

## FIRST PLACE



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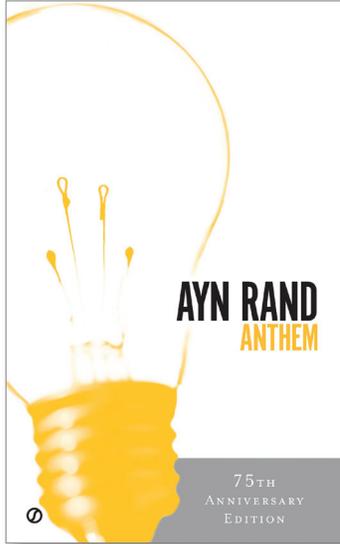
**Equality knows that his invention will benefit mankind greatly. However, this was not his primary motivation in conducting his experiments, and it is not the primary source of the joy and the pride he experiences in his work. What is his primary motivation? Do you think that Equality is right to be motivated in this way? Explain the reasons for your answer. What do you think the world would be like if everyone were motivated in the same way?**

Unlike during the Unmentionable Times, when men created “towers [that] rose to the sky,” it is an affliction to be born with powerful intellectual capacity and ambition in Ayn Rand’s apocalyptic, nameless society in *Anthem*. Collectivism is ostensibly the moral guidepost for humanity, and any perceived threat to the inflexible, authoritarian regime is met with severe punishment. The attack on mankind’s free will and reason is most evident in the cold marble engraving in the Palace of the World Council: “We are one in all and all in one. There are no men but only the great WE, One, indivisible and forever” (6). Societal norms force homogeneity and sacrifice among all people. Laws and rules are crafted to prevent advancement and preserve relentless uniformity under the guise of moral righteousness. Here we find Equality 7-2521 on the path to self-discovery, struggling to understand the internal conflict he faces—his desire to learn and create against government indoctrination to force stagnation and conformity.

Equality possesses gifts despised by the government: intellectual and psychological strength. He aspires to work at the Home of Scholars, where there is some perceived semblance of education and discovery (9). However, knowing Equality possesses talent, the Council of Vocations, in a sinister move, assigns him the role of Street Sweeper (10). By placing Equality in abeyance, the Council attempts to crush his spirit and prevent him from acquiring knowledge, thereby preserving their hegemon. Equality believes he is being punished for his skills, but he accepts his fate pursuant to societal pressure for servitude, save for his “cursed wish to know” (12).

Equality’s desire to learn survives the drudgery. While working one day, he discovers a tunnel from the Unmentionable Times (14). The tunnel becomes his sanctum for knowledge and self-discovery. For three hours each evening, in solitude (a transgression), he pursues his love of scientific experimentation and reflection. The more knowledge he gains, the greater his thirst for knowledge becomes, not for anything or anyone other than for the sake of learning itself (17). He feels no guilt, no regret (17). He begins to realize he is spending his time in the tunnel because he “wish[es] to do it” for himself (17).

Eventually Equality makes the monumental discovery of electric light. He realizes for the first time that he possesses greater wisdom than the Scholars and is willing to say it, not caring about the severe implications (28). Equality naively believes, despite the



transgressions required to make his discovery, that the monumental nature of his work will supersede those infractions and he will be accepted into the Home of Scholars. Years of collectivist subjugation continue to plague his mind and create conflict as he initially believes he created this great work to help others. On the other hand, he feels contentment solely in the act of invention (32). However, Equality's continued use of the word "WE" to articulate his joy (32) implies that he remains ambivalent toward what is driving his happiness.

Equality decides he must divulge his creation, and wants to show the Scholars "the greatest gift ever offered to men" (38). Not unexpectedly, the council is vengeful toward Equality. They accuse him of breaking the law and call for the destruction of his invention (42-43). Equality escapes and runs into the Unchartered Forest, leaving society. The process of facing lifeless and talentless bureaucrats, however, becomes the major event that breaks Equality from faux altruism. This dramatic experience leads to an epiphany when Equality exclaims, "we have not built this box for the good of our brothers. We built it for its own sake" (44). His refutation of collectivist ideology is near complete.

