

Anthem



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF AYN RAND

Born in 1905 to Zinovy Rosenbaum and Alissa Rosenbaum, Ayn Rand was the oldest of three children and an able student. A formative event in her early life was the repossession of her father's successful pharmacy business by the Bolshevik Communists, following the 1917 Russian Revolution. This, and other perceived misconduct by Russian Communists, likely fueled the resentment of collectivist ideologies that Rand expounds upon at length in *Anthem*. In 1924, Rand took up cinematic studies in the Soviet Union, and in 1926 was granted permission to relocate to Chicago in order to obtain more filmmaking knowledge. There, she married an actor named Frank O'Connor and changed her name from Alissa Rosenbaum to Ayn Rand.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Rand's repudiation of collectivism is undeniably a reaction to the collectivist ideologies of the Soviet Communists who dominated her homeland. In 1917, the government of Russia was taken over by Bolsheviks, whose ideology based itself on an elimination of class differences and the notion that social welfare should be derived "from each according to his ability," and granted "to each according to his need." The popularity of her work in the United States, in turn, likely stemmed from their compatibility with the more individualistic tenets of the country's laissez-faire capitalist system.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The most directly related works to *Anthem* are Ayn Rand's later novels, which more explicitly elaborate upon her philosophy of Objectivism. Of these, [The Fountainhead](#) and *Atlas Shrugged* are by far the most significant. In considering other related works, it may be useful to consult texts at the absolute opposite end of the ideological spectrum. Of these, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *Communist Manifesto* is a definitive example; it is one of the most widely-known outlines of the sort of collectivist society that Rand denounces in *Anthem*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Anthem*
- **When Written:** 1937
- **Where Written:** New York, New York
- **When Published:** 1938
- **Literary Period:** Science Fiction

- **Genre:** Novella, Parable
- **Setting:** Unspecified collectivist dystopia, likely in the near future
- **Climax:** Equality 7-2521's empowering discovery of the word "I."
- **Antagonist:** Collectivism, as represented by the World Council of Scholars
- **Point of View:** First-person narration by Equality 7-2521

EXTRA CREDIT

Rhymes with "Mine" Befitting her self-centered philosophy, Ayn Rand's oft-mispronounced first name is correctly pronounced as rhyming with "mine."

Politics as Usual. Rand's objectivist philosophies have been a major influence for American conservatives with an interest in smaller government, particularly the recent Tea Party movement.



PLOT SUMMARY

By candlelight, a 21-year-old Street Sweeper named Equality 7-2521 writes in his journal as he sits alone in a disused railway tunnel. Thinking for one's self has been outlawed in his collectivist society, and he always refers to himself using the pronoun "we." Equality 7-2521 is tall, strong, and intellectually curious—all qualities that set him apart from his peers, and thus he considers these qualities a "curse." He spent his childhood education hoping to be assigned to work at the Home of the Scholars. However, he is assigned the insulting job of Street Sweeper. One day, while sweeping streets, Equality 7-2521 finds an entrance to a tunnel left over from the Unmentionable Times. From this day forward, Equality 7-2521 sneaks away from the mandatory entertainment each night in order to spend time alone in the tunnel. There, he reads stolen manuscripts and uses stolen tools to conduct experiments.

Equality 7-2521 is enamored of a girl named Liberty 5-3000 who works in the Home of the Peasants. Whenever he sweeps near her field, they discreetly indicate their affection for one another. Equality 7-2521 gives Liberty 5-300 the name, "the Golden One." One day, Equality 7-2521 tells the Golden One of his special attraction to her. In the days following this encounter, Equality 7-2521's joyfulness distinguishes him from his miserable peers. One night, Equality 7-2521 recalls a childhood memory of watching a Transgressor of the Unspoken Word being publicly burned at the stake. He remembers the sinner's courage and poise, reminiscent of a proud saint.

Working in his tunnel, Equality 7-2521 discovers that metal conducts electricity. He believes that men harnessed this power in the Unmentionable Times. Some time later, Equality 7-2521 reencounters the Golden One. He drinks water from her cupped hands, and they are both struck by the powerful emotions they feel afterwards. Equality 7-2521 uses his new knowledge to create a **light bulb**. He sees its usefulness for mankind and decides he will present it to the World Council of Scholars when they meet in his City. Caught up in his success, Equality 7-2521 forgets to return to the City Theatre on time. He is tortured, but refuses to disclose where he has spent time alone. Equality 7-2521 is then imprisoned, but escapes the day before the World Council of Scholars is due to meet. He prepares his invention to present to the Council, confident that they will appreciate his accomplishment even if it arose out of sinfulness.

However, Equality 7-2521's presentation before the World Council of Scholars does not go well. The Scholars fear his invention and resent that Equality 7-2521 acted alone. They vow to punish him and destroy his invention for violating the principles of collectivism. Equality 7-2521 curses the Scholars and escapes through a window, cradling his invention in his arms. He runs to the Uncharted Forest, and after a day, he is charmed by his newfound solitary life. The next day, Equality 7-2521 discovers that the Golden One has followed him into the forest after hearing of his escape from the City. She promises her devotion to him and the two walk together for days. Equality 7-2521 ponders how this solitude could possibly be a corrupting force.

