RAWLS' AMBIGUOUS UTOPIA

Rawls' realistic utopia has been subject to much criticism. The Realist claims Rawls' realistic utopia to be too utopian. The Cosmopolitan, on the other hand, claims Rawls' realistic utopia to be insufficiently utopian. In this essay, I argue that the criticism can be circumvented by means of clarifying an ambiguity in the concept of utopia. I argue that the Realist is not criticizing Rawls for being utopian, but unrealistic, impractical and idealistic (quixotic). The Cosmopolitan might, however, be right in criticizing Rawls for not being utopian enough. The orthodox understanding of utopia, adopted by the Cosmopolitan is, however, in itself quixotic. Drawing on Le Guin's *The Dispossessed,* I will propose a novel understanding of how utopia ought to be understood. Once the Rawlsian adopts this conception of utopia, it alleviates the objections raised by the Realist and the Cosmopolitan.

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Rawls has received criticism from realists, declaring a realistic utopia to be too utopian, and from cosmopolitans that it is not utopian enough. In this essay, I suggest the disagreement can be alleviated by clarifying an ambiguity in the concept utopia. There are two understandings of utopia: (1) a perfect and/or ideal society and (2) an implausibly idealistic, unrealistic and/or impractical society (quixotic). Most, including Rawls, appear to hold these meanings simultaneously, reducing utopia to an unachievable ideal. We need to remove the second meaning of utopia, and acquire a better understanding of the first. In short, I defend the idea of a realistic utopia by proposing a new way of understanding what a utopia *ought* to be. In doing so, I draw on Ursula K. Le Guin's notion of a utopia in her science fiction novel *The Dispossessed*. First, however, an excursion into Rawls' realistic utopia is required. Second, we explore criticism raised by realists and cosmopolitans. In this context, a realist is one who accentuates competitiveness and power in political relations. A cosmopolitan underscores cooperation, and that human beings should be members of one single community. Finally, we examine Le Guin's conception of utopia. Le Guin's idea of a utopia can, I opine, improve Rawls' conception of a realistic utopia in the following four ways:

(i) clear up misunderstandings concerning the concept utopia; (ii) illustrate how a utopia *ought* to be understood; (iii) suggest ways of clarifying Rawls' skepticism of utopian thought; (iv) help resolve the aforementioned criticisms. Once the Rawlsian adopts this conception of utopia, the charge that Rawls' realistic utopia is too utopian, or insufficiently utopian, can be circumvented.

1. Rawls' realistic utopia

Rawls' realistic utopia is *realistic* because it tackles current and actual problems, and because it does not put unreasonable expectations on its citizens. Rawls' realistic utopia is *utopian* in that it sets goals and shows us what to reach for. Rawls combines *ideal* theory—defining normative standards—and *non-ideal* theory, developing measures suited for real-world conditions. Rawls' aim, therefore, is to converge the ideal with reality—the "is" and the "ought"—and model a world of sovereign states under a reasonable and just, realistically-utopian, law of peoples.

For a liberal society to be realistically utopian, according to Rawls, seven conditions should be met (Rawls 1999, 12). For our purposes, the first three are of importance, being conditions for a liberal society to be realistic and utopian. The first condition is *stability for the right*

reasons. If the relationship between Russia and the US in the cold war was stable*,* it was definitely not stable for the right reasons. According to the second condition, a realistic utopia must be workable and applicable in the political and social world of today. Call this second condition *realistically grounded*. The third condition specifies that "A necessary condition for a political conception of justice to be *utopian* is that it uses political (moral) ideals, principles and concepts to specify a reasonable and just society" (Rawls 1999, 14). A society cannot, accordingly, be based on process and rules alone, but rather on something purposeful, like social justice and equality. We need reasonable liberal conceptions of justice specifying basic rights and liberties. Call this third condition *desired results*.

A realistic utopia should include three additional features: the first a fact, the second a criterion, the third an opportunity. According to the fact of *reasonable pluralism*, we are bound to reasonably disagree on such areas as morality and religion because of different cultures and traditions of thought (Rawls 2009, 11).[1] As long as it is a reasonable Catholicism, or Old Norse polytheism, for example, none should be disregarded because of disagreement between them. It would, conversely, be unreasonable to impose a religion on someone. It would, inversely, be unreasonable to deny someone the choice of whether to be religious. The *criterion of reciprocity* specifies that "[…] representatives must think not only that it is reasonable for them to propose it, but also that it is reasonable for other peoples to accept it" (Rawls 1999, 14). The opportunity is *overlapping consensus*, where citizens endorse a core set of laws for different reasons. The idea is that opposing religions and moral doctrines can agree on particular principles of justice.

