

Source A

James, Adam S. Utopian Literature and Political Understanding: The Lasting Relevance of Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas".

The following is an excerpt from the article in an academic paper.

Le Guin's *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* illustrates the fact that utopian fiction and politics go hand in hand. As noted by Maureen Whitebrook, who argues in "Politics and Literature?" that students should turn to literature as a primary source of political understanding, "[the] connection of politics and literature has a long history – from Plato to Hegel, Marx, Arendt".¹⁴ Therefore, Le Guin obviously doesn't accomplish anything 'new' in *Omelas*, though she carries the well-established connection into the postmodern literary space, while promoting a post-modern, liberal political agenda. Whitebrook also notes that "[some] of the best work in 'politics and literature' has taken literature as an essential source of political understanding rather than as mere illustration or example."¹⁵ One such work is Barbara Benne's "Through Ecofeminist Eyes: Le Guin's *"The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"*", published in *The English Journal* in 2005, which remains one of the best secondary sources concerning Le Guin's short story and its political relevance.

In her article, Benne discusses how *Omelas* can easily be read through an ecofeminist lens. Ecofeminism is defined by Benne as "a widely encompassing ideology, touching on subjects as diverse as nature-based religion; animal rights; women's rights; environmental worries about water, land, and air pollution; wildlife conservation; and [most importantly in this case,] the oppression of Third World countries and peoples by the United States and other industrialized nations."¹⁶ The last aspect Benne mentions is clearly the most applicable in the case of *Omelas*. The city of *Omelas* is certainly a part of some industrialized nation, if not its own independent entity, and the suffering child may easily be interpreted as a representation of the Third World's deplorable conditions. But what, exactly, do ecofeminists believe?

First and foremost, according to Benne, "ecofeminists believe in the interconnectedness of all things: What happens in one part of the world, or in one life, will eventually affect all others in the way that all threads reverberate from movement at any spot in a web."¹⁷ Therefore, ecofeminism is clearly on the left end of the political spectrum. It must be noted that a similar

type of global interconnectedness, as promoted by ecofeminism, is becoming more and more established in the broad field of comparative history. The idea of interconnectedness is especially crucial in such fields as 'new global labor history,' which recognizes the fact that the labor situation in one location does not take place in a vacuum, but effects labor situations around the world. Therefore, ecofeminism and new global labor history are, in certain ways, related.

This global viewpoint is especially crucial in the case of *Omelas*, and Benne provides an applicable example to illustrate its relevance: the "[reliance] on cheap and disposable items sold in American stores perpetuates oppression in Third World countries."¹⁸ This fact is virtually common knowledge now, though it was almost certainly less well established in the early 1970s. Today, most adult Americans are aware that the vast majority of the clothing available in shopping malls is made in sweatshops for a meager wage. Likewise, nowadays, everyone is familiar with images of starving children. The suffering child in *Omelas* easily conjures images of, as described by Benne, "the child on television advertisements that seek donations from overfed viewers who want to quell their guilt by writing checks once a month".¹⁹ And, as most citizens in *Omelas* accept the situation of the starving child, most American citizens purchase the sweatshop-manufactured products anyways, and often change the channel to avoid seeing the unpleasant sight of starving children with bloated stomachs.

This is precisely why the most disturbing aspect of Le Guin's story is the fact that "they all know it is there," and most move on with their lives. It is disturbing because we, like the citizens of *Omelas*, all know the starving children are there, somewhere across the world, and "we have [also] found a way to live with the knowledge that the child is there, a way to live in spite of the knowledge."²⁰ We find ways to, as worded by Bennet, "rationalize the existence and suffering of such a child and even forget it. We allow that sometimes the suffering of an individual can be worth the price of the happiness of thousands."²¹ Some of us chalk it up to cultural differences. Others learn to "repress the image to get on with our normal lives."²² Most of us have, even though it is tough to admit, "chosen to allow the child's suffering solely because we like the benefits."²³ It is this awareness of our own acceptance of "the terrible justice of reality" that makes *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* remain as powerful, today, as when it was first published.

