aggrandizement, on the one hand, and the instinct for species (or

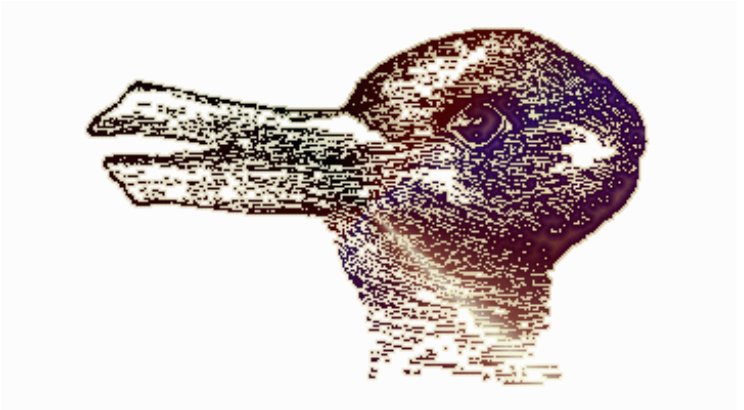

Figure 1. Rabbit-Duck

For Le Guin complementarity has roots in twentieth-century physics, modern theories of time, Jungian psychology, and ancient Taoist wisdom.1 For our purposes, however, the intellectual backgrounds of the idea are less important than the type of logic it implies. In this essay, complementarity is defined as the use of two seemingly incompatible perspectives in order to see the wholeness of some slice of reality. The idea can be exemplified by the famous rabbit-duck drawing (Figure 1 on previous page).

On the most basic level, the image is simply what it is—marks on a paper. But on the level of human understanding, those marks may be interpreted as a rabbit or a duck. It depends on one's gestalt. The figure can be seen both ways, of course, but not at the same time. Still, once people have seen the two figures they know that both interpretations are necessary for a complete understanding of the drawing. The inherent power of complementarity is well illustrated by this example. Difference, both in the seeming incompatibility of the two interpretations and in their temporal alternation, is controlled by sameness, both in the unity of the drawing itself and in the observer's knowledge that two coherent interpretations exist. The logic of complementarity is thus a specific form of containing difference within unity. Its power rests on its ability not to diminish the integrity of either interpretation and yet to bring the two different ways of seeing into a whole.

In the novel, the two most prominent slices of reality that require complementary interpretations are Shevek's General Temporal Theory and his vision of anarchism on Anarres. Just as he sees Sequency and Simultaneity as complementary, so he sees individual freedom and social responsibility as the complementary manifestations of anarchy. Moreover, Shevek is able to comprehend anarchy in a complementary way only because his view is based on the theory of time that he has developed.

> beauty, vitality, achievement. It is what a world should be! It is *alive,* tremendously alive—alive, despite all its evils, with hope. (*Dispossessed* 347)

Keng's response is most revealing in her lack of a direct object for "hope." It is not that Urras has come alive through hope for a successful revolution toward an Anarresti form of anarchism. In fact, it is not hope for anything in particular. In the aftermath of the near destruction of life on Terra, as Keng goes on to explain, the Hainish gave the Terrans assistance and offered them hope, but now, she adds, the Terrans have outlived even that little bit of hope. As a result, Urras evokes their admiration and envy but stays beyond their reach. She has absolutely no hope that, for the Terrans, Anarres can mean anything at all. Despite Shevek's lecture to her that the past, present, and future are unified and change is not only possible but inevitable, he recognizes the depth of her despair and the resulting impossibility that in the near term the Anarres he is re-creating will impact Terra. For the present, he has to admit that his opponents on Anarres were right when they said that the anarchists cannot come to such other-worlders, that they will have to wait for peoples like the Terrans to come to them. It is a moment of painful insight into the nature of otherness.