In summary, Rawls' realistic utopia could be a model for achieving global justice. Rawls' hope is that the combination of two seemingly contradictory notions, the realistic and the utopian, can lead to a just society that is stable over time.[2]

2. The Cosmopolitan and the Realist

The criticisms leveled by both the Realist and the Cosmopolitan originates in Rawls' attempt at unifying realism and cosmopolitanism (Audard 2006, 59).[3] The Realist complains that Rawls is being too utopian. The Cosmopolitan accuses him of being insufficiently utopian. Before presenting the criticism, however, I will try to elucidate the differences in the realistic vision, and the utopian vision of the Cosmopolitan.

2.1 Competing visions

One challenge for Rawls' realistic utopia is that it combines two entirely different ways of thinking, namely a realistic and a utopian mode of thought (Sowell 1987, 22-3).[4] Generally, realist thinking is skeptical, and favors a rule-based system emphasizing *process*. Utopian thinking, antithetically, converges on *desired results* achieved through emphasizing ends instead of means.

At the root of this divide is two competing notions of human nature (Ibid., 30). For the Realist, human nature is morally and cognitively limited. We need, therefore, *incentives* to encourage us to do good for society and deter us from doing bad. The Utopian disagrees; humans are capable of goodness and self-sacrifice without incentives. The solution for the Utopian, then, lies not in feeding man's ego, but rather in committing to ideals. Moreover, utopian thinking aspires to a world without war, where power is no longer the dominant determinate for relationships. The Realist is skeptical of the prospect of achieving these ideals. To sum up, realists stress constraints, utopians stress opportunities. What Rawls is trying to do—quite ingeniously—is combine them to achieve a realistically constrained utopia.

A final distinction is needed. The Utopian regards politics as a function of ethics, while the Realist regards ethics as a function of politics (Carr, Cox & Cox 1981, 42). The Rawlsian and the Cosmopolitan agree, therefore, that politics can be a function of ethics (Rawls 1999, 35).[5] The Realist disagrees, and considers normative principles irrelevant for solving international conflicts (Audard 2006, 1).

2.2 The Realist

Realism rose up, amongst other reasons, as a countermovement to the dominance of Rawlsian influence within political theory (Galston 2010, 285). The Realist opposes the Rawlsian tendency "to evade, displace or escape from politics" (Ibid.). According to the Realist, the utopian perspective of the Rawlsian ought to be avoided. Specifically, there are three remedies the Realist suggests for a utopian framework (Ibid., 394-5).[6] First, it is important to always be aware of the possibility of regress as well as progress. Second, it is better to shift focus to the worst-case scenario instead of hoping for the best. Third, principles cannot be standards for political life unless they are feasible in the real world.

There are at least three additional reasons why the Realist rejects Rawls' realistic utopia. First, for reasons outlined above, a realistic utopia is not *realistically grounded*. Second, the idea of overlapping consensus is implau-

sible (Galston 2016, 112).[7] Even assuming overlapping consensus were possible, it could not provide normative facts (Ibid., 113).[8] Third, the Realist considers *conflict* as ineradicable, and views "political moralists" as hopelessly optimistic of achieving a normative or practical consensus (Galston 2010, 396).[9] Accordingly, if one espouses the realist view, the best we can hope for is a modus vivendi.[10] Hence, Rawls' realistic utopia is too utopian.

2.3 The Cosmopolitan

The Cosmopolitan has four misgivings concerning the Rawlsian realistic utopia. First, the Cosmopolitan regards Rawlsian ideals as feeble, and not superior to the status quo (Brock 2010, 90). Rawls has, in fact, offered nothing more than a modus vivendi with oppressor states (Ackerman 1994, 383). Second, the Cosmopolitan finds the law of peoples to be unstable because it involves tolerance of unjust regimes. For instance, every Islamic nation will have women who insist on equal rights. The Cosmopolitan then asks: "Given these facts, the West must choose, and why should we choose to betray our own principles and side with the oppressors rather than the oppressed?" (Ibid.). Third, for the Cosmopolitan, the scope Rawls sets out for his theory of justice is too limited.[11] In *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls is concerned with justice *between* societies instead of justice *within* societies. The Cosmopolitan finds this peculiar given their close relation, enforcing the worry of relaxed toleration among non-liberal societies to do what they please with their citizens. Fourth, the Cosmopolitan objects to representatives making choices for the society, and not all the world's members (Brock 2010, 61).[12] In sum, the Cosmopolitan wants the scope of a Rawlsian realistic utopia to be global, and the basis to be on the individual. Hence, Rawls' realistic utopia is not utopian enough.