Source B

Faragher, Julia. "Rethinking Utopia". 2017. *Cross-sections*, no. XII (September). The Australian National University.
<https://studentjournals.anu.edu.au/index.php/cs/article/view/86>.

The following is an excerpt from the article in the Cross-sections academic journal at the Australian National University.

One of the big questions that come out of 'Omelas' is whether all stories need to have a message or moral. After all, Le Guin has constructed the story so as to entice her readers with the idea of utopia, therefore maximising the impact of the reveal that the city is built upon this one child's suffering. Kenneth Roemer writes that 'as the narrator leaves the descriptive mode and moves to commentary, we discover that the questions are not rhetorical. They pose real ethical, linguistic, and perceptual problems involved in describing and conceptualizing utopia during the last 20th century.⁹ Le Guin has taken her talent as a creative writer and discovered how to use it to advance a more political and ethical message that might initially seem out of place in a fictional universe. This issue is something that I always think about whenever I sit down to write a story, as I have noticed that my writing is much more focused and clearer when I have a specific message or goal in mind. Does the writer have an obligation to make their story worth reading in this way? Arguably, it makes Le Guin's story more 'literary' and less 'popular' in terms of fiction, as it has philosophical value and not just entertainment value. Personally, I have never tackled something as big as Le Guin achieves here, and it is definitely enlightening to see how she has manipulated normal literary conventions to best shape her message. Fictional writing does not always have to be a pursuit of character exploration or a simple three-arc plot — Le Guin demonstrates that it is also possible to pursue a narrative with an agenda. The question remains of whether the reader would walk away from Omelas or not, but perhaps Le Guin did not intend for there to be a straightforward, morally-sound answer. As Roemer writes, 'Each reader will walk away from "Omelas" with different interpretations of the final phase, the child, and the

glorious procession'.¹⁰ One common interpretation views this story as 'an allegory of Western hegemony',¹¹ arguing that its ideas reflect how much of the success and wealth of more affluent, capitalist nations relies on the existence of poorer, third-world countries. As David Brooks writes, 'many of us live in societies whose prosperity depends on some faraway child in the basement'.¹² He continues to describe the 'inner numbing' that this story creates in its readers — as they notice the similarities between Omelas and their own city, they realise that they have already faced this decision and not walked away. However, walking away is not necessarily the 'correct' response to this story. Wyman writes, 'To withdraw, then, from this fellowship would be comparable to betraying the social contract and abdicating responsibility for the child's lot'.¹³ It seems as though the reader has found themselves caught in a catch-22 — if they feel they would remain, they are condoning the child's suffering, but if they leave, they have simply removed themselves from the situation and have actually not done anything to help the city's social problems. Barbara Bennett suggests that it is actually possible to 'walk away figuratively, rather than literally'.¹⁴ Writing from an ecofeminist perspective, she lists ways that readers can achieve this by helping reshape their society rather than just abandoning it, such as 'recycling, carpooling [and] reducing the amount of goods they buy'.¹⁵ It is likely Le Guin is aware that there may not be an answer as to whether we are supposed to walk away from Omelas — but it is important to think about how we might change our behaviour or mindset all the same. Ultimately, "Omelas" encourages its readers to face the harsh reality lying behind the idea of a utopia through an initial lull into believing the beautiful picture but an eventual challenge as to how they might behave in such a society. Le Guin achieves this through descriptive, poetic language shifting into a more hypothetical, speculative form of narration. Essentially, we begin reading a beautiful story but leave rethinking exactly how our world is run.

Source C

Chappell, Sophie-Grace and Nicholas Smyth, "Bernard Williams", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2023/entries/williams-bernard/>.

