

**“Shevek”  
in Ursula K. LeGuin’s  
The Dispossessed:  
A Profile in Heideggerian  
Authentic Selfhood**

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## ABSTRACT

Political philosophy (past and present) concerns itself with thematic, systematic interrogation of political ideas, structures, institutions, and practices. As such it privileges the authority of reason. But, the vision of the literary imagination likewise can and does contribute to human understanding and to imagining our common future. Ursula K. LeGuin is a master teacher of ethical politics in her award-winning novel *The Dispossessed*. Therein, the protagonist Shevek is presented as an edifying exemplar of “permanent revolution” in a uniquely “thinking mind.” His quest for solidarity of peoples is grounded on a possibility of authentic selfhood within his anarchist society. Considering the concept of authentic selfhood as discussed in philosopher Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Shevek’s character may be represented as an imaginary, yet “real,” example or profile of how authentic selfhood may be constituted. This is consistent with LeGuin’s intent in *The Dispossessed*.

Keywords:  
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## “Shevek” in Ursula K. LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed*: A Profile in Heideggerian Authentic Selfhood

### Linking Reason and Imagination

The relation between philosophy and literature is discussed and represented variously in both contemporary philosophy and literary studies. Notable here is the debate about the purpose of literary narratives. Richard Posner, e.g., argued that, ‘immersion in literature does not make us better citizens or better people... The proper criteria for evaluating literature are aesthetic rather than ethical.’<sup>1</sup> On the other side of this view, following Martha Nussbaum, one may argue that, ‘the aesthetic is ethical and political,’ that literature cultivates and reinforces ‘valuable moral abilities.’<sup>2</sup> For some, the merit of a work of art does not depend primarily or only on intuiting and interpreting ‘the author’s intent’ in the production of a work of literature. Indeed, twentieth century philosophical hermeneutics, as developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer, is instructive for having moved beyond the methodological commitment according to which interpretation involves reproduction of authorial intent, thereby to having ‘scientific’ validation. On the contrary, Gadamer opined, ‘Within all linguistic phenomena the literary work of art occupies a privileged relationship to interpretation and thus moves into the

neighborhood of philosophy.’<sup>3</sup>

For Gadamer, ‘The understanding and the interpretation of texts is not merely a concern of science, but obviously belongs to human experience of the world in general.’<sup>4</sup> Indeed, he writes, ‘The hermeneutic phenomenon is...not concerned with a method of understanding by means of which texts are subjected to scientific investigation.’ Hence, ‘the experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history itself’ are different ‘modes of experience,’ such that ‘through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way,’ in which case Gadamer delivered ‘a critique of aesthetic consciousness in order to defend the experience of truth that comes to us through the work of art against the aesthetic theory that lets itself be restricted to a scientific conception of truth.’<sup>5</sup> Precisely, therefore, because the process of understanding entails a productive ‘fusion of horizons’ in a work of art such as literature, the reader engages ‘the text’ to elicit a novel understanding of the narrative.<sup>6</sup> In short, works of literature can perform in a way that is disclosive of novel features of the human condition. In this way, it may be argued, a novelist integrates the aesthetic, ethical, and political

in a way that is edifying, even though critics such as Posner prefer to keep these domains of analysis separate.

Ursula K. LeGuin (1929-2018) is a first-rank and Hugo and Nebula award-winning twentieth century novelist who wrote in the genre of science fiction and fantasy, integrating the ethical and political in her imaginative work so as to edify her reader. In answer to the question, ‘What do you think the purpose of story is in human society?’, she replied: ‘I think we tell stories to each other to remember who we are as a people, and to find out who we are as individuals.’<sup>7</sup> This is an important insight into the fact that the human condition and the clarification of individual identity involve both remembrance and self-discovery. The twentieth century philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) considered self-discovery (Selbstbefindlichkeit) central to the human way to be in the world in which we find and establish our ‘abode’ (ethos, dwelling) in a given time and place (topos) between the claims of past and future, between the seeming necessity and determinism of fate and destiny, and between ‘modes’ of being that make us alternately inauthentic (uneigentlich) and authentic (eigentlich)

1. Richard A. Posner, “Against Ethical Criticism,” *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 21:1, 1997, 1-27.

2. Martha Nussbaum, “Exactly and Responsibly: A Defense of Ethical Criticism,” *Philosophy and Literature*, 22:2, 1998, 343-365.

3. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Philosophy and Literature,” *Man and World*, 18:3, September 1985, 241-259.

4. Hans-Georg Gadamer, (2004). *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd revised edition (London: Continuum, 2004).