2.4 Resolving misconceptions of the term utopia

Rawls is being accused of being culturally imperialistic, while at the same time *too* considerate of non-democratic countries (Audard 2006, 16). The Cosmopolitan finds Rawls insufficient both in liberal and individualist accounts, while the Realist (and the Relativist) thinks him too liberal and individualistic (Ibid.). It does not appear that Rawls can be *utopian* and *realistic* concurrently.

However, it seems to me that the Realist suffers under the second (mis)comprehension of utopia.[13] They are not questioning whether it is an ideal society. What Rawls is being accused of, perhaps unsurprisingly, is being *unrealistic*. The Realist criticizes Rawls' negative stand to modus vivendi because anything else is unrealistic. The claim that

principles has to be feasible in order to be good standards for political life is based on *attainability*, not whether the aspiration is ideal or not. Furthermore, the Realist's criticism of «hoping for the best» does not describe what that «best» is. Rather, they denounce hope itself as *improbable.* This all culminates in whether a realistic utopia is *realistic* —not utopian. Perhaps, then, the Realist should refrain from calling a realistic utopia *too* utopian, as if it was an epithet. The criticism of a realistic utopia not leaving room for conflict and regress, however, still stands.

The Cosmopolitan has the correct understanding of utopia as an ideal future. However, challenges can be put to the *vision* of that future. Let us, therefore, remove the quixoticness of utopia, and turn our focus to how a perfect and ideal society ought to be.[14]

3. An ambiguous utopia

I begin this section by looking at the orthodox notion of a utopia. Then, I outline some literary distinctions, before turning to Le Guin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia.* I shall argue that Le Guin's notion of a utopia is one the Rawlsian should adopt.

3.1 Utopia

The term utopia was coined by Thomas More,[15] in his book by the same name (2003, 147). The notion was based on a pun: *outopia*, meaning no place; *eutopia*, meaning good place.[16] More's *Utopia* was, consequently, judged unlikely by his peers, which is one of the reasons why utopia received its double meaning (Madeline & Rogan 2009, 309).[17] Post More, the focus in literature converted to making a blueprint of a "good" place. Utopian literature has been changing ever since. Prior to the 1960s, however, it seems to have some recurring characteristics: a perfect place, safe environment, universal agreement, perfect harmony and everlasting peace. In addition, it is often a social commentary, imagining a society with a given set of conditions often chosen to illuminate the wrongs of its time (Ibid., 314).[18]

Rawls is skeptical of utopian thinking, and enumerates three dangerous tendencies (Curtis 2005, 266). First, utopians assume any problem to be solvable. Second, utopians might let ends justify means. Third, utopians assume everyone can be attracted to the same vision, hence compromise becomes difficult. A realistic utopia suggests, however, that Rawls is trying to determine whether a utopian society is possible. Why, then, does he constantly emphasize its realisticity and not its utopian component? (Brock 2010, 91). Why even use *utopia*? I find Shaun P. Young's
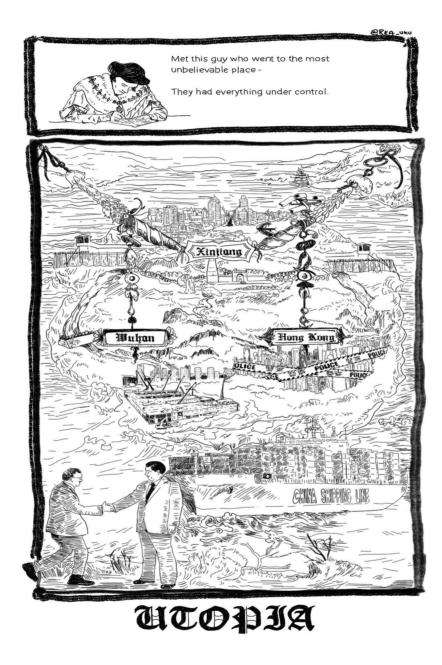
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answer to this quite compelling:

> Rawls emphasizes that our ambitions for the future character of the global order need not and should not be restricted to what is currently possible: the "actual" must not overwhelm our beliefs concerning what *might* be achieved (2011, 26).

Put differently, it is important for the Rawlsian to retain the notion of a utopia in a society.

3.2 Literary distinctions

Margaret Atwood draws an illuminating distinction between science fiction and speculative fiction: whereas science fiction deals with "technologies we don't yet have, other universes[...]", speculative fiction deals with this planet; "it doesn't use things we do not already have or are not already developing" (Mancuso 2016). *The Dispossessed* is an example of both, having sophisticated space travel we do not have and political problems we do have. In combination, Le Guin can illuminate *today's* issues with *tomorrow's* outlook.