The fact that a large number of people on Urras and Terra cannot be included within the permanent revolution on Anarres indicates that the unification of differences within Shevek's complementary vision is not total. Even assuming that his agenda for Anarres is a step toward utopia, it is not a utopia that encompasses all the known worlds or even all the people within the anarchist society of his home planet. The forces of difference and otherness create a tragic dimension within the work. To the extent that multiple groups and individuals cannot be brought into the world that Shevek imagines, it is not only that his revolution is unfinalized and perhaps incapable of being finalized. It is that no means of overcoming differences,

common, both being socialist products of the same revolutionary period. This time Shevek does not ask the probing question and let the ideologue expose herself or himself. He, instead, openly attacks the Thuvian ideology:

> But you are archists. The State of Thu is even more centralized than the State of A-Io. One power structure controls all, the government, administration, police, army, education, laws, trades, manufactures. And you have the money economy. (*Dispossessed* 136)

As the full conversation with Chifoilisk indicates, Shevek does not understand all the political intricacies of Urras, but he knows enough to stay away from the controlled society of Thu. Socialism is worthless if it comes at the price of individual freedom.

However, the external challenges to anarchism do not stop with the archist ideologies of Urras. They also include despair. As the novel nears its end, Le Guin introduces her readers to Keng, the woman who serves as Terran ambassador to the Council of World Governments headquartered in A-Io. After Shevek escapes the aftermath of a violently suppressed mass rally in A-Io, he seeks sanctuary in the Terran embassy. During his stay there, he engages in a lengthy conversation with Keng that includes, among other topics, their respective views of Urras. Although, for Shevek, Urras is hell, for Keng it is paradise. The planet she comes from is a future version of earth trying desperately to recover from near annihilation due to pollution and war. Compared to the gray heat of Terra, Urras is a most beautiful planet. More importantly, from her perspective it is alive:

> I know it is full of evils, full of human injustice, greed, folly, waste. But it is also full of good, of

Fully to understand the novel's idea of anarchy, therefore, one must go through the General Temporal Theory.[1]

As Shevek is growing up, the scientific communities of both Urras and Anarres hold Sequency as the dominant theory of time. This theory describes the common-sense notion of time as moving from the past through the present to the future. One can think of it as the flight of a rock thrown at a tree. The rock moves on a straight path from hand to trunk through a sequence of instants. But as powerful as this theory is, it is incomplete. Even as a boy Shevek has intimations of its problems: he independently rediscovers Zeno's paradox that the rock would never reach the tree. Once it traveled half way the rock would still have the other half to go, and having traveled that half it would have to travel half the remainder, and so on to infinity. No matter how small the remaining half becomes, the rock can never hit the tree. This insight and others like it eventually lead Shevek as a young physicist to write the Simultaneity theory of time—that all time exists at once. This is the time of myth, dream, and other forms of the unconscious life. As opposed to the straight line of Sequency, Simultaneity can be best represented by a circle, as in a planet that revolves around a star with no beginning and no end to its orbit. His formulation of the Simultaneity theory wins Shevek fame in the world of physics in the twin planet societies of Urras and Anarres, even if to get it published he has to pretend to have co-authored it with Sabul, the senior scientist under whom he works.

However, Shevek is not content with having theorized Simultaneity. He wants a General Temporal Theory, a grand synthesis that combines the insights of Sequency and Simultaneity. His journey to the lush but dangerous planet of Ur-

[1] On complementarity throughout Le Guin's work, see Bittner x-xiii. Bittner comments on many devotees of complementarity, including Niels Bohr and Carl Jung. On the theories of time with which Le Guin was familiar, see Fraser. On Taoism in Le Guin, in addition to Bittner see Cogell and Bain.

ras is, in part, motivated by his need to interact with the best physicists in his corner of the universe as he fashions his unified theory and presents it as a gift to all the worlds of human beings. The breakthrough in his work occurs when he contemplates a book on relativity by the Ter- ran Ainsetain, an obvious allusion to Einstein. Shevek learns from Ainsetain's failure to prove his unified field theory that one cannot, and should not, try to prove the hypothesis of the coexistence of Sequency and Simultaneity. Instead, he simply assumes that they coexist and works out the mathematics of their "fundamental unity" (*Dispossessed* 280). This unity, significantly, takes the form of complementarity. Perhaps the best analogy for time so conceived is that of a book, an analogy Shevek himself uses at a high-society party on Urras:

> Well, we think that time "passes," flows past us, but what if it is we who move forward, from past to future, always discovering the new? It would be a little like reading a book, you see. The book is all there, all at once, between its covers. But if you want to read the story and understand it, you must begin with the first page, and go forward, always in order. So the universe would be a very great book, and we would be very small readers. (*Dispossessed* 221)

Like a book, time is there all at once, and yet it is most often experienced by humans as a sequence of successive moments. Depending on one's perspective, it can be seen as simultaneous or sequential although it is fully understood only as both at once.

