

## FIRST PLACE



**Katrice Wasgatt, Newark, DE – Towle Institute, Hockessin, DE**

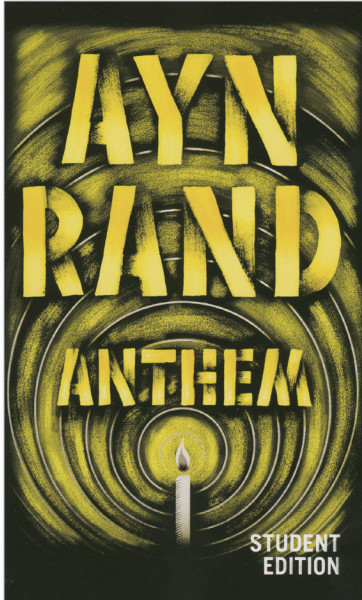
**In *Anthem*, the City has numerous rules and controls. Why do these exist? What is their purpose? Do you think the society that Equality envisions creating at the end of the story would include any of these rules and controls? Explain why or why not.**

“Everything which is not permitted by law is forbidden” (31). This statement sums up the legal system of society after the “Great Rebirth” in *Anthem* by Ayn Rand. There are rules for everything: no smiling without reason, no friendships, no crushes, and ultimately nothing done solely for one’s own benefit. Even explaining the wish to do something for entirely selfish reasons is impossible because the word “I” has vanished. The purpose of these rules is to maintain control by abolishing individuals, a goal which the main character, Equality, plans to discard as he builds a new society.

The reason for excessive regulations in “the City” is a desire to avoid conflict by keeping absolute control. There are indications that before the “Great Rebirth,” a war had ravished the world. Equality recalls stories he has heard about “great fighting” during the Unmentionable Times (48). In history, severe wars, especially revolutions, are often followed by dictatorship. Napoleon became emperor after the French Revolution, and Stalin became dictator after the Russian Revolution. In both instances, citizens were tired of fighting and were willing to accept a change that would end it, even at the cost of some freedom. They felt a need for some people to have control, because control guarantees a measure of peace. While it is not explicitly explained, that seems to be the case in this book.

Areas that rules attempt to control in the novel are the language and people’s thoughts. It is clear that a common English word is missing in Equality’s vocabulary—the word “I.” A strategy also employed by the government in the book *1984*, this government manipulates language to try to curb people’s thoughts. They are largely successful. For a time Equality believed that it was impossible for him to be more intelligent than anyone in the Council of Scholars (54). As he and the “Golden One” flirt, he mentioned that his thoughts about her were not permitted. In a Scholar’s indignant speech, he was shocked that Equality “dared to think” (71). Equality thinks that he will soon meet his death in the forest because he has been told that no one survives living in it, without thinking of the fact that if no one has come out of it, the fate of its entries is actually unknown. The Council operated on the idea that if no one thought about rebellion, no one would rebel.

Another aspect of life that the Council tries to control is emotions and relationships. Although Equality wants to be a scholar, he has been trained so well that preference is wrong that he feels guilty, and is initially happy when he is ordered to become a Street Sweeper. Later he realizes that “It is forbidden, not to be happy” (45). Friendship is forbidden as well, because it involves preferring one person over others. Extra measures are taken to prevent relationships by cultivating a culture of fear. Since individual thoughts are not allowed, speaking takes the risk of a disagreement, which would result in punishment for the speaker (47). The relationship



policy is extended to romantic relationships as well; rather than marriage as the natural method of propagating children, citizens “mate” as if they’re animals (41). A bonus in this system for the Council is that it completely sabotages familial life and makes it easier to take children from their mothers and raise them in institutions, a move that Communist countries often make in order to educate the next generation with political propaganda.

The purpose for the obsessive control over every single aspect of life is to eradicate individuals and avoid rebellion and conflict. If everyone is exactly the same, no one will argue. Features superior to anyone else’s and the desire to see one’s face are sins. The general consensus among those in the Council of Scholars which Equality interrupts is that “What is not thought by all men cannot be true” (73). The society has become so adept at extinguishing original ideas that there are no good locks or guards in the jail because escape never occurs to anyone. The jail symbolizes the City as a whole: there are no soldiers or police to keep order because it never occurs to anyone to rebel. However, because humans are not robots and cannot be permanently robbed of their own singularities, the system is not perfect and there is a rebel.

Equality successfully has opinions of his own and manages to break out from collectivism. His mission is to start a new society governed by the word “ego.” I think that the only types of rules in his society will be to protect people from unreasonable harm by others, a goal which should be government’s primary purpose. His purposeful choice of independent future friends and his near worship of the word “I” lead one to think that laws would hold the sole purpose of promoting each person’s unique contributions.

*Anthem* demonstrates the delicate balance laws must strike to protect the people without hindering them. Although exhaustive guidelines may seem to be an effective solution for evading war, they ultimately lead to lack of progress and decreased quality of life, a combination which causes frustration and eventually more conflict. In spite of the Council’s attempt to dominate society by eliminating uniqueness, Equality defies his civilization by displaying his singularity.

## Bibliography

Rand, Ayn. *Anthem*. New American Library, 1995. Print.