Another helpful distinction is between *written* and *unwritten* worlds (Stow 2002, 78). Instead of the common distinction between imagination and reality, which might force the imagination *out* of reality, the distinction between written and unwritten worlds better helps distinguish between the world of the text and the world in which that text was written (Stow 2005, 37). To write fiction is not just imagining, but also being aware of what is going on in real life.

The complexity of the relationship between the written and unwritten world illustrates the problem with utopia in political theory: Either the two worlds are entirely separate, reducing utopia to a thought experiment with little practical importance (idealistic), or the distinction is ignored and utopia is seen as a detailed blueprint for a future society (Ibid.). This is how utopia has been thought of in the history of political thinking, from Thucydides to Rawls. Rawls differs from his historic predecessors, however, in wanting to combine the two in a realistic utopia. Rawls is still, however, under the spell of dichotomy. In *The Dispossessed*, Le Guin shows us a third solution to the problem of Utopia. In her creation of two fully realized literary worlds, *Anarres* and *Urras*, Le Guin shows a way out of juxtaposing realities as a source of critical insights (Ibid.). *The Dispossessed* can be read as a postmodern utopian story, its main feature being self-reflexive; challenging the reader to review what we think of a utopia. Similarly,

Le Guin's utopia can be depicted as a critical utopia, which focuses on global exploitation, gender and race inequality, and class antagonism (Moylan 1986, 10). Le Guin does not want to look at utopias as blueprints, nor as simple thought experiments, but as "ways of exploring, amongst other things, the politics, relationships and emotions of the unwritten world under different conditions" (Stow 2005, 38).

3.3 Le Guin's ambiguous utopia

Le Guin writes: "If you like you can read it, and a lot of other science fiction, as a thought experiment" (2000, 12). Let us abide by her example. The following is a rendition of Le Guin's *The Dispossessed.*

Imagine two planets with the names Anarres and Urras. In the beginning Anarres was the moon of Urras. Due to ideological disagreements, however, a group of people literally got sent to the moon by the government. On this new planet, Anarres, they created a world vastly different to that of Urras. The new world was based on freedom and created with no government and few rules. Anarres turned out to be, however, a difficult world. "Anarres is all dust and dry hills. All meagry, all dry […] The towns are very small and dull, they are dreary. No palaces. Life is dull, and hard work. You can't always have what you want, or even what you need, because there isn't enough" (Ibid., 114). Urras, on the other hand, is a beautiful place. People from Urras, called Urrasti have an abundance of everything.

> Enough air, enough rain, grass, oceans, food, music, buildings, factories, machines, books, clothes, history […] Everything is beautiful, here. Only not the faces. On Anarres nothing is beautiful, nothing but the faces […] Here you see the jewels, there you see the eyes. And in the eyes you see the splendour, the splendour of the human spirit (Ibid.).

On Urras, however, there is no trust. They don't know where allegiances lie. On Anarres, there is no allegiance, so there is no reason *not* to trust. On Urras basic rights are not a given. On Anarres, not having basic rights is unthinkable. On Urras each is alone on a heap of what he owns. On Anarres they have nothing but each other. The Urrasti are possessed, the Anarri the dispossessed.

The main character of the book, Shevek, gets the same choice that I give you now: where do you want to live? Second question: which world would you consider to be the most utopian? Last question: do the first and second question have the same answer? The answer to the second

question is, in my opinion, Anarres. It is not, however, obvious that Anarres is the answer to both questions. In fact, I would hazard that most people would want to live on Urras. Let us consider in more detail what makes Anarres a utopian candidate.[19]

On Anarres, people are enjoying individual *freedom.* Being confused on Urras, Shevek asks: "Why do you talk in abstractions? … It's not names of countries, it is people killing each other. Why do soldiers go? Why does a man go and kill strangers?" (Le Guin 2002, 188). On Anarres they are in alliance with peoples, not some unseen state or government. In addition, there is no forced labor (Ibid.). Everyone chips in on the "dirty work" when necessary. Accordingly, no one must do hard or degrading work full time.

On Anarres, there is no sense of *possession.* As a result, people do not rob and murder. They have no reason to do so, nobody *owns* anything for anyone to steal. Not being possessed in this way, people earn according to the work they do. "Nothing is yours. It is to use. It is to share. If you will not share it you cannot use it" (Ibid., 26). On Anarres, they have no possessive pronouns. People would not say "my shirt", but instead "the shirt that I use". Clothing is made communally by people who have volunteered on a clothing making assignment. Shevek is perplexed to see, on Urras, that "[a]ll the people in all the shops were either buyers or sellers. They had no relation to the things but that of possession" (Ibid., 111).