Within the novel, the General Temporal Theory is important not only because it greatly advances theoretical physics but also, more practically, because it makes possible the invention of the ansible, a device that allows simultaneous communication across space. It also becomes the foundation upon

Another representative of the other is the elderly Urrasti physicist Atro. When war breaks out between A-Io and Thu (the Urrasti equivalents of the United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War times in which the novel was written), Atro's aristocratic brand of patriotism rises up to defend the world power of his beloved A-Io. Le Guin again uses Shevek as the questioner who elicits the damning response. When he asks Atro what the people think of the war, the older man replies:

> "What's it to them? They're used to mass conscriptions. It's what they're for, my dear fellow! To fight for their country. And let me tell you, there's no better soldier on earth than the Ioti man of the ranks, once he's been broken in to taking orders. In peacetime he may spout sentimental pacifism, but the grit's there, underneath. The common soldier has always been our greatest resource as a nation. It's how we became the leader we are. (*Dispossessed* 286)

This condescending patriotic ideology is completely alien to the world Shevek is seeking to create. It is not merely that the common people, or rather men, are reduced to means for those in power to accomplish their ends, but militarism is the ultimate path to the greatness of the state. As an anarchist who does not believe in the state, Shevek may come to understand Atro's ideology, but he cannot assimilate it into any value system he can condone.

If the ideology of patriotism in A-Io is bad, that of Thu is no better. In the jockeying for control of Shevek and his theory, Chifoilisk, the physicist/ spy from Thu tries to get Shevek to leave A-Io and come to his Soviet-style country. During their final conversation before his government suddenly calls him home, Chifoilisk tells Shevek that Thu and Anarres have a lot in

Anarres does exist within a larger world that is filled with external threats to its anarchist experiment. Two types are most prominent within the novel: entrenched ideologies that are incompatible with anarchism and societal hopelessness.

Different individuals on Urras, in summary and almost caricatured ways, present ideologies that are not only incompatible with each other but also completely resistant to absorption into the view of freedom and responsibility that Shevek is in the process of fashioning. Three brief examples will suffice to demonstrate the otherness of these ideologies from the perspective of Shevek's set of values. Most obviously other is the value-system of Vea, the woman who has made a life by exploiting her sexuality. Having no job except to be a sign of her often-absent husband's worldly success, she stands in direct contrast to the women of Anarres, especially Takver. But what makes her so alien to Shevek is not her status in the world of A-Io, but rather her belief that in a society in which men do all the work and have all the power, she thinks that the women really run the show from behind the scenes. When Shevek asks her what women in A-Io do, her response is devastating:

> Why, run the men, of course! And you know, it's perfectly safe to tell them that, because they never believe it. They say, "Haw haw, funny little woman!" and pat your head and stalk off with their medals jangling, perfectly self-content." (*Dispossessed* 215)

As delusional or inauthentic as this view may be, one cannot ignore it. For, short of a radical conversion that borders on the unimaginable, a person holding this ideology can have no place in Shevek's world except as other. Even if he understands her better than she understands herself, such knowledge can at best form a significant piece of his critique of Urras. Her ideology cannot be part of a society within which he would choose to live.

which Shevek builds his conception of anarchy as complementary. Shevek uses the same logic of complementarity (that led to his theory of time) to solve his greatest problem, the seeming incompatibility of individual freedom and social responsibility within the anarchist society of Anarres. Seen one way, the problem is moral: how does a person act in complete freedom and yet for the mutual aid of others? Seen another way, the problem is political: how does an anarchist society negotiate the needs both of the individual and of the group? But whichever way one formulates the question, it is the fundamental issue of anarchy on Anarres going all the way back to Odo, the revolutionary whose works provide the settlers of Anarres with the blueprint for their social experiment. The Odonian premise of an anarchist society is profoundly simple, "'any rule is tyranny'" (*Dispossessed* 359), and its first corollary is clear: "'The duty of the individual is to accept *no* rule, to be the initiator of his own acts, to be responsible'." But also following from the founding premise are the principles of mutual aid and free association.[2] Shevek announces them most forcefully in his speech to a rally on Urras: "'We have no law but the single principle of mutual aid between individuals. We have no government but the single principle of free association'" (*Dispossessed* 300). The question then becomes: How can one ensure that the acts she initiates will always be in the best interests of the group?