5. *Ibid.*

6. Gadamer, 2004. Also see Hans-Georg Gadamer. (1976). *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press.

7. Guy Haley. “Ursula K. LeGuin, The Deathray Interview,” *Deathray*, October 2007, [http://www.ursulaklequin.com/Deathray-dr05\\_interview\\_lequin.pdf](http://www.ursulaklequin.com/Deathray-dr05_interview_lequin.pdf), accessed on 21 May 2019. Italics added.

relative to the task of self-discovery and self-affirmation.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, moral dilemmas are often 'situations' of self-discovery as expressions of individual autonomy are pitted against the dominating authority of tradition, in the historical struggle over what are to count legitimately (qua 'orthodoxy') as 'thoughts,' 'words,' and 'deeds.' This is especially so as the claims of particularity clash with claims of universality, and as the force of human reason asserts itself all too often to be privileged in moral decision, even to the exclusion of the legitimate insights of the human imagination and its place in the task of clarifying and expressing one's self (in Heidegger's terms) as an "authentic self" (eigentlich Selbst).

Hence, it is not surprising that LeGuin opined, 'Science fiction is wonderfully useful for offering a convincing picture of alternative ways of doing and being, which can shake readers out of fixed mindsets, knock the blinkers off them.'<sup>9</sup> It is not merely a matter of human conduct, i.e., what we are to do, but rather about how we are and who we are, whom we choose to be, as we struggle individually and collectively to transcend the present, responsive to the claim of the future and our individuated potentiality-for-being. Furthermore, LeGuin tells us, she thinks that, '...science fiction is particularly good at and useful for: present[ing] alternative cultures/societies/technologies/physiologies/mores/sexualities/etcetera to the reader—who, like all of us, is more or less "culture-bound," stuck in one way of seeing, one way of doing.'<sup>10</sup> This, of course, is consequent to the force of ancestral custom, of religious and political tradition, the authority of each of which has its own historical inertia to sustain it. Yet, the fact is that these may, with all reasonable justification, be interrogated

and be displaced by the disclosure of new potentialities in the way we may dwell upon the earth.

This can happen in the course of challenges grounded in novel insights into the human way to be, into individually distinct potentialities for being, when conscientious objection to time-honored ideological appeals and to the authority of time-honored tradition strikes a resounding note. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assert that LeGuin is correct in her authorial assessment when she writes: 'The use of imaginative fiction is to deepen your understanding of your world, and your fellow men, and your own feelings, and your destiny.'<sup>11</sup> Indeed, LeGuin opines, 'realism'—as a word that denotes a class of literature that ostensibly teaches us about ourselves "better" than any other genre precisely because it is 'realistic'—'is perhaps the least adequate means of understanding or portraying the incredible realities of our existence.' And there, indeed, is the principal question: How we are to understand the incredible realities of our existence, what we mean by 'existence,' in its historical determination, but also relative to the appeal of the future as it claims us both severally and jointly to think, to do, and to be otherwise than we have been.

The place of the literary imagination in moral philosophy is not to be dismissed out of hand. In an article engaging the topic of a presentation at the annual meeting of the Academy of Philosophy and Letters in June 2014, political philosopher Claes G. Ryn asked a poignant question: 'How desperate should we be?' The context for the question is Ryn's concern about the difficult and unsettled issue of 'the meaning or form of morality, particularly as it relates to politics.'<sup>12</sup> He expressed his concern as a matter of in-

terrogating 'a dubious tendency in Western moral philosophy since the ancient Greeks,' viz., 'the habit of defining morality as adherence to a preexisting rational or ideal standard.' This habit, Ryn opines, seems to him to be detrimental to how one finds one's way to what morality requires 'in actual circumstances, especially in highly charged and hard-to-understand situations.'<sup>13</sup> He argues that, while 'Morality demands respect for a universal moral authority,' nonetheless, 'morality is misconceived as conformity to ready-made norms or models.' Having written a novel<sup>14</sup> to illustrate his philosophical concerns, Ryn comments on what he characterizes as the 'epistemological theme that the imagination and the arts are ultimately more influential and more fundamental in human consciousness than the conceptual, reasoning mind.'<sup>15</sup> One may differ on the claim, of course. But, this is an important insight for both contemporary moral and political philosophy, since it is to be argued reasonably that both reason and imagination contribute to understanding (a) what politics entail of an individual at any given time and (b) what morality or ethics could or should be in a given context of individual political life.