On Anarres, people are happy. Happiness is the responsibility of the individual, but the conditions for attaining happiness is the responsibility of the community; conditions such as housing, education and enough food.[20] On Anarres, people are accepted for who they are. There is no punishment for sexual practice, except that of rape (Ibid., 204). Furthermore, they do not distinguish, in any significant way, between men and women. On Urrus, on the contrary, there are significant gender differences. For instance, no women are scientists on Urrus, and the idea of it is found to be ridiculous.

Reconsidering the questions above, I would think that most people would still want to live on Urras, while at the same time consider Anarres most utopian. In other words, people would *not* choose to live in an ideal society. I think this illustrates some complexities concerning the concept of utopia, raising questions like what a utopia can be, what factors a utopia depends on, and whether utopia is an end state or a comparative quality.

If this is all that there is to Anarres, however, Le Guin's utopia would suffer from the same shortcoming of quixo-

ticness as the other utopias. Indeed, if read in isolation, the Anarres chapters of *The Dispossessed* bear a striking resemblance to a perfectionist utopia (Ferns 2005, 254). Le Guin solves this problem with the admission that some parts of human nature and aspects of the world are unavoidable. There are three main elements that help distance Le Guin's utopia from the orthodox notion of utopia: *ambiguity, skepticism* and the need for *change.*

Anarres is ambiguous because it inhabits two concepts previously thought incompatible with utopia: imperfection and suffering (Le Guin 2002, 52-3). Suffering is a natural part of life, however, not just on Anarres. Imperfection is based on the fact that a world will always involve such things as pain and suffering, and will always depend on the world we live in and the creatures that live on it. We see, therefore, how Le Guin's utopia is *realistically grounded.* It is feasible in the world as we know it.

The Dispossessed is different from its utopian antecedents in that it does not maintain the separation between utopia and reality (Ferns 2005, 255). Le Guin is skeptical of thinking of a utopia in isolation, detached from human nature and history. Anarres is not immune to famine, viruses, conflicts and suffering and political disputes. One of the most illuminating examples of her skepticism is the lack of a happy ending in *The Dispossessed.* It has an open ending, not telling the reader if all goes well. It is the same with a utopia, never knowing what the future brings.

To see the need for *change* in a utopia we need another plunge into *The Dispossessed.* By our notion of written and unwritten worlds, perhaps we can learn from the *written* world of Anarres to incite change on the *unwritten* world of present-day earth. When the settlers arrived on Anarres, they had an ideology based on principles of freedom, called Odonianism. On present-day Anarres, however, they have forgotten the ideology. Shevek argues:

> […] we didn't come to Anarres for safety, but for freedom. If we must all agree, all work together, we're no better than a machine. The duty of the individual is to accept *no* rule, to be the initiator of his own acts, to be responsible. Only if he does so will the society live, and change, and adapt, and survive (Le Guin 2002, 295).

> […] We fear being outcast, being called lazy, dysfunctional, egoising. We fear our neighbour's opinion more than we respect our own freedom of choice … We've made laws, laws of conventional behaviour, built walls all around ourselves, and we can't see them, because they're part of our thinking (Ibid., 272).

On Anarres, individualism is important, and universal agreement is not a virtue.[21] If people accept being ruled, even if it is through neighbors and conventional behavior, people are not free. The inhabitants of Anarres have been so caught up with the social conscience that they have failed to realize that they are conforming to laws, effectively indoctrinating themselves. This is the primary reason why they are in need of change, in need of a revolution. The secondary reason is that scientific progress and information are impeded on Anarres, justified by the hard work in need of doing. The tertiary reason for a revolution is that people are measured in utility. People are not, for instance, allowed to practice music since music is not viewed as useful. A friend of Shevek complains: "The circle has come right back round to the most vile kind of profiteering utilitarianism" (Ibid., 147). It is an illuminating example of a tendency revolutions have to relapse into something all too similar to the social order they were designed to overthrow (Ferns 2005, 250). Without a permanent revolution, a constant reevaluation of society, people become stagnant. Shevek, in collaboration with some friends, creates a faction trying to change the status quo; the modus vivendi. They make information and research open and free for everyone. In addition, Shevek travels to Urras creating friction on both planets, igniting change. Anarres is able to revitalize its revolutionary potential only when Shevek annihilates the wall that has cut his home world off from contact with other worlds (Somay 2005, 242).