Equality 7-2521 and the Golden One find a house in the mountains, abandoned since the Unmentionable Times. Inside, they find artifacts like mirrors and manuscripts. That night, Equality 7-2521 stays up reading the texts and discovers the unspeakable word: "I." Now writing in first-person, he concludes that his own happiness is the only purpose of his life. From his readings, Equality 7-2521 chooses a new name for himself: **Prometheus**, after the Greek mythological figure who stole fire from the Gods to give to humans. He gives the Golden One the name Gaea. In time, Gaea becomes pregnant, and Prometheus explains that he will begin a new society of egotists, recruiting new members from his former City. The worship of the word "we," he realizes, is the reason that the accomplishments of the Unmentionable Times were undone by the collectivists. He recognizes the heroic struggle of people like the Transgressor of the Unspeakable Word and vows to continue their mission.

him to work as a Street Sweeper and encourages him to feel ashamed of his individualism and self-motivation. Equality 7-2521 indulges his creativity by spending years working clandestinely to invent a **light bulb**, but when he triumphantly presents this invention to the World Council of Scholars, they call him a selfish heretic. This incident prompts him to flee his City, and over time, Equality 7-2521 learns to defy societal proscriptions against egocentrism and value his own happiness above all else. At the book's conclusion, he renames himself **Prometheus**, makes a home deep in the Uncharted Forest with his beloved, The Golden One, and plans to start a new civilization of egotists.

The Golden One – A former farm worker whose infatuation with Equality 7-2521 prompts her to follow him into exile. "The Golden One" is the name she allows him to call her instead of her given name, Liberty 5-3000. Like Equality 7-2521, she is arrogant and self-centered, and she respects her mate because he lacks the weakness she sees in her peers. She settles in the forest with Equality 7-2521 and seems willing to function as his subordinate, both by letting him rename her "Gaea" and by telling him "They will be done."

The Transgressor of the Unspeakable Word – When Equality 7-2521 was ten years old, he watched the Transgressor being burned at the stake for speaking the Unspeakable Word: the anti-collectivist word "I." Equality 7-2521 remembers this man's saintly courage and composure, and recognizes him as a hero once he, too, discovers the power of the word "I."

International 4-8818 – The closest thing Equality 7-2521 has to a friend in the City, International 4-8818 is a humorous, ambitious artist who was forced to abandon his passion when he was assigned to work as a Street Sweeper. International 4-8818 is individualistic enough to cover up Equality 7-2521's discovery of the tunnel and help him sneak away from nightly entertainment, and Equality 7-2521 plans to recruit him to live in his egocentric colony in the forest.

The World Council of Scholars – Led by Collective 0-0009, the World Council of Scholars is the group in charge of all scholarly affairs in Equality 7-2521's collectivist society. The group and its members are meant to illustrate what Rand perceived as the weak, spineless, and inefficient nature of collectivism. When Equality 7-2521 presents his light bulb to the Council, they condemn him as an arrogant, selfish sinner for trying to better mankind by acting alone. Because the light bulb was not invented collectively, they conclude that it must be evil endeavor to destroy it and punish Equality 7-2521; however, they are thwarted when Equality 7-2521 escapes with his invention.



CHARACTERS

Equality 7-2521 – The strong, intelligent, and creative protagonist of *Anthem*. Despite his exceptional talents and interest in science, Equality 7-2521's collectivist society forces



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-

coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



INDIVIDUALISM

Without a doubt, individualism is the core theme of *Anthem*. The entire text is essentially a parable designed to illustrate the paramount importance of

Ayn Rand's idea of individual will. The plot chronicles Equality 7-2521's evolution from a brainwashed, faceless drone in a dismal authoritarian state; to a self-sufficient, creative, and powerful man living outside of the system that oppressed him. The key catalyst of Equality 7-2521's liberation is his self-reliance. Even though his society discourages it, Equality 7-2521 gradually begins to act more and more in his own self-interest, instead of bowing to the arbitrary demands imposed upon him. At first, pursuing his passion for scientific discovery registers to Equality 7-2521 as an "evil" act, but he learns to feel unashamed of his strength, intelligence, and creativity and slowly begins to develop as an individual.

Throughout the novel, Equality 7-2521 refers to himself using the first-person plural, "**we**," highlighting the way that his collectivist society has eliminated the deep-rooted concept of selfhood. As Equality 7-2521 and his individualistic lover, the Golden One, progress through the awakenings of their individual egos, they begin to grasp the concept of the "I," and feel "torn, torn for some word we could not find." Finally, Equality 7-2521's triumph over collectivist oppression is his realization and embrace of the word "I." The last chapter of the book is dedicated to praising individualism, delivered in the first person. In this chapter, Equality 7-2521 states Rand's central message: "My happiness needs no higher aim to vindicate it. My happiness is not the means to any end. It is the end. It is its own goal. It is its own purpose." While Equality 7-2521's anti-individualist society had unhealthy and unnaturally quashed his impulses to assert himself, he has finally found true empowerment in the strength of his own ego. "Ego," to both Rand and her protagonist, represents "the word which can never die on this earth, for it is the heart of it and the meaning and the glory." Equality 7-2521's empowering evolution into an individualist illustrates that no matter what oppressive, depersonalizing conditions are imposed on mankind, the strength of the individual ego will always prevail one way or another.



COLLECTIVISM

Naturally, the flipside of Rand's passionate advocacy of individualism is her vehement condemnation of collectivism, which is a broad

term for any sociopolitical ideology that bases itself on the belief that all humans must depend on one another. In the

foreword to *Anthem*, Rand writes that "the greatest guilt today is that of people who accept collectivism by moral default; the people who seek protection from the necessity of taking a stand, by refusing to admit to themselves the nature of that which they are accepting; the people who support plans specifically designed to achieve serfdom, but hide behind the empty assertion that they are lovers of freedom, with no concrete meaning attached to the word; the people who believe that the content of ideas need not be examined, that principles need not be defined, and that facts can be eliminated by keeping one's eyes shut."