Concurring with Ryn's epistemological thematic for my present purpose, I turn to LeGuin's literary imagination. Her novels more or less depict the same thematic issues in which the political and the ethical/moral are ambiguously intertwined; and, both are interrogated at their foundation in arduously complex situations of political and moral decision. Here I focus on LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*,<sup>16</sup> a Hugo and Nebula Award winning novel, in which the protagonist Shevek illustrates the complexity of situations of political and moral decision as

8. Martin Heidegger. (1996). *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Stambaugh. Albany, SUNY Press.

9. Haley, op. cit.

10. Ibid.

11. Ursula K. LeGuin. (1979) *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. G.P. Putnam's Sons.

12. Claes G. Ryn. "How Desperate Should We Be?" *A Symposium: Morality Reconsidered*. *Humanitas*, 28:1 & 2, 2015, 5-30.

13. Ibid.

14. Claes G. Ryn. (2014). *A Desperate Man*. Washington D.C.: Athena Books.

15. Ryn, 2015, op. cit.

16. Ursula K. LeGuin. (2014). *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*. New York: Harper & Collins.

he seeks to do his professional work as a temporal physicist. LeGuin characterizes Shevek's 'home' on Anarres—if it can be called a home—an ambiguous utopia.<sup>17</sup> Here I wish to appropriate the literary figure of Shevek and to highlight his way of being as a "profile" in authentic selfhood. This latter concept is meant in Heidegger's sense as described in various texts, although primarily in his magnum opus, *Being and Time*. It is my claim that, when the philosophical reasoning of Heidegger is combined with the literary imagination of LeGuin in an interpretive exercise concerned with politics and morality, one comes away with a productive understanding of how Heidegger's concept of authentic selfhood can be represented, not only in fiction but in the reality of everyday life. And that, so I shall argue, is informative in the present as a work of imagination contributes to understanding the moral dilemma an individual faces in making choices that resolve into authenticity and authentic selfhood over against the dominance of inauthenticity and inauthentic selfhood.

### An Ambiguous Utopia

'Utopia' speaks of what has 'no place' and thus 'no reality' relative to what has place (*topos*) and thus is the reality of a human abode, a place where humans find their being in thought, word, and deed. LeGuin has written a novel that concerns a no-place she characterizes as possibly real—having its 'place' in the human imagination—as an ambiguous utopia. Why a 'utopia'? Why 'ambiguous'? The answer is to be found in the fact that anarchism, as a political theory, has no 'place' in the historical actualization of political associations on the planet Earth (called 'Terra' in the novel). Anarres (a dusty barren 'moon' to the richly resourced planet Urras<sup>18</sup> in another part of

the universe) represents an 'experiment' in anarchical living, 'an experiment in nonauthoritarian communism' (as the Terran Ambassador Keng says). The Anarresti live in self-imposed exile from Urras in pursuit of a communal-anarchical way of life—removed in space and time from the warring states and the dominant high-tech capitalism of Urras (represented by the nation-state A-Io, much like the contemporary USA and countered by the nation-state of Thu, much like Russia in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). LeGuin speaks of anarchism as 'the most idealistic... of all political theories.'<sup>19</sup> But, to say it is the most idealistic is not to say it is unrealistic.

As a political theory, such as described by Pëtr Kropotkin<sup>20</sup> and others, anarchism speaks to a possibility of human political association, notwithstanding all the complexities and challenges present in any proposed 'actualization' in the context of human history on Earth. The 'struggle for existence,' Kropotkin understood in contrast to the Social Darwinism of his day, does not mean we must adopt a 'state of civil society' in opposition to the evil of a 'state of nature' such as Thomas Hobbes described in his *Leviathan*. One may organize a political association in which there is a hierarchical relation of ruler and ruled, an installation of 'government' with all that this entails in hierarchically governing institutional structures, laws, armed forces, bureaucracy, division and organization of labor, etc., as in the modern nation-state system. But, existence, Kropotkin argued, also requires cooperation, mutual aid. One may thereby perpetuate both conditions of competition as well as cooperation, political and socioeconomic structures operating to enhance the one or the other, that which is 'private' relating ambiguously to that which is 'public,' as personal autonomy

and acts of self-governance relate to the heteronomy of public law and order.

LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*, as Daniel P. Jaeckle tells us, is a novel in which the political theory of anarchism is imaginatively represented on Anarres and integrated with Shevek's theoretical work in temporal physics, in which both time's sequency and simultaneity affect the actuality and the potentiality of life.<sup>21</sup> Jaeckle captures the essential elements of LeGuin's anarchistic society to exclude 'the three great enemies of freedom: the state, organized religion, and private property'—though there is a central Production and Distribution Coordination (PDC) organizing the division of labor and the distribution of the basic resources needed, even as the 'Odonian' values of the Anarresti are representative of the teaching of Taoism (with its attention to complementarity, yin/yang) and Jungian depth psychology that speaks of the individual conscious psyche in relation to an ineradicable collective unconscious. 'Reality,' howsoever we might perceive it, involves complementarity, which is not to say opposition. This is important for the understanding of our reality. As Jaeckle puts it saliently as illustrated in the 'gestalt switch' present in our apprehension of the 'rabbit-duck' image, '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.'<sup>22</sup>

In the integration of political and sci-

17. I see LeGuin's choice of word here as itself revealing in its root origin, suggesting the privative 'an-' in relation to the Latin word 'res,' which is part of 'republic' as in 'res publica,' the "public thing." Anarres in this sense presents a political society that is not a "republic," does not install a public as what is politically dominant in a political society.