In sum, then, Le Guin's utopia is *ambiguous* in relation to the orthodox idea of a utopia; it is *not* a final, static goal, but rather a work in progress. Le Guin is a *skeptic* rooted in reality. Constant *change* is not just a need, but a premise for a utopia. A utopia should be dynamic, premised on an acceptance of a reality with social conflicts and historical change (Davis 2005, 18). The process of utopia is a never-ending (r)evolution (Rodgers 2005, 191).

There are two additional features that make Anarres utopian. The first is its inhabitants' efforts to uphold the principle that one cannot justify the happiness of some by sacrificing or degrading other people (Davis 2005, xxi). The second is that violence, which unavoidably will happen, has been disconnected from institutions (Stillman 2005, 60). A Rawlsian would not adopt such a disconnection from institutions. A Rawlsian should, however, incorporate the principle of freedom, and the three elements of ambiguity, skepticism and change.[22]

3.4 Rawls' ambiguous utopia

As we saw in section 3.1, Rawls has three apprehensions of

a utopian mode of thought. I am going to shorthand them here as (1) quixotism, (2) ends justifying means and (3) dogmatism. In my opinion, Le Guin's ambiguous utopia withstands all three concerns. Why not begin with the latter, and work our way backwards.

Rawls is famously critical of utilitarianism for its teleology. He has the same misgiving of utopian thinking. Rawls suspects that utopianism breeds a dogmatism laying down principles that are undeniably true (Curtis 2005, 267). This is exactly what Le Guin rejects when she chooses the more chaotic and difficult world of Anarres as a utopia over the dogmatic world of Urras (Ibid., 270). The guiding principles of Odonianism are not intended as appeals to a shared future outcome, but as a common ground always open to interpretation. The possibilities inherent in the concept of utopia, that should be sought, is not dogmatic perfectionism, but skepticism (Ibid., 266). Anarres is a skeptical utopia—resembling the notion of a critical utopia, as mentioned in section 3.1.—far from the ordinarily visioned utopia of final perfection. Furthermore, Le Guin's utopia is both realistic and realistically grounded. Anarres is a world with ongoing struggles, imperfect ideals and in constant need of re-shaping in light of changing conditions. Anarres, therefore, is not a dogmatic utopia.

The need for change and rethinking in a society, illustrates how ends could not justify means for Le Guin. When injustice does occur, as it has on Anarres, the responsibility falls on the people to revolt, which Shevek (finally) attempts to motivate. The current conditions are not acceptable, neither on Anarres nor Urras. Change is needed in a utopia. The ends in itself might be interchangeable.

We removed quixotism from the concept of utopia in section 2.4. Recall the three meanings quixotism encompasses: idealism, impracticality and unrealisticness.[23] Anarres is not a perfect society. Consequently, it is not too idealistic. Anarres does not assume perfect harmony, nor absence of conflict. Consequently, it is not impractical. Anarres have constant problems, disagreements and suffering. Consequently, it is not unrealistic. Anarres is, in conclusion, not quixotic. "Our society is practical. Maybe too practical", Shevek says to a fellow scientist on Urrus. No longer an idealist like the settlers were, Shevek is more like a pessimist when saying, "What is idealistic about social cooperation, mutual aid, when it is the only means of staying alive?" (Le Guin 2002, 113-4). They have achieved their ideal on Anarres because the ideal is grounded in reality. Le Guin's ambiguous utopia is not meant to be perfect. Rather, like Odonianism, it is intended as a focal point for creative, thought-provoking, and politically en-

gaged debate (Davis 2005, xxvi).

The question remains, however: is Anarres sufficiently utopian? I think it is. Anarres is utopian, not because of the conditions on the planet; not because of a miraculous change in human nature; not because of a final goal finally reached; not because of universal agreement - no, it is a utopia *despite* the conditions on the planet; despite human nature; despite imperfection. A utopia depends not on conditions of a world, but the people on it. The Anarri refuses to spurn the principles of freedom.[24] Happiness cannot be justified by sacrificing some people for others.[25]

Reconsidering some of the requirements of a Rawlsian realistic utopia, we can see that Le Guin's utopia aims for desired results but remains realistically grounded. It is not a stable utopia, but *unstable* for the right reasons. I think that (in)stability for the right reasons hold, albeit paradoxically. Indeed, a utopian society *depends* on this instability. We have seen that the Anarri are imposing a lack of freedom on themselves. This is one example of the constant need for change. We need to continually consider possible regress and progress. Furthermore, the fact of reasonable pluralism is retained in an ambiguous utopia because disagreement and conflict occur, but the underlying principles are agreed upon. The criterion of reciprocity becomes a non-problem, directly going against the Anarri's principles of freedom. Overlapping consensus should hold on Anarres because there is no religion, and Odonianism is the prevailing ideology. It is uncertain, however, how overlapping consensus would transfer to a world with a plethora of religions and ideologies.