As with his formulation of the General Temporal Theory, so, too, with his understanding of anarchism Shevek struggles to find a way of conceptualizing the unity of freedom and responsibility. And just as in his physics, so in his ethics he has an intellectual breakthrough which allows him to understand that unity in terms of complementarity. In the simplest terms, he concludes that to follow one's own will and be an individual is

[2] Le Guin absorbs and tests ideas of mutual aid from the traditional anarchist Kropotkin. On Le Guin's specific debts to Kropotkin, see Smith.

at the same time to fulfill one's social obligation. It is merely a matter of seeing the same actions from two different points of view. In a climactic and complex paragraph, Shevek's resolution to his anarchist dilemma becomes clear:

> He recognized that need [to be himself], in Odonian terms, as his "cellular function," the analogic term for the individual's individuality, the work he can do best, therefore his best contribution to his society. A healthy society would let him exercise that optimum function freely, in the coordination of all such functions finding its adaptability and strength. That was the central idea of Odo's *Analogy*. That the Odonian society on Anarres had fallen short of the ideal did not, in his eyes, lessen his responsibility to it; just the contrary. With the myth of the State out of the way, the real mutuality and reciprocity of society and the individual became clear. Sacrifice might be demanded of the individual, but never compromise: for though only the society could give security and stability, only the individual, the person, had the power of moral choice— the power of change, the essential function of life. The Odonian society was conceived as a permanent revolution, and revolution begins in the thinking mind. (*Dispossessed* 333)

Initially, the solution to the problem of moral living in an anarchist society is captured in an organic metaphor. Each individual is a cell in the social organism and is responsible for performing its specialized function, like a red blood cell carrying oxygen to the rest of the body. To perform this function is simultaneously to be an individual and to contribute to the whole. One's perspective determines which way it is

mutual aid (if not ultimately as powerful or successful) (228—232). Le Guin has well understood this challenge to anarchy and represents it, albeit in a somewhat caricatured form, in the character of Sabul, the leading physicist on Anarres until Shevek comes along. Sabul exercises his power in a variety of ways. He steals ideas from others and takes credit for them in order to protect and enhance his status. Not only does he appropriate Shevek's early book on Simultaneity and insinuate himself as co-author, but also for years he has been taking ideas from Urrasti physicists and representing them as his own on Anarres. As part of his need to keep power, he practices secrecy and enjoins Shevek to do so as well. For example, when Shevek first comes to the capital, Abbenay, to work with Sabul, he is instructed to learn Iotic, the language of A-Io, but not to let anyone else know he is doing so. Sabul also exercises various forms of organizational control over the world of physics on Anarres. These range from "recommending" which books get published and what gets sent to Urras to who can receive a posting to teach physics in Abbenay. As a result of his single-minded will to dominate Anarresti physics, Sabul has attained authority, prestige, and property (if only an appropriated office). In short, he exemplifies much of what Shevek feels is wrong with his society. Until the walls around physics that Sabul has erected come down, there will be no true scientific community on the planet. However, the threat is not limited to the world of physics. Nothing stops Sabuls from appearing in all arenas of Anarresti life and gathering such power as they can.