18. As with the etymology of 'Anarres' I suggest that the chosen word here is likewise related anthropologically to the idea of a "root society," as with the legendary city of Ur of ancient Mesopotamia, but related likewise to the German word prefix 'Ur-' for "origin," Urras thus the planetary origin of the Anarresti people.

19. Ursula K. LeGuin. (1976). *Wind's Twelve Quarters*. Bantam Books.

20. Pëtr Kropotkin. (1902). *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*. New York: McClure Phillips & Co. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-kropotkin-mutual-aid-a-factor-of-evolution.pdf>, accessed 17 July 2019.

21. Daniel P. Jaeckle, "Embodied Anarchy in Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*," *Utopian Studies*, 20:1, 2009, 75-95.

22. *Ibid.*

entific theory as LeGuin unfolds it in the novel, we find that Shevek 'sees Sequency and Simultaneity as complementary' in his General Temporal Theory (which seeks to unify the two theoretical approaches to time) even as he 'sees individual freedom and social responsibility as the complementary manifestations of anarchy.'<sup>23</sup> But, this is not merely a matter of politics—it is also centrally a matter of an individual way to be and individual moral decision in the press of any number of situations of political engagement. Shevek's situation of political expression and scientific practice involves complementarity; and, this complementarity includes both competition and cooperation whether politically or scientifically as he interacts with other Anarresti or, eventually, with those he eventually meets on the planet Urras. Anarres's anarchical society includes both competition and cooperation as individuals express the dominant expectations of their society's values and as they also seek to express their ownmost freedom to be the individuals they are. In short, Anarres is a society in which individuals can be surrendered to the 'public,' thus to think, speak, and do as 'they' do, hence to be inauthentic in their way to be. Such a 'they-self'—what Heidegger calls *das Man-Selbst*—can dominate to the diminution and even exclusion of authentic selfhood.

Shevek is the protagonist who manifests this inescapable complementarity of selfhood, the constant struggle to sustain himself in authenticity against the many ways in which his society can be suppressive and even oppressive of his ownmost potentiality to be both as a temporal physicist and as a 'free' yet 'responsible' Anarresti. Can one have cooperation in politics and in science without hierarchy? Can one have competition in politics and in science with social responsibility? Can one be an integrated self, within whom one's conscious being and the collective unconscious determine one's psyche yet without foreclosing the potentiality the

future discloses through one's interrogation of past and present? Jaeckle poses the moral question thus: 'how does a person act in complete freedom and yet for the mutual aid of others?'<sup>24</sup> LeGuin presents the alternative thinking in the Odonian valuation she presents: 'The duty of the individual is to accept no rule, to be the initiator of his own acts, to be responsible.' Such is the anarchist ethos as usually associated with anarchist discourse: that which is *arché* (rule, law) is opposed to that which is *an-arché* (absence or privation of rule, law) and vice versa. But, this opposition excludes all attention to the complementarity that is at issue in the stated opposition and which is to be resolved in thoughts, words, and deeds that evince the complementarity. Both Anarres and Urras, both the Anarresti and the Urrasti, the anarchical society in relation to the warring states, etc., do not apprehend the importance of this complementarity as the one is privileged in the one place and the other privileged in the other place, both separated by time and space so that all communication and interaction between the two is rendered null.

Shevek realizes (i.e., LeGuin posits for our consideration) that 'only the individual, the person, [has] the power of moral choice—the power of change, the essential function of life.'<sup>25</sup> Revolution, understood not merely ideologically but instead in terms of the power of change (LeGuin asserts through Shevek), 'begins in the thinking mind.' In the case of Anarres, which seeks to be a sustainable anarchical society, the revolution is 'permanent' in the minds of thinking individuals, not transient in the way in which, e.g., the Marxist-Communist revolutions in our place and time abandoned the creation of classless communist society and installed hybrids of capitalism and the totalitarian state apparatus. What matters in such permanent revolution, as Jaeckle sees it, is to understand that anarchy is not 'a *fait accompli* but a process of

constant return to the complementarity of freedom and responsibility.<sup>26</sup> And, this constancy depends on the individual's projection of him/herself in the existential resolve of being what s/he 'is' according to the open (thus undetermined) claim of the future. This is to be done in the individuated projection of his/her potentiality-for-being, where the strife of 'they-self' and 'authentic-self' must be overcome constantly in the interest of authentic being—despite the incessantly intruding presence of that which is 'the public' and that dominates to perpetuate inauthenticity by way of expectations of obedience to social convention rather than freely chosen cooperation. LeGuin's key to a proper understanding of time in relation to moral choice is expressed by Shevek's spoken adage: 'As surely as the future becomes the past, the past becomes the future.'<sup>27</sup> For present purpose, the adage might be restated: As surely as the past becomes the future (as our perception of sequency discloses), the future becomes the past (as our projections of potentiality for being disclose the simultaneity of actuality and potentiality). An individual's existence (in Heidegger's sense, *ek-sistence*, standing out into the future beyond the present) is at once a function of both sequency and simultaneity. Moral choice always involves this temporal complementarity.