To demonstrate this point, the society that Equality 7-2521 is born into is a sinister caricature of collectivist ideals. Noble goals, like equality and fairness, are distorted into justifying ludicrously oppressive living conditions. Presumably to contribute to a collectivist ethos, no member of society can have a conventional name, and everyone is instead assigned a numbered platitude like "Freedom" or "Equality"—an indication of the words' lack of "concrete meaning" that Rand criticizes in her foreword. Before going to bed, men chant, "we are nothing. Mankind is all." In the name of fairness, citizens are arbitrarily assigned to jobs unrelated to their skill sets, rather than being allowed to pursue their passions. Equality 7-2521, who is intelligent and vigorous, has ambitions of being allowed to work as a Scholar. His hopes are dashed, however, when he is assigned the insulting job of Street Sweeper. Most egregiously of all, the leaders of this society dread the breakthrough invention that Equality 7-2521 devises, and try to destroy it. They claim that Equality 7-2521's **light bulb** is "a great evil" because it might lighten men's toil, and "men have no cause to exist save in toiling for other men." Over time, it is also revealed that this collectivist society actually represents a dramatic regression from a more advanced and prosperous age of individualism that preceded it. Through these and other details, Rand posits that collectivism wastes individual ability and works to the detriment of mankind.



LOVE

The collectivist culture Equality 7-2521 is born into appears designed to eliminate meaningful interpersonal relationships. People are afraid even to speak their minds to one another, "for all must agree with all, and they cannot know if their thoughts are the thoughts of all." Deep personal connections are eliminated in the name of equality and impartiality; even the intimate act of sex is reduced to a shamefully impersonal once-a-year trip to the "Palace of Mating." The profound love that Equality 7-2521 finds and shares with the Golden One is a large motivator of his decision to escape from society, and her choice to follow in search of him.

Thus, Rand asserts that the relationships that develop under collectivism are shallow and unfulfilling, and that truly

dignifying relationships require the assertion of the individual ego. Rand criticizes collectivists for turning concepts like freedom and equality into meaningless bromides; she also seems to argue that collectivism diminishes love in much the same way. Upon realizing the power of his own ego, Equality 7-2521 proclaims, “I am neither foe nor friend to my brothers, but such as each of them shall deserve of me. And to earn my love, my brothers must do more than to have been born. I do not grant my love without reason, nor to any chance passer-by who may wish to claim it. I honor men with my love. But honor is a thing to be earned.” In this way, Rand’s individualistic ideal allows for powerful interpersonal connections, rather than the demeaning one-size-fits-all approach that collectivist society imposes.



POWER

In several senses, power is what allows Equality 7-2521 to assert himself as a unique individual over the stultifying conditions imposed on him by society. The most literal way in which power sets the protagonist apart is through his commanding physique. Unlike his brethren, who are weak and pitiful in appearance, Equality 7-2521 is tall and muscular. On first viewing his reflection, Equality 7-2521 remembers that “We sat still and we held our breath. For our face and our body were beautiful. Our face was not like the faces of our brothers, for we felt no pity when looking upon it. Our body was not like the bodies of our brothers, for our limbs were straight and thin and hard and strong.” Equality 7-2521 is also mentally powerful, and his intellect is underutilized by the job of Sweet Sweeper that he is arbitrarily assigned.

Moreover, Equality 7-2521 uses this mental power to harness another sort of power. Through secret study, Equality 7-2521 gains an understanding of electricity and assembles a functional **light bulb**, which he presents to the World Council of Scholars. “Let us all work together, and harness this power, and make it ease the toil of men,” he triumphantly proclaims. The Scholars, however, lack Equality 7-2521’s willingness to embrace this power, and instead fear the new invention. Equality 7-2521’s most empowering characteristic, then—even greater than his powers themselves—is that he readily takes advantage of his powers, even when his society forbids doing so. The most despicable characters in *Anthem* are not necessarily the weakest characters, but rather those who, like the Council, work in the name of false ideals to prevent the strong from exercising their individual power. Thus, Rand illustrates that it is of paramount importance for individuals to understand and maximize their own powers and abilities, and use these abilities for their own betterment.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



“WE”

Individuals in Equality 7-2521’s collectivist society are forbidden from thinking of themselves as individuals. The pronoun “I” is not only forbidden but unknown, and everyone must refer to him- or herself as “we” in order to ensure that all actions and self-conceptions are collective. Not surprisingly, this is Rand’s way of symbolizing the way in which collectivism destroys the individual will, which is, in her opinion, mankind’s most sacred and essential attribute. The Golden One is unable to truly experience love without the pronoun “I”—she is not content to tell Equality 7-2521 that “we love you.” At the book’s conclusion, Rand illustrates Equality 7-2521’s empowerment and self-realization with his acquisition of the pronoun “I.” This knowledge allows Equality 7-2521 to condemn the worship of “we,” which he argues has turned mankind into a weak and regressive race.



LIGHT AND THE LIGHT BULB

Light is used throughout the book to symbolize Equality 7-2521’s individualistic spark. While his society as a whole is dimly conformist and restricted to candlelight, Equality 7-2521’s extraordinary motivation allows him to invent a groundbreaking form of light: the electric light bulb. The World Council of Scholars rejects Equality 7-2521’s invention because the Scholars’ collectivist sensibilities cannot accommodate this vital individualistic spark. This weakness condemns the collectivists to living in darkness, while Equality 7-2521’s strength and ingenuity permits him to live in the light. In one final bit of imagery, the house that will serve as Equality 7-2521’s bastion of egocentrism appears in the mountains with “white fire [coming] from the sun on[to] the glass of its windows.”