The following is an excerpt from the article in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

One important misunderstanding can arise fairly naturally from Williams' two famous examples of "Jim", who is told by utilitarianism to murder one Amazon villager to prevent twenty being murdered, and "George", who is told by utilitarianism to take a job making weapons of mass destruction, since the balance-sheet of utilities shows that if George refuses, George and his family will suffer poverty and someone else—who will do more harm than George—will take the job anyway. It is easy to think that these stories are simply another round in the familiar game of rebutting utilitarianism by counter-examples, and hence that Williams' integrity objection boils down to the straightforward inference (1) utilitarianism tells Jim to do X and George to do Y, (2) but X and Y are wrong (perhaps because they violate integrity?), so (3) utilitarianism is false. But this cannot be Williams' argument, because in fact Williams denies (2). Not only does he not claim that utilitarianism tells both Jim and George to do the wrong things. He even suggests, albeit rather grudgingly, that utilitarianism tells Jim (at least) to do the right thing, "...if (as I suppose) the utilitarian is right in this case..." Counter-examples, then, are not the point: "If the stories of George and Jim have a resonance, it is not the sound of a principle being dented by an intuition". The real point, he tells us, is not "just a question of the rightness or obviousness of these answers"; "It is also a question of what sort of considerations come into finding the answer". "Over all this, or round it, and certainly at the end of it, there should have been heard 'what do you think?', 'Does it seem like that to you?', 'What if anything do you want to do with the notion of integrity?'"

Again, despite Williams' interest in the moral category of "the unthinkable", it is not Williams' claim that either Jim or George, if they are (in the familiar phrase) "men of integrity", are bound to find it literally unthinkable to work in WMD or to shoot a villager, or will regard these actions as the sort of things that come under the ban of some absolute prohibition that holds (in Anscombe's famous phrase) whatever the consequences: "this is a much stronger position than any involved, as I have defined the issues, in the denial of consequentialism... It is perfectly consistent, and it might be thought a mark of sense, to believe, while not being a consequentialist, that there was no type of action which satisfied [the conditions for counting as morally prohibited no matter what]"

Nor therefore, to pick up a third misunderstanding of the integrity objection, is Williams offering an argument in praise of "the moral virtue of integrity", where "integrity" is—in jejune forms of this misreading—the virtue of doing the right thing not the wrong thing, or—in more sophisticated forms—a kind of honesty about what one's values really are and a firm refusal to compromise those values by hypocrisy or cowardice (usually, with the implication that one has hold of the right values). An agent can be told by utilitarianism to do something terrible in order to avoid something even worse, as Jim and George are. Williams is not opposing this sort of utilitarian conclusion by arguing that the value of "integrity" in the sense of the word that he anyway does not have in mind—the personal quality—is something else that has to be put into the utilitarian balance-sheet, and that when you put it in, the utilitarian verdict comes out differently. Nor is Williams saying, even, that the value of integrity in the sense of the word that he does have in mind—roughly, allowing agents to be agents—is something else that has to be put into the utilitarian balance-sheet, as it is characteristically put in by indirect utilitarians such as Peter Railton and Amartya Sen: "The point here is not, as utilitarians may hasten to say, that if the project or attitude is that central to his life, then to abandon it will be very disagreeable to him and great loss of utility will be involved. I have already argued in section 4 that it is not like that; on the contrary, once he is prepared to look at it like that, the argument in any serious case is over anyway". Williams' point is rather that the whole business of compiling balance-sheets of the utilitarian sort is incompatible with the phenomenon of agency as we know it: "the reason

why utilitarianism cannot understand integrity is that it cannot coherently describe the relations between a man's projects and his actions". As soon as we take up the viewpoint which aims at nothing but the overall maximisation of utility, and which sees agents as no more than nodes in the causal network that is to be manipulated to produce this consequence, we have lost sight of the very idea of agency.

Source D

“Utilitarianism: Crash Course Philosophy #36” CrashCourse, Youtube, 21 November 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-a739VjqdSI.

The following video can be viewed by clicking on the image below.



Source E

Jackson, Marc Evan, Host. "Ch. 19: William Jackson Harper, Actor | Dr. Todd May, Philosophy Advisor." The Good Place: The Podcast. NBC Entertainment Podcast Network. 28 August 2018

The following podcast episode can be viewed at the timestamps of 00:12:00 - 00:16:34 of episode 19 and clicking the image below.



Source F

Twohy, Mike. "I'm afraid that kidney went to somebody who can write code." *The New Yorker*. 22 June 2015.



"I'm afraid that kidney went to somebody who can write code."