### Shevek's Moral Dilemmas

Every individual is faced with the task of relating his and her individual freedom to his and her social responsibility within the society s/he claims as a political association. In all such associations, understood since the time of the ancient Greeks (Plato, Aristotle) in the Western philosophical tradition, politics involves individuals in alternate functions of citizenship either ruling or being ruled—no matter whether the polis or the nation-state is 'constituted' a monarchy, a democracy, an aristocracy, etc. Anarchical society such as LeGuin

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. LeGuin, 1974, op. cit.

26. Jaeckle, 2009, op. cit.

27. LeGuin, 1974, op. cit.

conceives it, following such as Kropotkin highlights the moral duty of mutual aid, eschews this exchange of function and the structures of hierarchical government. Yet, the opposition of ruler and ruled that is installed on the planet Urras (as on contemporary Earth), but which is supposedly avoided on Anarres, has to move within the spatiotemporal reality of a complementarity. How this is to be realized is entirely ambiguous, which is represented by LeGuin's reference to Anarres as an ambiguous utopia. Can anarchical society have its 'place' in 'real' time and space? Should it, on the assumption that it is politically and morally superior to 'archival' societies of past and present? What does Shevek himself represent as exemplar of a thinking mind in whom the anarchical revolution is supposedly permanent?

Every individual is faced with the strife of authenticity and inauthenticity in his/her own 'being-there,' i.e., in opening up and disclosing the 'world' that, as a referential context of signification (to use Heidegger's words), has meaning. The pressures of social convention, custom, law, etc., all contribute to determine one's responses in a way that sustains these modes of gathering and organizing a collective association. Yet, authenticity requires one pit one's potentiality to be, one's original freedom, against the dominance of the they-self. This does not mean, however, that thereby one chooses to be anarchical in the pejorative sense that one is singularly egoistic in pursuit of interests both capricious and vicious. The authentic choice is not between the 'archival' and the 'anarchical,' between law (nomos) and caprice. The choice is in the complementarity that preserves the fundamental unity of law and freedom. Shevek is an Anarresti in whom this fundamental unity is at the outset undetermined, but which is challenged daily to be made determinate in the character of his person as he goes about his work, as he fulfills his 'social function,' whether in terms of the manual labor he does in field

postings that contribute to the survival of the collective or the unique intellectual labor he does as theoretical physicist. He finds himself having to make moral decisions where his individual freedom comes up against his social responsibility—the latter sometimes defined not by him but by other members of the society in which he lives, his authentic selfhood thus often imperiled by the demands of the they-self that would restrain and constrain his freedom.

A they-self, much as a constituted society, builds walls—and, as LeGuin reminds at the opening of *The Dispossessed*, walls function to 'keep out' but also to 'keep in,' thus excluding some while including others. Exclusion sustains a customary alienation of some qua 'aliens,' but inclusion is sometimes in reality the same as a witting or unwitting imprisonment. The more critically significant walls are those 'invisible walls' in the human mind that are tacitly determinative of thought, word, and deed. Thus, as Winter Elliot remarks, '...The Dispossessed is, on the surface, a mediation between two utopias, two worlds, two macrocosms of humanity, with differing goals, desires, and beliefs...The book is not ultimately as interested in which world has the best, or even better, political system as it is in Shevek's role within those worlds.'<sup>28</sup> This is why Shevek, as protagonist of the novel, is critical to sorting out philosophically complex moral dilemmas in which he as individual must negotiate his individuated potentiality-for-being amidst the dominating structures of his political society. These structures are many times present in the background of interpersonal interactions, and they operate invisibly to induce and coerce individual deliberation, choices, judgments, and conduct. However, importantly, as the novel shows in so many ways—as Elliot says—'walls... are not, ultimately, impermeable.' This is why LeGuin is entirely correct to voice the proposition that the power of change, of moral choice, resides with the individual and not the collective.

