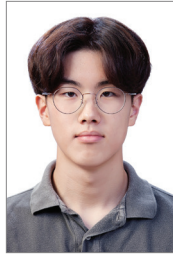


FIRST PLACE



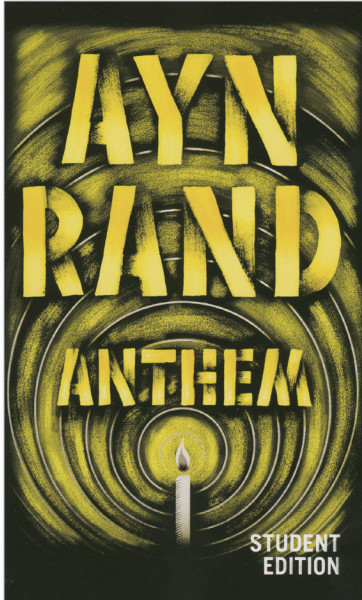
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The people in the society of *Anthem* are taught to live by certain principles concerning what is good and evil, right and wrong. Do you think those who adhere to these principles are happy or unhappy? What lessons do you draw from this about how we should think about morality today?

In the society of *Anthem* where collectivism is the ultimate standard of the good, people are chained to the state and cannot exercise their free will. According to this moral ideology, it is a sin for people to act in their own self-interest or choose their own values; instead, they must abandon their desires and well-being for their brother and sisters, or the sacred “great WE” (19). The Councils claim that those who serve the state should be happy; however, this is incongruent with the facts of reality where happiness is reserved for free, rational man who pursues his life honoring his life’s objective needs. Thoughtless, self-dehumanizing residents who adhere to the principles of collectivism cannot achieve true happiness.

To fully understand why freedom and happiness is only for free, thinking man, it is important to understand that happiness is a psychological result of the actions of maintaining one’s life. As the *Atlas Shrugged* protagonist Galt notes, life is not an unconditional guarantee as man faces a choice of whether to live or die. Those who, by choice, hold their life as their highest purpose make rational, proper decisions to direct all of their actions towards meeting the absolute needs of life. These are the self-sufficient individualists who practice their virtues—autonomy and rationality—necessary to prosper and achieve happiness as a reward. On the other hand, those whose highest purpose in life is “the great WE” will ignore their individual needs and exploit everything including their own body and soul as a means to serve others. These are the collectivists who essentially subject themselves to deprivation, suffering, and even death. Actions driven by collectivist ideals are flawed because life is an end in itself and humans have natural rights to pursue it. Thus, contrary to the City’s teachings, joy cannot be achieved collectively but only individually by exercising free will to choose one’s own values and commit to them in action. Achieving happiness is a deeply moral concept as it cannot be attained by those who fail to practice proper virtues.

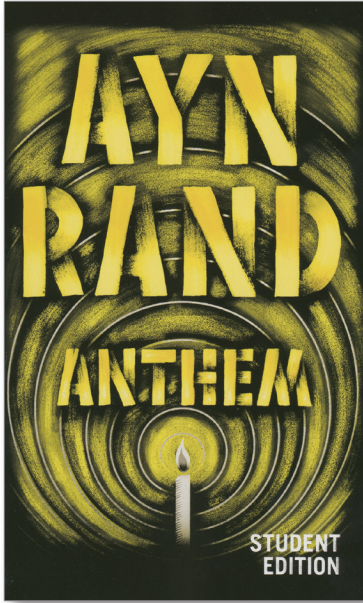
Thus, it is unsurprising that fear prevails in the society of *Anthem* where most people blindly adhere to the warped doctrine of collectivism. Governed by strict rules enforced with harsh punishments, people are constantly afraid to use their individual minds lest they might say something that differs from what others think or act in ways not approved of by others. Reduced to feeble parts of society, they live feeling indebted to others and inadequate as individuals. As Equality and Liberty discern, their brothers stand hunched over and have dull eyes, deprived of pride, peace, and joy. Though people try to conceal their emotions as



it is illegal to be unhappy, fear leaks out unconsciously at night: Fraternity cries out suddenly without reason, while Solidarity screams for help in the middle of the night (47).

Initially, Equality is also unable to find joy in his life due to his firm commitment to collectivism. As the book demonstrates, his adherence to the state's principles prevents him from bringing out his best qualities. For instance, Equality regards his intellectual and physical superiority as a “curse” and views himself unfit to be good. Striving to emulate the half-brained Union, he resists all his other self-serving desires. Though he secretly aspires to be a scholar, he is relieved when the Council of Vocation assigns him the role of Street Sweeper and gladly accepts his Life Mandate as a way of erasing his sin. However, despite his struggles to reconcile his personal values with the state's ideology, his individualistic tendencies grow by the day causing him to break the rules so that he can live his way. He develops feelings for Liberty, talks to her, and even gives her a special name “the Golden One.” Likewise, when he discovers the tunnel, he refuses to hold himself back from entering the space and spending time alone there to study and delve into science experiments. However, his transgressions do not lead to feelings of guilt or shame, but true happiness. He realizes the flaws of the City's ideology and re-establishes his moral compass by consciously placing “I” as the foundation of his morality. As he glorifies his self and free will, he liberates his soul from the chains of collectivism and empowers himself to pursue his own happiness, life, and prosperity. Equality's journey shows that man cannot experience true happiness without exercising his own inalienable rights to choose his own values and pursue self-interest.

While the City embodies pure collectivism, traces of the same ideology can be found in today's culture. Similar to Equality whose superiority is frowned upon, in our modern society, the wealthy and the successful often become targets of resentment and jealousy. When such irrational emotions are in force, the culture discourages achievement, equating humility with kindness, and ambition with greed. As previously mentioned, *Anthem* teaches us that happiness is for free man who acts on his free will and self-respect regardless of external pressure. Thus, the book shows us that we have a choice over two ways of pursuing life. First, with a proper moral compass, we can be like Equality and live the life we want. Even if we are not born with Equality's intellectual superiority, we can still be like Liberty and International, the ones who do not dread Equality's superiority but look up to the hero and motivate themselves to bring out their best within their limited potential. Another way we can live life is by complying with the conventional morality of selflessness and allowing external pressure to govern our choices and actions. Surrendering ourselves to society, we will direct our time and efforts towards—not fruitful achievements that will lead to real happiness—but fulfilling desires that are not our own. Even when we treat ourselves, we would do so when no one is looking for fear that we might be judged. Lacking a sense of self-worth, we might seek status and wealth, but the truth is that they are merely cover-ups for our insecurities. When the source of fulfillment is not



within, we would be constantly afraid of facing rejection from others. This also means that upon meeting a great man like Equality, we would be terrified and strive to stay relevant by dragging him down. Meanwhile, we would encourage inferiority and gain assurances by befriending people beneath us.

Although today's culture widely recognizes the dangers of collectivism, we tend to have a complicated relationship with principles such as self-sacrifice and altruism. Society often labels individualists as "eccentric" and even "immoral," encouraging us to put aside our self-interests and prioritize others' welfare. We live in a world that tests our sense of self-worth; however, we must realize that such obstacles are impotent against true individualists and that ultimately, we have the final say over which moral principles we will abide by. Only by honoring our values above all things will we achieve genuine happiness.

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