PROMETHEUS

At the end of the book, Equality 7-2521 chooses a new name for himself: Prometheus. Prometheus was a Greek Titan who brought fire to humans against the Gods’ wishes, and was punished with eternal suffering for this transgression. Like the mythical Prometheus, Equality 7-2521 brings a new, life-changing form of technology to mankind, and like Prometheus, Equality 7-2521 must suffer for doing so. However, there is a crucial difference between the ancient myth and Rand’s retelling: while humankind accepts Prometheus’s gift of fire, Equality 7-2521’s collectivist society cravenly and narrow-mindedly rejects his gift. Thus, Rand

demonstrates the way that collectivism destroys man's instinct to better himself and his people.





QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *Anthem* published in 2014.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ It is a sin to write this. It is a sin to think words no others think and to put them down upon a paper no others are to see. It is base and evil. It is as if we were speaking alone to no ears but our own. And we know well that there is no transgression blacker than to do or think alone. We have broken the laws. The laws say that men may not write unless the Council of Vocations bid them so. May we be forgiven!

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis


Anthem begins with the main character, Equality 7-2521, claiming that it's sinful for him to be writing his own story. In Equality's society, individuality of any kind is seen as a hideous crime against humanity; therefore, writing something like a diary--something designed to be written and read by one person and only one person--is truly a sin.

Right away, then, Rand shows us that Equality is living in a dystopian society, one in which the freedom to think, to write, and to be alone are all under constant attack. Notice Equality's careful use of pronouns--even when he's talking about himself (one person) he uses the word "we," suggesting that Equality is so used to thinking in terms of the group that the notion of being an individual is utterly foreign to him.

☞ We were born with a curse. It has always driven us to thoughts which are forbidden. It has always given us wishes which men may not wish. We know that we are evil, but there is no will in us and no power to resist it. This is our wonder and our secret fear, that we know and do not resist.

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 



Page Number: 2


Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Rand poses a natural question: in a collectivist society, how does she choose a narrator? In other words, what makes Equality different from the people around him--why is he especially suited to write a book or be a hero of individuality? Rand answers her own question by showing that Equality is a naturally curious and adventurous person. Like so many other literary heroes, he feels a constant stirring to go out and explore the world. The difference between Equality and most other heroes of literature, however, is that Equality lives in a world where his curiosity is forbidden.

☞ And questions give us no rest. We know not why our curse makes us seek we know not what, ever and ever. But we cannot resist it. It whispers to us that there are great things on this earth of ours, and that we can know them if we try, and that we must know them. We ask, why must we know, but it has no answer to give us. We must know that we may know.

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

Equality tries to describe the unique feeling of curiosity and individualism within himself. He tries to describe the feeling in many different ways--he compares it to a whispering voice, a curse, etc.

From our perspective, Equality's instinct is perfectly comprehensible--Equality is just a particularly adventurous, curious person. But because Equality lives in a collectivist society, he literally cannot find the words to describe his own state of mind. As in another famous dystopian novel, *1984* (see Background Info), Equality's world has rewritten the very rules of language to make it impossible for people to describe their sense of freedom and individualism. Quite literally, there is no "I," only "We."

☛ International 4-8818 and we are friends. This is an evil thing to say, for it is a transgression, the great Transgression of Preference, to love any among men better than the others, since we must love all men and all men are our friends. So International 4-8818 and we have never spoken of it. But we know. We know, when we look into each other's eyes. And when we look thus without words, we both know other things also, strange things for which there are no words, and these things frighten us.

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker), International 4-8818

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

As a young man, Equality befriends a man named International 4-8818. In Equality's society, friendship of any kind is a sin, because it violates the principles of collectivism: to be friends with somebody is to prefer them to other people, and therefore to disrespect the basic rules of collectivism.

In general, the passage paints a picture of the contrast between individualism and collectivism. In spite of the fact that Equality's society strives to wipe out all traces of individuality by rewriting the rules of language itself, Equality continues to feel individualistic inclinations. Even if there's no word for the bond between himself and International, both he and International *feel* the bond. Society may try to wipe out individual thought and love, but in the end, Equality's individualism wins out.

☛ And yet there is no shame in us and no regret. We say to ourselves that we are a wretch and a traitor. But we feel no burden upon our spirit and no fear in our heart. And it seems to us that our spirit is clear as a lake troubled by no eyes save those of the sun. And in our heart -- strange are the ways of evil! -- in our heart there is the first peace we have known in twenty years.

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Together, Equality and International discover a secret

tunnel. They agree to keep all information about the tunnel to themselves, despite the fact that keeping secrets of any kind is a sin--a violation of collectivism. Henceforth, Equality sneaks into the tunnel and spends time alone. Although Equality feels that he is disobeying the rules of society, he's exhilarated nonetheless.

In one sense, it's clear that Equality's shame at keeping a secret from his society is absurd; Equality has been conditioned to believe in a botched morality, in which individualism of any kind is condemned. In a more general sense, the passage shows Rand's belief that personal morality is the only true morality. Equality has been brought up to believe in a certain set of rules of right and wrong--rules that are simply not true, he finds. Rand celebrates Equality for ignoring society's rules and listening to his own instincts, no matter what.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☛ We do not wonder at this new sin of ours. It is our second Transgression of Preference, for we do not think of all our brothers, as we must, but only of one, and their name is Liberty 5-3000. We do not know why we think of them. We do not know why, when we think of them, we feel of a sudden that the earth is good and that it is not a burden to live.

Related Characters: The Golden One

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Almost right away, Equality becomes interested in a woman named Liberty 5-3000. Although Equality lacks the proper terminology to describe his own emotions, we can tell that he's falling in love with Liberty.

The passage defines Rand's most basic critique of the collectivist society. A society that celebrates unity and group identity violates mankind's most basic emotion--love--by substituted a bland, vanilla "love for one's fellow man" for genuine interpersonal love. In spite of society's prohibitions on love, Equality continues to feel attracted to Liberty, suggesting that ultimately, the human spirit and basic instincts are stronger than society's clumsy attempts to censor freedom and individual identity.