Shevek's individuated permanent revolution in his thinking mind sets him at odds with both Anarres and Urras in their political isolation from each other; and, as he discovers in trying to originate a 'communication' between the two 'planets' while doing his theoretical work in temporal physics, 'both worlds attempt control on not just a physical but also a mental and spiritual basis. Urras and Anarres manage not only bodies but also minds and ideas.'<sup>29</sup> On Urras, 'an idea is a property of the State,' Urras having a 'propertarian,' 'profiteering,' 'governing' political culture in contrast to the anarcho-communism of Anarres, where things and ideas are to be shared and not owned and, therefore, are to be administered cooperatively, not hierarchically. The perspective here is one of being caring and solicitous in being with one another (as with Kropotkin's mutual aid) without committing 'the ultimate blasphemy' in the Odonian value system of appropriating and parroting words of ritual to be performed in deed as if they were 'laws.' Shevek manifests in his character both his diligence to freedom (thus his quest for authentic selfhood) and his forgetfulness of the bureaucratization that operates on Anarres (hence his being 'fallen' into the mode of inauthentic selfhood). He is reminded of what his friend Bedap asserts to be the perpetual task of a society such as Anarres: '...we forgot that the will to dominance is as central in human beings as the impulse to mutual aid is, and has to be trained in each individual, in each new generation.'<sup>30</sup>

Training of the will towards either impulse depends on individuals having the power of social change and sustaining their power of moral choice. Only thus does an individual manifest his/her authentic selfhood rather than surrendering to the more dominant impulses of 'the public,' the anonymous 'they-self' that insists on orthodoxy (correct opinions) and its corresponding orthopraxis (correct conduct). Shevek, as one exemplar of a freely thinking mind on Anarres, under-

28. Winter Elliot. (2005). "Breaching Invisible Walls: Individual Anarchy," in *The Dispossessed*, "The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*, ed. Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman. Lanham: Lexington Books. 149-164.

29. Elliot, 2005, op. cit.

30. LeGuin, 1974, op. cit.

stands the need for balance (complementarity) between the individual conscience and the social conscience, and of the need to respect the individual freedom of choice rather than to fear the neighbor's restraining and constraining opinion that calls for obedience.<sup>31</sup> Cooperation is not obedience, and it must originate in moral choice, not in the heteronomy of historically contingent social imperatives. To be free is to be dispossessed in the most essential sense—it is in the having, the owning, of possessions, be they material or intellectual, that one is possessed by them and made unfree.

### The 'Journey' towards Authentic Selfhood

Speaking to a point made at the end of *The Dispossessed*, Elliot observes, 'each life is new and free to choose its own journey...'<sup>32</sup> But, as LeGuin would have us understand, a journey is not an adventure, a moving outward that sets aside and forgets the origin. Hence, LeGuin instructs: 'True journey is return.' The adage is loaded with significance as the ideas of time, truth, journey, and return are conjoined. If one undertakes an adventure, then that is all it is understood to be from the outset, a venturing outward without meaningful goal or intended direction. If one undertakes a journey, one ventures outward surely; but, most importantly, one's journey is true to the spirit of the journey only if and when one returns to the point of origin. In Shevek's case the journey is obviously spatial—from his own personal (as anarchist) and professional (as temporal physicist) 'place' in Anarresti society to the places he goes as part of his communal contribution to the Anarresti division of labor, then from Anarres to Urras, and then at the end from Urras in return to Anarres. As LeGuin writes, 'It is not until an act occurs within the landscape of the past and the future that it is a human act.'<sup>33</sup> Ethics and time are connected in virtue of human

temporality, in virtue of the fact that humans are temporal beings, bound by time but also open to the disclosure of potentialities that only they can disclose for the sake of creating their world anew.

But, Shevek's journey is also inward in a fourfold way, (1) into his own thinking mind so that it is decidedly one of self-discovery, (2) into the scientific ideas of the General Temporal Theory he eventually shares with all worlds so that the ideas are not 'owned,' (3) into the ideas that are foundational for his society, and (4) into the ideas that define his moral and political self. In that way, the journey is also manifestly temporal as the sequency of Shevek's actions and the simultaneity of his being in the unity of his past, present, and future are integrated in the ethos of decision in the present. It is from that inward journey that Shevek discovers himself and the power of his ownmost moral choice to then move outward in his moral and political comportment, to perpetuate the revolutionary spirit within Anarres and an ethic of communication with Urras and all the known worlds that thereby overcomes the self-imposed exile of the Anarresti. His past and his future are united in his present, which itself is at once a sequential movement from out of the past and into the future and simultaneous as the future—i.e., his own most proper, thus self-appropriated, potentiality for being—lays its claim on his present. Despite the seeming determinacy of the past, Shevek acts to reconfigure his mode of being away from inauthenticity—away from his prior deference to the bureaucratic and functionalist politics of Anarres—to the authenticity that assures him of the self-governance that is proper to his own being. Shevek demonstrates, as LeGuin would have us understand, that 'Fulfillment,' as Shevek thought, 'is a function of time.'<sup>34</sup>

But here, I suggest, Shevek shows that in truth he is neither archist nor anarchist

in the usual senses of these contraposed terms, but instead the complement of the two. And, the ambiguity of *The Dispossessed* as a utopia, with the multiple complementarities structured by LeGuin, points to the principle of integration, especially in relation to the Jungian concept of integration of self. Ellen M. Rigsby is correct to find fault in some critics of the work who complain that LeGuin did not provide enough 'information about the political system' of Anarres.<sup>35</sup> As she says, it does not follow logically that 'a system must be wrung from the text for it to describe a politics.' LeGuin's imagination of an experiment in anarchical living, contrasted to the usual 'State' political apparatus on Urras, decidedly distinguishes anarchism and archism, and it describes a politics on Anarres without the structures of the 'State' as such. In effect, LeGuin's dichotomy of anarchism and archism underscores the disjunction of 'government' and 'self-governance.' The concept of 'self-governance' is, in fact, not represented properly by the concept of 'anarchist;' hence, this is where I go beyond LeGuin to link the Heideggerian concept of authentic selfhood to that of self-governance.