Internal threats from social emergencies and the more habitual forms of fear and power challenge the viability of anarchy on Anarres. Even if Anarres did not exist in a universe of incompatible ideologies, its inhabitants would need to sustain a permanent revolution to ensure that the ambitious and fearful did not corrupt the society and that natural disasters caused as little disruption to the social system as possible. However,

people act in the conventional and expected ways of the group. This tyranny is brought home to Shevek most powerfully by the fate of his playwright friend Tirin and the treatment of his own daughter in retaliation for the work of the Syndicate of Initiative. The hostile reception given to Tirin's satiric play lands him in an asylum and finally breaks him. Meanwhile, Sadik (Shevek's daughter) is shunned in her dormitory because the other children and even the supervising adults see Shevek as a traitor for his contacts with Urras. This kind of pressure means that most people take the work postings they are given and generally follow social conventions. As he customarily does, Shevek summarizes the situation succinctly: "'We don't cooperate—we *obey.* We fear being outcast, being called lazy, dysfunctional, egoizing. We fear our neighbor's opinion more than we respect our own freedom of choice'" (*Dispossessed* 330). It is a harsh realization that he reaches, but Le Guin is seeking to expose the kind of internal dangers to freedom that if unchecked can effectively end an anarchist society even if the pretense of freedom persists.

What makes fear such an interesting challenge to anarchy is that, like promising, it, too, is based on time. If a promise extends the present into the future, fear brings the future into the present. Rulag already sees the arrival of the Urrasti warships and the destruction of the anarchist society as if they are real. The individual who contemplates not accepting a work posting already sees the anger of neighbors and the reality of social isolation. Imagining the future in the act of promising may link the present to the future by personal commitment. However, imagining the future in a moment of fear may also involve a self-limitation of freedom, only this time of a most unhealthy variety.

A third type of threat to anarchy arising from within the anarchist society itself is the desire for power. In his moral theory Kropotkin admits that individual assertion is as fundamental to humanity as the more social instinct of cooperation and

seen. By the end of the quoted passage, however, Shevek has moved from the metaphor of the cell to the oxymoronic idea of permanent revolution. Even if sacrifice is sometimes required of the individual, freedom remains complete in the sense that one never has to compromise one's moral principles. Once Odonians recognize that fact, the social organism can grow and change, adapting to changing circumstances and perpetually reinventing itself. On the basis of this line of thought, Shevek and his friends create the Syndicate of Initiative, the purpose of which is to open the anarchist society of Anarres and return it to true Odonian principles. Within the novel, that conversion is never achieved, but by work's end it is beginning. The novel is in this sense open-ended, for it imagines anarchy not as a *fait accompli* but as a process of constant return to the complementarity of freedom and responsibility.

Within Le Guin's thought-experiment the complementarities of physics and ethics are not mere analogies for one another. Instead, the unification of freedom and responsibility depends on the complementarity of time itself. The central idea connecting the two complementarities is the act of promising. For Le Guin, promising is the ethical linchpin that holds freedom and responsibility together. It is only through a promise that the individual can freely create his or her social responsibilities. And as Shevek explains to the other guests at the party on Urras, promising is a function of time. Unaware of time, a baby cannot make a promise. But for adults, who know the difference between now and not now, promising is possible precisely because it presupposes the unity of Sequency and Simultaneity:

> To break a promise is to deny the reality of the past; therefore it is to deny the hope of a real future. If time and reason are functions of each other, if we are creatures of time, then we had better know it,

and try to make the best of it. To act responsibly. (*Dispossessed* 225)

The moment of promising, the duration of the promise, and its ultimate keeping or breaking constitute an obvious sequence. But Shevek's remark that to break a promise is to deny the past also means that the past, present, and future are from the moral perspective inextricably interwoven, even mutually informing. At the moment of promising, the future is in the present just as in the act of keeping the promise, the past is in the present. Thus, a promise and its keeping also exist in simultaneity.

Le Guin's embodiment of anarchy gives us more than might have been expected. Not only does she show the reader how an anarchist society might run—from the PDC and its affiliated syndicates to the details of living arrangements and child care—but she also provides a tie between her anarchist society and the physical theory of time developed by her protagonist. By providing that connection, she presents anarchy in a way distinct from nineteenth-century socialist theories, including anarchist ones. Anarres does not require an evolutionary theory, much less a dialectical view of history replete with the complications of an *Aufhebung* derived from Hegel.[3] Because the separation from Urras has already taken place, the history of anarchism on Anarres becomes a permanent revolution—not to drive the system unceasingly to a better future but to keep the Promise first articulated by Odo alive. Improvement, there-

[3] Slusser elaborates this idea in the context of Le Guin's work as a whole:

"Le Guin's universe obeys less the law of dialectics than that of polarity. In no case is a higher third born of the confrontation of opposites. Le Guin's "way" is not progressive, nor does it view man as working towards some end in a distant future. Her universe is ongoing, but not open-ended, for the pattern, the equilibrium, is ever-present; the more things change, the more they stay the same." (3)

I agree, except that for Le Guin the "same" is always new.

land to trade supplies for metals. This fear also accounts for the Terms of the Settlement of Anarres, the rule that no Urrasti would be allowed off the spaceships trading with Anarres once the original settlers had all landed. When the Syndicate of Initiative goes to the PDC to discuss whether some Urrasti anarchists could be allowed to come to Anarres, Shevek's mother and political opponent, Rulag, delivers a powerful speech against the proposal. In the course of her remarks, she makes a point crucial to the thought-experiment on anarchy: she accuses the Syndicate of Initiative of "'total irresponsibility towards the society's welfare'" (*Dispossessed* 355). Once one opens the wall even the slightest bit, she believes, it is only a matter of time until a fleet of Urrasti armed spaceships arrives to put an end to the Promise of Anarres. Rulag is making the case that social responsibility needs to trump freedom when it comes to the safety of the planet. Shevek and his Syndicate of Initiative, of course, believe the opposite: that whatever the risk of breaking the Terms of Settlement may be, the potential benefits will be much greater. Personal contact with Urras would mean both reconnecting with the past of Anarres—whose inhabitants after all originally came from Urras—and an openness to the future that could be nothing but healthy for the insulated world of the anarchists. Rulag wins the battle in the sense that the proposal to bring Urrasti anarchists to Anarres is withdrawn, but she loses the war in that Shevek decides to go to Urras and open up the world in an alternative way. Still, the reader does not know at book's end whether Shevek will be met with resistance at the Anarres spaceport upon his return. Thus, there is no hard evidence that the fear of Urras and the potential for internal violence stemming from this fear have disappeared from his planet.

The other type of fear that marks life on Anarres is that of ostracism for unconventional behavior. Although, in theory, no laws keep one from acting freely, in practice social pressure in Anarresti society has risen to the point that almost all

that it has been a bad time? Perhaps it is true that any political or ethical system breaks down at the extremes and that the extreme scarcity created by the drought provides unfair test cases for anarchism. However that may be, the novel has no answers to the riddles of delivering food at all costs and making ration lists. At the limits, the gap in the complementarity of freedom and responsibility becomes an abyss into which anarchy falls.

In light of these test cases, one sentence from the paragraph in which Shevek presents his case for the complementarity of freedom and responsibility needs further review: "'Sacrifice might be demanded of the individual, but never compromise'" (*Dispossessed* 333). The passive voice bears noting. If we assume that the agent making the demands of the individual is the collective—society itself as it seeks to distribute work—a successful anarchy is already in danger. For, in an ideal anarchy there are no demands. However, once someone representing the whole decides to keep the mills open or to send grain to one starving community rather than to another, someone has to do the task of rationing or driving. To quit the posting as Shevek did does not solve the problem. It means either that another individual has to assume the responsibility or, worse, no one takes it on and society falls into chaos. If, as an Odonian, one believes that making decisions of life and death over others is wrong, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that, contrary to what Shevek says, ethical compromise is sometimes required. I can find nothing in the novel that affords escape from this difficulty.

An anarchy based on the complementarity between individual freedom and social responsibility faces another internal threat—fear. Although various kinds of fear threaten the social fabric of Anarres, two are the most prominent. The first is fear of its neighbor Urras, the comparatively powerful partner planet which could conquer Anarres at any moment. (See McCormak and Mendel 38—40.) On account of this fear, Anarres has built a wall around the spaceport where Urrasti aircraft

fore, is always a return to the founding principles of Anarres. As a result, one might be tempted to see in this vision of anarchy a history of the same, a perpetual moving away from and then back toward the origins of Odonianism. But the paradox and the beauty of Le Guin's conception is that, because circumstances are always changing, the return to founding principles always takes society to a new place. The inevitability of novelty, whether in the form of a new group like the Syndicate of Initiative or the invention of the ansible, means that the eternal return to first principles does not end history. It instead makes sure that the new conforms to the ideas of anarchy upon with the society is constructed. Thus, just as with the General Temporal Theory, so with the permanent revolution of anarchism: "You *can* go home again … so long as you understand that home is a place where you have never been" (*Dispossessed* 55).