A few questions are left unanswered: Are we dependent on a struggling world like Anarres to achieve a utopia? Do we need an opposite, like the Anarri and the Urrasti, to unite us? If these are necessary for a utopia, then perhaps we need a crisis as provocation. We should remember, however, that this is not a blueprint, nor a simple thought experiment, but a written world meant as a reflection on the unwritten world. By speculating on today's society with tomorrow's outlook, Le Guin is able to change the utopian perspective. In addition, it underlines Rawls' point of not limiting ourselves to the actual, but always have a "reasonable hope" of something better.

4. Conclusion

I have argued that there are four ways in which Le Guin's ambiguous utopia can improve the Rawlsian realistic utopia: (1) clear up misunderstandings around the concept utopia, (2) clarify Rawls' own skepticism of utopian thought, (3) resolve criticism from the Cosmopolitan and the Realist, and (4) change the conception of utopia.

First, a utopia should not apply to both the quixotic and the ideal, only the latter. We can criticize a utopia for being quixotic, but this should not be implied in the concept itself. Second, Le Guin is not letting means be justified by ends in her utopian vision. The ambiguous utopia is not quixotic and not dogmatic. Le Guin relieves Rawlsian skepticism with her own skeptical utopia. Third, Le Guin's utopia alleviates some of the criticism from the Realist and the Cosmopolitan. The Realist's main criticism is that the Rawlsian realistic utopia is quixotic. I hope, by now, you agree that Le Guin's utopia is not unlikely, unrealistic or impractical. If anything, it is based on realism and practicality. The unlikelihood only lies in its fictionality, but as a written world it attempts only to describe, not to predict. Furthermore, the Realist's emphasis on conflict and regress in society is constantly happening—and expected to—in an ambiguous utopia. The criticism from the Realist should, therefore, be resolved.[26]

The Cosmopolitan might object that the utopian vision of a perfectionist society still stands. The appropriate objection from the Cosmopolitan should be, however, that a realistic utopia is not idealistic. Not being rooted in reality, however, it is unclear what the Cosmopolitan —with the orthodox utopian vision—can achieve. My defense of a realistic utopia from the Cosmopolitan, therefore, lies in denouncing the orthodox notion of utopia for its quixoticness. This does not resolve the criticism from the Cosmopolitan completely, but it does, if nothing else, assuage the criticism. I think the Rawlsian and the Realist would concur.

Fourth, Le Guin's utopia is preferable to the orthodox utopia: it is a *possible* utopia, and it is rooted in reality and human nature. This applies directly to one of the main questions Rawls endeavors to answer in *The Law of Peoples*: Is a realistic utopia possible? (1999, 5-6). If we remain under the current, orthodox conception of utopia, this amounts to a contradiction; is something unreachable reachable? Utopia, as it is commonly understood, is in itself a parody: a perfect society you would be naive to believe in. Why not resolve this parody by making utopia an actual and reachable condition? The conception of utopia from *The Dispossessed* is one the Rawlsian should adopt because it is how utopia ought to be conceived.

The very idea of a perfect society is unrealistic. Indeed, as we saw from the thought experiment, one might not even want to choose a perfect society over a planet that is similar to earth. Le Guin's utopia is not a perfect society. Rather, it is a society that teaches us something about how

ideal and perfect a society can be, while still being connected to the real world. The utopian concept should not pertain to a "perfect society" existing in its own bubble outside of time and place. Utopia should not be a final state, but of comparative quality, taking into account factors such as time, place and its inhabitants. If you want to create a perfect world for humans, then you should include the human factor. The concept "utopia" should not be synonymous with the unrealistic, impracticable and idealistic, because the ideal society, within the correct framework, should be realistic. Anarres is an ideal society despite the conditions on the planet. Anarres is a utopia.

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NOTES

1 According to Rawls, each citizen has their own comprehensive doctrine. If citizens are reasonable, however, they will not impose their doctrines on others who are willing to agree upon mutually beneficial rules.

2 I will concentrate on ideal theory in *The Law of Peoples*, where Rawls (1999) first expounded his theory of a realistic utopia within the context of global justice.

3 Realism, in this context, refers to international or political realism. Cosmopolitanism refers to liberal or political cosmopolitanism. The specifics of each affiliation are, however, of little interest here. The relevance for this essay lies in their core ideas and specific criticism raised against Rawls.