I submit that, the concept 'autarchist'—etymologically derived from ancient Greek to mean one who is self-sufficient through his or her self-ruling—more properly captures the sense of 'who' Shevek is in and through his political ethos and how he appropriates the function of governance to himself rather than externalize it in any number of ways in which heteronomy encroaches upon his moral autonomy, whether on Anarres or elsewhere such as in his encounters with the scientists and those representing the interests of the governments of A-lo or Thu. Indeed, Rigsby is entirely correct to highlight a principal point of LeGuin's narrative: 'that society can exist in which everyone acts on his or her own

31. Ibid.

32. Elliot, 2005, op. cit.

33. LeGuin, 1974, op. cit.

34. Ibid

35. Ellen M Rigsby. (2005). "Time and the Measure of the Political Animal," in Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman, ed. *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. LeGuin's The Dispossessed*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books. 167-180.



initiative.<sup>36</sup> 'Initiative', in the ancient Greek sense, is expressed by the word 'arché', which is often translated as principle, or rule, beginning, etc. It is through this initiative of self-governance that Shevek accomplishes the power of social change and thereby has the moral authority to do so in a constant interrogation and challenge to the status quo, custom, and the inertia that preserves the authority of tradition merely for the sake of tradition. It is in this sense, taking up the power of his own initiative, that Shevek takes up what is his own, thus what is authentikos (authentic, being true to himself) and autarchos (self-governing).

Rigsby perspicaciously captures the important point of the linkage of ethics and time in words Shevek speaks, where he speaks of 'chronosophy' or wisdom about time:

But it's true, chronosophy does involve ethics. Because our sense of time involves our ability to separate cause and effect, means and ends. The baby, the animal, they don't see the difference between what they do now and what will happen because of it. They can't make a pulley, or a promise. We can. Seeing the difference between the now and not now, we can make the connection. And there morality enters in. Responsibility... To break a promise is to deny the reality of the past; therefore it is to deny the hope of a real future.<sup>37</sup>

Shevek realizes that he cannot 'convert' the Urrasti to his way of thinking as an anarchist or even as a temporal physicist, even as he realizes he has to return to Anarres and face the consequences of his break with those Anarresti who preferred continuing isolation of Anarres to the communicative engagement with all

the known worlds that Shevek initiated. His return, as Rigsby rightly points out, is one in which he chooses 'to continue his initiative to unbuild walls...'<sup>38</sup> As he had said when deciding to go to Urras, he will fulfill his 'proper function in the social organism...to unbuild walls.'<sup>39</sup> As the permanent revolutionary, Shevek embodies 'the enduring reality of Anarres,' the reality not of an anarchical society, but the reality of the autarchos who will not surrender his radical freedom, daily to take it up and to act responsibly on his own initiative.

Linking Heidegger's philosophy to a conception of the political, I have written elsewhere that, 'To every factual determination of the political belongs the originary task of bringing political being into its essential determination.'<sup>40</sup> Political philosophers teach about political ideas, structures, and systems, mostly as informed from the record of historical and extant political societies. The twenty-first century presents humankind with the prospect of a technocratic world order in which individual initiative and the radical freedom on which it is grounded are entirely supplanted, i.e., individuals transformed into 'human resources' readily used, disposed, and abused according to the dictates of instrumental and technocratic reason. Yet, every human being always retains the originary task or original liability of his and her existence as an ethico-political being, the task that speaks to him and her from out of his and her 'origin' to bring political being into unconcealment (what Heidegger calls *Unverborgenheit*), i.e., into its essential determination. I have proposed: "Autarchos" names that to which the human as political being is authentically released as the originary presence of politics.<sup>41</sup> Every individual who appropriates his

or her own initiative answers the call of the origin that discloses an 'original praxis'—a call that pushes into insignificance the ideological appeals of the 'they-self' by privileging 'that potentiality-for-being-political which is most one's own (eigentlich).'<sup>42</sup> What is most one's own, what is authentic, is to be self-governing, 'to be' authentikos as autarchos. In the jointure of aesthetic and ethical appeal, one comes to understand: One must be persistent, steadfast (*ständig*), in one's projection of one's potentiality-to-be, if one is to disclose oneself with constancy in the mode of authenticity. The modification from inauthenticity is a persevering movement that navigates the present being's self-disclosure in view of the projected futural being toward which one inclines in standing out (*ek-stasis*) beyond the present. Following Heidegger's engagement of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book VI), as Walter Brogan clarifies, 'The virtuous intellect is virtuous to the extent that it holds in truth and safeguards (*Verwahrung*) the disclosure of beings,'<sup>43</sup> including here being open to one's ownmost 'ontological liability' (liability for one's own being) and safeguarding one's authentic selfhood against the encroachments of the they-self.