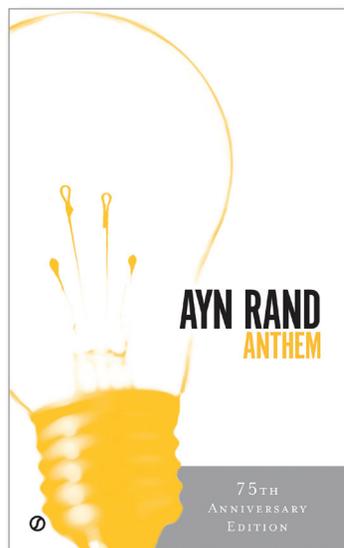
In a stream in the forest, he sees his reflection for the first time, and realizes how different he looks from his brothers (47). He laughs at being damned by society as he continues to realize his intellectual, and even physical, superiority (47). Equality notes that in society, there was no joy for men "other than the joyed shared with all their brothers," but he finally proclaims that his joy comes solely from creating his invention, and that this joy "belong[s] to [him] and come[s] from [him] alone" and "bears no relation to [his] brothers" (51). This thinking is completely antithetical to collectivist ideology. Equality becomes a rational individual.

Originally, Equality incorrectly believes he is motivated to create something for society. However, he now understands his euphoria is from using his hands and his mind alone, for his own sake, to independently create something of significant value, without sacrifice (32). Ultimately it becomes clear that his motivation is to attain an individual identity through reason, intellect, and inquisitiveness. In the forest, the complete break with collectivism occurs when, for the first time, Equality substitutes the word "WE" for the word "I," the Unspeakable Word. He goes on to call "WE" the monster, and associates the word "I" with GOD, effectively declaring himself GOD, the one person who, through free will, can bring himself happiness without sacrifice, the bane of collectivism (59).

Free will allows humans to choose their values, and the freedom of the mind allows humans to explore and create in order to prosper. Everyone should possess the right to pursue happiness. It can be argued that it is moral to act in ones' own self-interest to find joy. After all, this construct is central to the Declaration of Independence, and a cornerstone of inalienable rights. Self-sacrifice is not an inalienable obligation. Collectivism states that humans should exist for the service of others, and that the pursuit of individual happiness is not moral. However, rational egoism and the pursuit of happiness is true morality, as it is the foundation of freedom and a natural right.

If everyone were motivated by rational egoism, the world would be enhanced, although not perfect. Individuals must be free to study, experiment, and create in order for societies to advance and living standards to rise. It is no coincidence that nations which rank among the

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highest in standards of living are also those that have produced by wide margins the most Nobel Laureates and have the most individual freedoms (X). Most of the greatest inventions in modern history have come from free countries and not from tyrannies. For example, the United States, one of the freest nations in history, has produced more Nobel Prize winners than all other nations combined, and those nations run by communist and collectivist societies, such as China and the Middle East, have won just a small fraction (Y).

While advancements in technology may also lead to greater economic inequality such as we are experiencing today, overall wealth, living standards, and opportunities in free countries remain superior to those in collectivist societies. In addition, rational egoism does not infer selfish psychological behavior since it requires that individuals respect others and the law. With enhanced rational individualism, more things of value will be created by having more creators and fewer collectivists that do not produce. If everyone takes rational actions and works at things that bring happiness while respecting others, greater value will be generated as more monumental scientific advances will lead to higher living standards, and potentially greater freedom overall.

## NOTES:

(X) [http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/human\\_development.htm](http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/human_development.htm)

(Y) <http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/top-30-countries-with-nobel-prize-winners.html>

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1. Rand, Ayn. *Anthem*. Mockingbird Classics Publishing, 2015. Print.
2. [http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/human\\_development.htm](http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/human_development.htm)
3. <http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/top-30-countries-with-nobel-prize-winners.html>.