

FIRST PLACE



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In the final chapter of *Anthem*, Prometheus writes that he now understands “why the best in me had been my sins and my transgressions; and why I had never felt guilt in my sins.” What has Prometheus come to understand about himself? Why does his society regard the “best in him” as sinful?

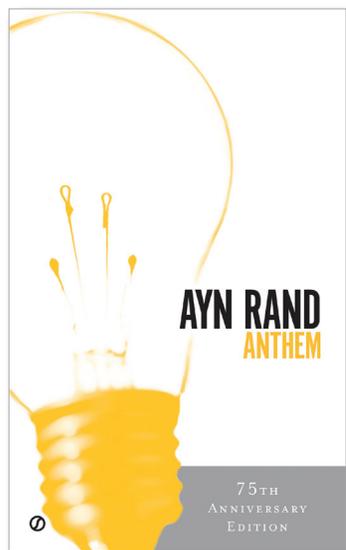
One of the first characteristics we discover about the society in Ayn Rand’s *Anthem* is “we are all in all and all in one. There are no men but only the great WE, One, indivisible and forever” (19). We also learn that the collectivist, altruist society presented in the novella suppresses and outlaws any who “[hold themselves] as one alone and with the thoughts of one and not of the many” (72). Throughout the novella, Equality 7-2521—later Prometheus—displays many characteristics which directly oppose the standards of the society.

We learn of Equality’s “[wish] to know about all the things which make the earth [around him],” and his “great sin” of being born with a quicker and superior mind to his brothers (23). The society aspires for all to be equal, for everyone to exist only for their brothers. The society feels “if you are not needed by your brother men, there is no reason for you to burden the earth with your bodies” (22). With this in mind we follow Equality 7-2521 through his journey of self-discovery to his ultimate unearthing of the Unspeakable Word. “I.” After he uncovers the Unspeakable Word, he renames himself because “there was a time when each man had a name of his own to distinguish him from all other men.” (98). His new name? Prometheus, after the titan who bore the light of the gods to the men of Earth, since he also brought electricity back to the world of men. Through Equality’s both unintentional and intentional actions in the name of individuality, he challenges the society that raised him.

Prometheus writes “I understood why the best in me had been my sins and my transgressions; and why I had never felt guilt in my sins.” (98). Through the discovery of the Unspeakable Word “I,” Prometheus begins to explore his past, and he realizes that the attributes his collectivist society hated so much about him was his individuality, and the attributes that made him unique and set him apart from his brothers and created a sense of peace and joy in his life were what the society so despised. Prometheus comes to understand that the parts of himself such as his appearance, his curiosity, his brain, his preferences, his joy, and his belief that one could be better than many, set him apart from his brothers and what made his society view him as sinful.

Throughout the beginning of the novella, Equality 7-2521 most frequently committed the Transgression of Preference, the transgression of preferring one object over the other. We often find that Equality cannot do what the society desires; he cannot love all objects and all others equally. Equality first commits the Transgression of Preference when the Council of Vocations arrives to assign jobs to Equality and his fellow brothers. Despite his teachers’ warning to “dare not choose in your minds the work you would like to do when you leave the Home of Students,” Equality longs to be a Scholar, because he

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loves the Science of Things (23). Later, Equality commits the transgression when he sets his sights on Liberty 5-300. This becomes an issue as men are not permitted to notice women and women are not permitted to notice men. A collectivist society frowns upon the love of one person over another because all things are meant to be equally loved by all. The society sees noticing others as a transgression because personal preference establishes individuality. The attributes that set Prometheus apart from the society, and all others like it, is his free will and individuality; the parts Equality's society most desired to extinguish as they take away from the group and gives one power over many.

We also see Equality 7-2521 commit the Great Transgression, doing and thinking alone and separate from the group. Early on in Equality's time as a Street Sweeper, he discovers a tunnel. The tunnel he unearths becomes his laboratory where he performs many experiments to study The Science of Things, which is illegal to all save Scholars. After years of experimenting, he reinvents the power of electricity from the Unmentionable Times. He presents to the World Council of Scholars in hope of having his life mandate reassigned. Equality's study of the Science of Things is forbidden, not just because he works as a Street Sweeper, but because he took part in the studies without the assistance of his brothers. A collectivist society spurns all free and individual thought, and so naturally Equality working alone would cause a dilemma. Equality believes that the toil and discomfort his light will erase will outweigh his transgression, and more than that, discovering new ideas brings him joy, something living for his brothers never did. Society regards the joy Equality finds working for himself to be sinful because men cannot be happy unless they toil for their brothers. Prometheus realizes the joy he finds in learning is his gift, what sets him apart, and in his society all things individual must be shunned.

Appearance is the image that makes us all diverse and distinct. In an ideal collectivist society, all people must look relatively the same. The catch, however, is no person can control how they look or grow or change, as matters such as that are beyond the control of man. Man cannot wish for height, nor swear it off better than he can wish for the ocean to freeze over or the icecaps to melt. Likewise, Equality 7-2521 is burdened with his height as there are not many people in his society of similar height, and he cannot control how his body is to grow. As an attempt to control appearance, Equality's society extracts all hope and happiness from the lives of men until all that is left is fear, leaving all men afraid and dejected. After Equality escapes the society which has confined him for twenty one years, he finally sees his own face, which "was not like the faces of [his] brothers, for [he] felt no pity when looking upon it." (80). Through this discovery Prometheus realizes he cannot be controlled by his society, and everything that set him apart from his brothers is the only part that made life worth living, individuality.

Prometheus comes to understand the aspects about him his society so despised about him were the attributes of him that set him apart and made him an individual. He discovers Egoism, the belief that serving oneself should be one's ultimate objective in life. Through this discovery he finds everything he thought was sinful and wrong and cursed about him were the parts he should cherish about himself. It is these parts that make him who he is, an individual and not a mindless society drone, is why he felt no guilt for his transgressions, because he was just being himself, Prometheus, the one and only.