☛ Twice have we been sent to the Palace of Mating, but it is an ugly and shameful matter, of which we do not like to think.

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

In Rand's futuristic society, sex is an ugly, disgusting thing. Because citizens are forbidden from choosing their sexual partners, they're forced to have sex with people chosen by the state. The state recognizes the importance of sex--without "mating," the species will die out--but because the state is unwilling to accept love between two individual people, it's forced to order people to have sex with strangers.

The passage illustrates the clumsiness and incompetence of Equality's futuristic society. In a collectivist world, the most natural parts of life--having sex and bearing children--become a tedious problem, which the state must solve by establishing a Palace of Mating. Collectivism, Rand suggests, is ultimately a suicidal ideology--without the basic human emotions of love, curiosity, and friendship, society is always on the verge of dying out altogether.

☛ And as we look upon the Uncharted Forest far in the night, we think of the secrets of the Unmentionable Times. And we wonder how it came to pass that these secrets were lost to the world. We have heard the legends of the great fighting, in which many men fought on one side and only a few on the other. These few were the Evil Ones and they were conquered. Then great fires raged over the land. And in these fires the Evil Ones were burned. And the fire which is called the Dawn of the Great Rebirth, was the Script Fire where all the scripts of the Evil Ones were burned, and with them all the words of the Evil Ones. Great mountains of flame stood in the squares of the Cities for three months. Then came the Great Rebirth.

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 32-33



Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Equality explains some of the basic elements of his society's history. Some time in the distant past, Equality knows, society was wicked and individualistic. Society's individualism led it to perish--there was some kind

of great war, which resulted in "fire" (seemingly of burning books) and destruction. From the ashes of the old, sinful world, a new world was born, one in which individualism of any kind was strictly forbidden.

The passage is important because it illustrates the limitations of Equality's society. Instead of learning from the wisdom of the past, Equality's society chooses to ignore the past almost completely; to reject all the "secrets" of individualistic society (science, technology, medicine, art, etc.). The passage is also interesting in that it describes history in an almost religious way, suggesting Rand's critique of religion itself. (Notice that the "Great Rebirth" comes after 3 months of burning, perhaps an allusion to Christ's resurrection after three days.) Perhaps all religions, Rand suggests, are designed to control people by filling them with fear and inspiring a naive confidence in the *status quo*.

☛ But it seemed to us that the eyes of the Transgressor had chosen us from the crowd and were looking straight upon us. There was no pain in their eyes and no knowledge of the agony of their body. There was only joy in them, and pride, a pride holier than it is fit for human pride to be.

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 35



Explanation and Analysis


Equality here describes his memory of a man who was executed for daring to speak the "forbidden word," a word so hateful that it undermines everything that Equality's society stands for. Strangely, Equality's memory of the man's execution is inspiring, not frightening. The man--whom Equality calls "the Transgressor"--was not afraid of his death; instead, he approached death with a courageous sense of calm.

Equality's description of the Transgressor makes him sound like a saint--a martyr for freedom and individualism. Moreover, the very fact that speaking a single word is a capital offense in Equality's society illustrates how fragile and incompetent this society really is: the rulers of Equality's world are so frightened of any trace of individuality that they have no choice but to execute people like the Transgressor and hope that other citizens don't follow his example.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝ We, Equality 7-2521, have discovered a new power of nature. And we have discovered it alone, and we are alone to know it.

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis


In this chapter, Equality makes a monumental discovery--he discovers how to use electricity. Even though Equality lives in a society that forbids pride of any kind (since pride is an individualistic emotion), Equality cannot help but feel pride in his accomplishment--we can sense his self-satisfaction in the way he keeps repeating the word "alone."

It's significant that Rand's account of Equality's discovery of individualism places special emphasis on his scientific discoveries; i.e., his unique ideas. The cornerstone of Rand's defense of individualism is the principle that human beings own their selves and their ideas (of course, she also assumes that the average individual is exceptionally strong, intelligent, healthy, etc.). Equality's society disagrees, arguing that human beings "share" each other and each other's ideas. But as the passage makes clear, this society's beliefs are nonsensical: Equality discovered the power of electricity, and thus "owns" the moment and reality his discovery.

☝ No single one can possess greater wisdom than the many Scholars who are elected by all men for their wisdom. Yet we can. We do. We have fought against saying it, but now it is said. We do not care. We forget all men, all laws and all things save our metals and our wires. So much is still to be learned! So long a road lies before us, and what care we if we must travel it alone!

Related Characters: The World Council of Scholars

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

In Equality's society, all knowledge is controlled by a group

of Scholars--a supposedly wise body of elders who control the sum of humanity's knowledge and wisdom. As Equality makes very clear, his own intelligence and wisdom now seems to outstrip that of the Scholars: where the Scholars believe that candles are the best light source, Equality has discovered that there's a much better one, the light bulb.

The passage draws a distinction between the philosophy of the Scholars--to accept the current state of knowledge and refuse to discover anything new--and that of Equality--to be curious and constantly discover new information. The irony of the "Scholars" is that their society is almost totally lacking in information--after the collapse of individualistic society, most of the human race's wisdom was lost forever. The Scholars should be seeking out new information in the hopes of improving their society, but instead, they discourage scientific experimentation or research of any kind (especially the kind practiced by Equality).

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ "Our dearest one," we whispered. Never have men said this to women.

Related Characters: The Golden One

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 40



Explanation and Analysis



In this scene, Equality tells Liberty--whom he calls "The Golden One"--that she's dear to him. Equality is frightened to say these words to the Golden One, because they express love and a personal ego, both of which are forbidden in his society.