4 Sowell calls them *constrained (*realistic) and *unconstrained (*utopian) vision.

5 Rawls advocates that not just individuals but *peoples* have moral status.

6 Judith Shklar endorses an anti-utopian skepticism (Benhabib 1994, 477-80).

7 Galston finds overlapping consensus so unrealistic that it is not even worth discussing. Then, he goes on to discuss it.

8 Galston regards it as a historical accident.

9 Mouffe (2016, 17) even builds conflict into the definition of the political realm.

10 A modus vivendi is a temporary arrangement in the wait for a solution. Rawls perceives modus vivendi as political in the wrong way. Bernard Williams disapproves, calling Rawls' rejection of modus vivendi a utopian distance from real politics that is potentially dangerous (Galston 2010, 388).
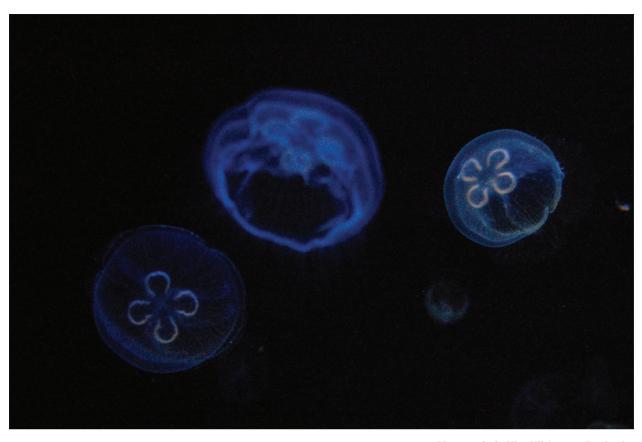
11 See, for instance, Pogge for this view (Audard 2006, 1-2).

12 Pogge (1989, 196) criticizes Rawls for not allowing a global difference principle involving a global tax on wealthy societies to be redistributed to less advantaged societies.

13 Quixotic, as a reminder, means something idealistic, unrealistic and/or impractical.

14 That being said, what follows will underline the removal of quixotic from utopia, as it is a more realistic utopia.

15 More criticizes his *Utopia*, saying more work was needed, thereby

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implying it was a work in progress. My argument, following Le Guin, is that a utopia will always be a work in progress.

16 The idea of an ideal society, however, is much older, and can (at least) be traced back to Plato's *Republic*.

17 It might be an ideal society, but it can never exist.

18 Utopia's evil twin, dystopia, is a depiction of a bad place. Sometimes the differences are, quite ominously, hard to distinguish. If nothing else, dystopias and utopias can be helpful indicators of how un-utopian our world is.

19 For brevity, I have limited myself to a handful of utopian elements of Anarres. The importance for this essay is not the details of the world, but the principles behind it. Furthermore, the reader is not given an abundance of utopian specifics by Le Guin, since this would make it a blueprint.

20 This aligns with Rawls' distinction between reasonableness and rationality. It is better to organize a society based on principles about what is right, and then let people seek out on their own for what is good (Curtis 2005, 266).

21 Contrary to the orthodox notion of utopia, where everyone seems to agree on everything, and no individuals seem to protest. As if asking, why would anyone have reason to protest in a utopia? This is naive. Furthermore, Le Guin's notion of a utopia is more adapted to Rawlsian ideas assuming reasonable pluralism, instead of universal agreement.

22 Central to Le Guin's notion of a utopia—hitherto ignored—is anarchism, a political idea in conflict with Rawlsian ideas. I am not arguing, however, that the Rawlsian should adopt this exact utopia, something both impossible and beside the point. Anarres is a written world; a

description, not a prediction. What I am arguing is that the Rawlsian should adopt, the above-mentioned, core ideas behind it. Anarchism, therefore, need not be adopted. That being said, the anarchistic motivation—skepticism towards capitalistic systems—aligns nicely with the Rawlsian idea of constructing justice that extends beyond the actual, giving rise to a new political reality that is more just than the current state of affairs (Rawls 1999, 12). We see, therefore, that the motivation behind a realistic utopia and an ambiguous utopia is the same, but the political method of achieving an ideal society is different.

23 All commonly connected with—and used as criticism against—a utopia. In our new conception of utopia, they are all removed.

24 Sometimes, however, they need a reminder.

25 Indeed, happiness cannot be justified by the sacrifice of the few for the many. In *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*, Le Guin (1973) depicts a utopian world whose fortunes depend on the perpetual misery of a child, a sacrifice unacceptable to both Le Guin and Rawls. It is an epitome of the Rawlsian maximin principle (maximising the position of the worst-off) as an argument against Utilitarianism.

26 The criticism from the Realist that a realistic utopia is not being realistic enough might still stand. This has, however, not been my aim to disprove in this essay.