Through the sort of self-governance that Shevek exemplifies (despite his succumbing occasionally to the appeals of 'the public' of either Anarres or Urras) that make him inauthentic in a given moment of action, LeGuin presents us with the possibility, the real possibility (howsoever difficult) of radical freedom that is at the same time fully ethically responsible. Indeed, as Vandana Singh put it, 'What LeGuin did was to take down the walls around the imagination, and to set us all free. To shift the paradigms, the conceptual constructs by which we make sense

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., LeGuin, 1974, op. cit.

38. Rigsby, 2005, op. cit.

39. LeGuin, 1974, op. cit.

40. Norman K. Swazo. (2002). *Crisis Theory and World Order: Heideggerian Reflections*. Albany: SUNY Press.

41. Ibid.,

42. Ibid.

43. Walter. Brogan. (2005). *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Twofoldness of Being* Albany: SUNY Press.

of the world, is no small thing.<sup>44</sup>

Positing the foregoing as a compelling sense of political ethics where reason and imagination are complementary and by no means 'unreal,' one may conclude by heeding LeGuin's words. She tells us, her readers, 'When treated—even with much praise—as a methodical ax grinder, I am driven to deny that there's any didactic intention at all in my fiction. Of course, there is—I'm dead set against preaching, but the teaching impulse is often stronger than I am.'<sup>45</sup> LeGuin does not want the reader to make the reductive move that simply says, 'J'aime Shevek,' whereby character and author are wholly identified to be in agreement. She comments that *The Dispossessed* is not 'an exposition of ideas' but 'an embodiment of idea—a revolutionary artifact, a work containing a potential permanent source of renewal of thought and perception...' She observes that the narrative of the book, as she wrote it, 'seemed to follow neither an arbitrary nor a rationally decided course,' yet there is

therein a constituted 'architecture which is fundamentally aesthetic and which, in being so, fulfils an intellectual or rational design.'<sup>46</sup>

'LeGuin,' Julie Phillips reminds, 'was aware, always, that there were other stories to tell.'<sup>47</sup> Indeed. Each of us, always, in the unity of our ownmost sequency and simultaneity of being, have our own stories to tell, uniting our past with the indeterminate future from out of which we disclose who we are, thus to create the world anew. Either that, or we face a future such as the Terran Ambassador Keng characterized it in rueful retrospect as she spoke to Shevek about her past (which is the potential future of our Earth):

My world, my Earth, is a ruin. A planet spoiled by the human species. We multiplied and gobbled and fought until there was nothing left, and then we died. We controlled neither appetite nor violence; we did not adapt. We destroyed ourselves. But we destroyed the world first... You

Odonians chose a desert; we Terrans made a desert... We failed as a species, as a social species... [We]... saved what could be saved, and made a kind of life in the ruins...<sup>48</sup>

LeGuin teaches us in such writing that reason and imagination have their efficacious confluence, but also that one ought not to dismiss the truth of the imagination out of misplaced methodological commitment to scientific realism. *The Dispossessed* is a work of art that permits us a way to envision both the possibility and the reality of authentic selfhood in the setting of an ethical politics. This work elicits a truth that is not limited to the imagination of Anarres but that speaks to us in the present as we seek our dwelling upon this Earth. Even on the 'Terra' that is our present reality, radical freedom and ethical responsibility are irrevocably conjoined, so that one who would be—and resolves himself and herself to be—autarchos, ever manifests the permanent revolution of a thinking mind that safeguards the future in the present.

44. Vandana. Singh, "True Journey is Return: A Tribute to Ursula K. LeGuin," *Antariksh Yatra*, <https://vandanasingh.wordpress.com/2018/01/26/true-journey-is-return-a-tribute-to-ursula-k-le-guin/>, accessed 27 May 2019.

45. Ursula K. LeGuin. (2005). "A Response, by Ansible, from Tau Ceti," in Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman, ed. *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. LeGuin's The Dispossessed*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books. 305-308.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Julie Phillips, "The Subversive Imagination of Ursula K. LeGuin," *The New Yorker*, 25 January 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/postscript/the-subversive-imagination-of-ursula-k-le-guin>, accessed 27 May 2019.

48. LeGuin, 1974, op. cit.

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