The passage is important because it illustrates the power of the forces of love and the power of individualism. Even though Equality knows that he could be executed for daring to express his love to The Golden One he does so, anyway--his desire for individual happiness is far stronger than his fear of a collectivist society. And notice that the passage mentions both men and women (seemingly for the first time in the entire book!). Rand reminds us that Equality's forbidden love for The Golden One is rooted in the fact that he is a man and she is a woman; in other words, in the basic facts of (heteronormative) biology. Equality's society tries to prevent love, but it can't fight human nature.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ We made it. We created it. We brought it forth from the night of the ages. We alone. Our hands. Our mind. Ours alone and only.

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 43



Explanation and Analysis

Equality completes work on his newest invention, the light bulb, and he feels a palpable sense of pride at having created such an important device.

As before, Rand uses the passage to define individualism as ownership of one's accomplishments. Despite the fact that Equality lives in a society in which everyone is understood to own everything equally, Equality--and he alone--created the light bulb. Moreover, Equality's sense of pride is a critical part of *why* he strove to create the light bulb. Rand's message is clear: it's impossible to have an innovative society without individual achievement, anchored in a sense of competition and pride. In Rand's view, collectivist societies like the Soviet Union tried to make important scientific discoveries, but ultimately failed because they didn't glorify individual achievement.

☞ We stretch out our arms. For the first time do we know how strong our arms are. And a strange thought comes to us: we wonder, for the first time in our life, what we look like. Men never see their own faces and never ask their brothers about it, for it is evil to have concern for their own faces or bodies. But tonight, for a reason we cannot fathom, we wish it were possible to us to know the likeness of our own person.

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 45-46

Explanation and Analysis

Equality feels a strong desire to know what he looks like. In spite of the fact that he lives in a society where individualism of any kind is despised, Equality is becoming increasingly aware of his self; i.e., he's becoming conscious that he is a unique person, distinct from the society in which he lives.


It's crucial to note that Equality first becomes curious about what he looks like after he invents the light bulb. Equality feels a sense of pride in his scientific accomplishments, and even more importantly, he becomes aware that *someone* created the lightbulb--Equality himself. In short, Rand defines individualism in terms of intellectual action. A true individual is someone like Equality, who uses his mind to create something new. As Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am." Equality creates the lightbulb; therefore he is an individual.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☞ Tomorrow, in the full light of day, we shall take our box, and leave our tunnel open, and walk through the streets to the Home of the Scholars. We shall put before them the greatest gift ever offered to men. We shall tell them the truth. We shall hand to them, as our confession, these pages we have written. We shall join our hands to theirs, and we shall work together, with the power of the sky, for the glory of mankind.

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis



In this chapter, Equality--armed with the knowledge of how to build a light bulb--prepares to go before the Home of the Scholars and present his findings. Equality is confident that the Scholars will recognize the obvious superiority of his light bulb over the humble candle.

Notice that Equality frames his expectations for the meeting with the Scholars in terms of "the glory of mankind." Even though Equality is in the process of discovering his own individuality, he's still acting out of a sincere desire to help other people. Rand uses this passage to disprove the notion that individualism is incompatible with generosity. Evidently, it's possible to be an individual and to help other people.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ "A Street Sweeper! A Street Sweeper walking in upon the World Council of Scholars! It is not to be believed! It is against all the rules and all the laws!"

Related Characters: The World Council of Scholars (speaker), Equality 7-2521

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

Equality presents his light bulb before the Home of the Scholars, but to his amazement, the Scholars don't celebrate Equality's invention; on the contrary, they consider it dangerous and pointless. Here, the Scholars condemn Equality for daring to appear before the Scholars--Equality is just a humble Street Sweeper, who should know his place.


Up to this point, it was possible to believe that Equality's society was sincerely committed to the principles of equality and cooperation. Here, however, it becomes clear that the opposite is true. Whatever lip-service Equality's society pays to equality, it's obvious that the Scholars look down on certain people in society for being inferior. Equality's society is hypocritical: it claims to treat all people equally, and yet clearly doesn't.

The irony of the scene is that Equality is "more Catholic than the Pope"--in other words, he's more committed to helping other people than the Scholars themselves. Equality wants to use his lightbulb for the betterment of mankind--something the Scholars angrily forbid. Ultimately, Rand uses this passage to illustrate the contradictions of a collectivist society: the only society that can truly use its power to help its own people is a society that celebrates individual achievement.

☞ "What is not thought by all men cannot be true."

Related Characters: The World Council of Scholars (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis



At the World Council of Scholars, Equality presents his discovery of the light bulb, only to be angrily criticized. The Scholars dislike Equality for daring to pursue scientific research on his own. Equality's behavior illustrates his individualism--and therefore it infuriates the Council.

The Scholars ignore the fact that Equality has discovered something that's useful to all people--instead, they focus on the fact that Equality has discovered his invention *on his own*. In this passage, the Scholars sum up their opposition to Equality's behavior: Equality has dared to think something *new*, and therefore, he must be lying.

The passage proves that Equality's society is against all human progress. The only way that a society can move forward is if individual people use their intelligence to discover new things. By denying people like Equality the right to do so, the Council is condemning society to an eternity of ignorance.

☞ We sat still and we held our breath. For our face and our body were beautiful. Our face was not like the faces of our brothers, for we felt no pity when looking upon it. Our body was not like the bodies of our brothers, for our limbs were straight and thin and hard and strong. And we thought that we could trust this being who looked upon us from the stream, and that we had nothing to fear with this being.

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Equality--newly escaped from his society--walks through the forest and stumbles upon a stream. In the stream, Equality sees his own reflection--it's the first time he's ever seen what he looks like. To Equality's delight, he is strong and handsome.