Challenges to Complementary Anarchy

So far, Le Guin's project of seeing anarchy as a form of complementarity between freedom and responsibility seems to be going well. It is propped up by a hard (albeit fictional) scientific theory of time, and it manages to envisage a balance between the complete freedom of an individual and her responsibilities to society at large. But Le Guin is not content to believe that anarchy is so easily theorized. She, instead, spends a great deal of time within the novel showing the challenges to anarchy from within and without. In fact, she examines the strengths, weaknesses, and ultimate viability of anarchism to a degree that most theorists of anarchy do not match.

The first type of internal challenge to complementary anarchy may be approached by further inspection of the act of promising. As I have already intimated, all political and ethical issues on Anarres are wrapped up in the idea of promising. For it is in the promise that ethics can merge past, present, and fu-

ture. But the promise itself disturbs complementarity because it depends on a decision to limit one's freedom:

> The validity of the promise, even promise of indefinite term, was deep in the grain of Odo's thinking; though it might seem that her insistence on freedom to change would invalidate the idea of promise or vow, in fact the freedom made the promise meaningful. A promise is a direction taken, a self-limitation of choice. (*Dispossessed* 244)

This self-limitation of choice does not destroy freedom, of course. It is a part of one's freedom to make a commitment. At the same time, however, the fact that individual freedom must be self-limiting if responsibility is to become a reality breaks the grand analogy between physics, on the one hand, and ethics and politics, on the other. Neither Sequency nor Simultaneity needs to be internally limited for them to be unified in the General Temporal Theory. The whole point of complementarity, the feature that makes this logic so attractive, is that neither item in the pair needs to be compromised for their unification to succeed. The integrity of each can be respected. But the integrity of freedom is clearly violated in its limitation to ensure social responsibility. We should see this moment of failed analogy not as a flaw in the novel's commitment to complementarity but, rather, as an interesting complication. Just as the self-limiting of freedom is what makes complementarity in the moral and political worlds possible, so too does it open a gap that troubles anarchism.

Le Guin feels compelled to explore this gap. This exploration occurs in the most powerful passage in the novel, the conversation between Shevek and the train driver in Chapter Ten. Le Guin imagines two limiting cases of the complementarity between individual freedom and social responsibility, both arising from the severe drought that takes place on Anarres. In

the first case, the driver tells Shevek the story of a fellow driver whose shipment of grain was attacked by starving people along his route to a community of 800 souls for whom the grain was intended. To complete his run and deliver the food to its intended destination, he backed the train up and killed a couple of the starving people before the crowd cleared the track. At the end of the story, the driver tells Shevek that he cannot figure out the ethics of his comrade's action. Apparently, the greater good was to deliver the food to the greater number of people. However, he concludes with doubt: "'I don't know if it's right to count people like you count numbers. But then, what do you do? Which ones do you kill?'" (*Dispossessed* 312). Shevek responds with a story of his own. He explains that at one point in the drought he had the task of making lists of those in a mill community who were to receive full rations and those who were not. Those who were well enough to continue working fulltime in the mill received their full allotment while part-time workers received three-quarter, and the sick half, rations. He himself received full rations because of the excessive hours of work he was putting in. Eventually he quit the posting. However, he adds laconically: he was quickly replaced because there is "'always somebody willing to make lists'" (*Dispossessed* 312).

Le Guin creates the ethical dilemmas of these two stories for the explicit purpose of challenging the balance between freedom and responsibility as the driver's response to Shevek's job of doling out scarce food makes clear: "'You can't ask a man to do that. Aren't we Odonians?'" Shevek's only response is to say that it has been a bad time. So much is opened up in so little space here. Shevek ultimately quit the position in an expression of personal freedom over social responsibility, but was he right? Are the others who are willing to make lists wrong to do so even if such lists are necessary to community survival? Is the driver right that the job itself is incompatible with anarchism? And what about the fatalism of Shevek's comment