While Equality's behavior might seem vain (indeed, it's the very definition of "narcissism," as it echoes the Greek myth of Narcissus falling in love with his reflection), Rand is trying to make a different point. Equality has been living in a collectivist society for so long that *any* love for his own body, his own intelligence, and his own talent was forbidden. Therefore, it's crucial for Equality to recognize his own worth: as the passage makes very clear, he's no longer playing by his society's rules.

Indeed, Rand celebrates Equality's egotism and arrogance, and suggests that if we want to criticize him as vain then we are thinking collectively. As Rand was fond of saying, the modern world discourages people from taking pride in their own abilities--a slippery slope that, she claimed, will end in a totally collectivist society, of the kind on view in *Anthem*. (This doesn't speak to those who *aren't* naturally beautiful, strong, brilliant, and curious, however.)

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ We shall follow you wherever you go. If danger threatens you, we shall face it also. If it be death, we shall die with you. You are damned, and we wish to share your damnation.

Related Characters: The Golden One (speaker), Equality 7-2521

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 66



Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Equality reunites with The Golden One, the love of his life. Equality, who'd feared that he'd never see The Golden One again, is overjoyed to be with his love. In this scene, The Golden One tells Equality that she'll be with him forever--even if staying with him endangers her own life. In short, Equality and the Golden One love each other--they're willing to sacrifice their own happiness for each other's sake.

The passage is crucial because it responds to the most common criticism of Rand's style of individualism--that such individualism is incompatible with love and cooperation. As Rand argues here, true love is only possible *with* Randian individualism. It's perfectly possible to be a rugged individualist and also love someone completely. Indeed, love becomes more valuable when it's reserved for a handful of other people, rather than being doled out to everyone. In short, Rand implies, the man who loves people in general loves no one in particular.

☞ We have broken the law, but we have never doubted it. Yet now, as we walk through the forest, we are learning to doubt.

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 69-70

Explanation and Analysis



Equality, now escaped from collectivist society for good, begins to think critically about the rules he's grown up with. Since he was a baby, Equality has been taught to think in terms of the group--to distrust any kind of selfishness or self-interest. Although we've seen Equality disobey the laws of his society, Equality has still always thought of these laws


as being *correct*. Now that he's abandoned society altogether, Equality begins to realize that his former society's laws were never right--individuality and curiosity aren't sins at all.

The passage establishes doubt as one of the most important weapons for individualism. Nobody in Equality's society questioned society's rules, precisely because everyone believed in these rules. Rand advocates the practice of systematic doubt--the constant questioning of the ideas people are supposed to take for granted. As Equality begins to question the philosophy of collectivism and groupthink, he sees it for what it is: a pack of lies.

☞ We looked into each other's eyes and we knew that the breath of a miracle had touched us, and fled, and left us groping vainly. And we felt torn, torn for some word we could not find.

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker), The Golden One

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, Equality and The Golden One confess their love for one another--they say, "We love you," but notice that their words sound wrong. Equality and the Golden One feel that they have yet to become true individuals--they're still thinking in terms of the group, as evidenced by their use of the word "we."

In spite of the fact that Equality and The Golden One aren't yet complete individuals, the passage gives a vivid, almost religious account of the "miracle" of individualism. As Rand sees it, Equality has been blessed with an incredible gift--the gift to think for himself and pursue his own interests. Equality's story is a coming-of-age tale, in which he discovers his gift (the gift of individualism) and then proceeds to develop his gift to the point where he can utter the "sacred word" ("I") and become a true individual.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☞ And now we look upon the earth and sky. This spread of naked rock and peaks and moonlight is like a world ready to be born, a world that waits. It seems to us it asks a sign from us, a spark, a first commandment. We cannot know what word we are to give, nor what great deed this earth expects to witness. We know it waits. It seems to say it has great gifts to lay before us, but it wishes a greater gift from us. We are to speak. We are to give its goal, its highest meaning to all this glowing space of rock and sky.

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 76-77

Explanation and Analysis



Equality and his companion, The Golden One, look out into the wilderness and feel a sense of deep excitement. As Equality sees it, the natural world (the rocks, the moonlight, etc.) belongs to him and The Golden One--it's crying out to be "dominated" by human beings. Rand even suggests that the very "meaning" of the world is to be run by the human race.

Throughout the novel, Rand has argued that human beings own themselves and their ideas. Here, Rand offers an interesting corollary to her own theory of individualism: human beings own the world as well as themselves. Humans have been blessed with the gifts of self-consciousness and intellectual freedom--they must use their unique gifts to explore the natural world and place it under their control.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ Many words have been granted me, and some are wise, and some are false, but only three are holy: "I will it!"

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 78-79

Explanation and Analysis

In this dramatic passage, Equality claims that the only sacred words are "I will it." Equality's claim is interesting for a number of reasons.

1) The passage represents one of the first times in the novel that Equality uses the word "I." Up until now, Equality has

thought in terms of the group. Here, though, he's beginning to stretch his individualist muscles, thinking of himself as a unique, independent being--and he has finally learned the forbidden word and begun to apply it to himself.

2) The passage also reinforces the importance of freedom ("will"). It is not enough for human beings to be individuals; they must *use* their individuality to achieve specific actions, exercising their own unique freedom in the process. All human beings (even the human beings in Equality's society) have the *capacity* to be free individuals, but only those who choose to exercise their free will can truly be called individual. (This is also an echo of the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, in which the "will to power" is the most important part of achieving fulfillment in life.)

3) By the same token, the passage reminds us that individualism is an act, not just a state of mind. Over the course of the novel, Equality gets in touch with his individuality by discovering the light bulb, fleeing from the Council, etc.--in other words, by thinking his own thoughts and acting as he sees fit. As Rand believed, there are many people who know that they're individuals but lack the courage to exercise their free will by being truly original.

☞ My happiness is not the means to any end. It is the end. It is its own goal. It is its own purpose.

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis



Here, Equality comes to see that human happiness is its own purpose--an idea that's more complicated than it might seem at first. Equality's discovery rebuts a long philosophical tradition that argues that happiness must itself be a means to some other, higher goal.

Here, Rand uses Equality as a mouthpiece to articulate her own philosophical system Objectivism. As Rand argued in her other writings, all religions and ideologies make the same basic mistake: they trivialize human happiness and deify some other value, be it God, wealth, cooperation, wisdom, etc. The problem with religions and ideologies, then, is that they can be used to reduce individual happiness in favor of another value. (For example, Rand argued that Christianity tries to make human happiness appear less important than loyalty to God.) For Rand, the cornerstone of any system of philosophy must be the idea that individual

happiness is the highest good--indeed, protecting the principle of human happiness is the only way to respect individualism.

☛ And here, over the portals of my fort, I shall cut in the stone the word which is to be my beacon and my banner. The word which will not die, should we all perish in battle. The word which can never die on this earth, for it is the heart of it and the meaning and the glory. The sacred word: EGO

Related Characters: Equality 7-2521 (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 88-89

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel, Equality finally discovers the "sacred word" that defines all human greatness--ego. Ego, which is Latin for "I," is the cornerstone of Rand's philosophy of Objectivism. By the same token, it's also the cornerstone of Equality's way of life--his most important duty is protecting his own happiness and his own freedom. Each human has been given ownership of his own mind and body, and, according to Rand, humans must never sacrifice such gifts for the sake of the group (as in Equality's former society).

It's important to note that Equality's tone here borders on the messianic (notice that the final sentences of the novel echo the Lord's Prayer, "for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory ...". Where Christianity worships God, Equality (and Rand) worships ego--the miraculous, almost divine gift with which all human beings are blessed.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

“It is a sin to write this,” begins an entry in Equality 7-2521’s journal. He always refers to himself using the second-person plural, “we,” and explains that his writing is sinful because it is for himself alone, and thinking on one’s own has been outlawed. Alone in a disused railway tunnel, Equality 7-2521 writes by the light of a candle stolen from the Home of the Street Sweepers.

Equality 7-2521 explains that he is 21 years old, and his tall, strong body and his active, curious mind set him apart from other men. He calls these impulses a “curse,” because since the Great Rebirth, the World Council has commanded that “all men must be alike.” It is a punishable offense to speak of the Unmentionable Times before the Great Rebirth, in which technology flourished but people did not live by the Great Truth that “all men are one and that there is no will save the will of all men together.”

Equality 7-2521 recounts his childhood in the Home of the Infants, where he was disciplined for fighting with his brethren. He was then educated for ten years at the Home of the Students, where he felt cursed for being more intelligent than his cohort. A lover of science, he hopes to be assigned to the Home of the Scholars, where the candle was invented fairly recently, to continue his learning. However, on his fifteenth birthday, the Council of Vocations assigns him the role of Street Sweeper. Equality 7-2521 is upset by this, but feels that this tedious job may be a way for him to atone for his sins against his brethren.

In just the first few words of the novella, Rand clearly conveys that Equality 7-2521’s dystopian society is characterized by a lack of individuality and an overpowering sense of shame. By being unable to use the pronoun “I,” Equality 7-2521 has lost the ability to distinguish himself as an individual through language and has become assimilated into a faceless mass.



In this society, qualities that are almost universally valued, like strength and intelligence, are seen as shameful in the misguided pursuit of equality and fairness. Equality 7-2521’s allusion to the Unmentionable Times carries the disturbing implication that his society may have arisen after a progressive era similar to the 20th century, when Anthem was written.



Equality 7-2521’s career arc illustrates the insulting inefficiencies of collectivist society. Instead of being allowed to flourish and exercise his own power, Equality 7-2521 is forced to work a tedious job that insults his intelligence and wastes his potential. Moreover, the recent invention of the candle underscores how technologically backwards this society is.



For four years, Equality 7-2521 performed the menial, routine tasks demanded of the Street Sweepers, until he committed a “crime” two years ago. Equality 7-2521 worked on a team with a weak, sickly Sweeper named Union 5-3992; and a strong, friendly Sweeper named International 4-8818. International 4-8818 is an aspiring artist with a good sense of humor, but his job as a Street Sweeper forbids him from drawing. International 4-8818 is someone Equality 7-2521 considers a “friend,” which is a transgression as it is forbidden to prefer some men to others. As Equality 7-2521 sweeps near the outskirts of the city, he comes across an iron grate obscured by weeds. Together with International 4-8818, he manages to pull up the grate, revealing a dark tunnel and some rungs to climb into it. Equality 7-2521 insists on descending, even though International 4-8818 tells him that doing so would be forbidden.

Once he descends the ladder, Equality 7-2521 finds himself in a large tunnel. He finds metal tracks on the ground and soon realizes that this space is a vestige of the Unmentionable Times and of the “secrets which we have lost.” Equality 7-2521 climbs back up the ladder, and International 4-8818 tells him that they must report their discovery to the City Council. Equality 7-2521 tells his friend that they will do no such thing, and that he will sacrifice his life to protect the space’s secrecy. International 4-8818 tearfully agrees to keep Equality 7-2521’s secret, saying that he would prefer to act evilly alongside his friend than to behave well alongside his other brothers.

From then on, Equality 7-2521 sneaks away from the mandatory entertainment every night and spends time in his secret tunnel. There, he uses stolen tools and scientific supplies pilfered from the Home of the Scholars to study. He even consults stolen manuscripts, which are very valuable because they represent a year’s worth of handwriting work by a scribe. Equality 7-2521 alludes to some of the discoveries he has made in his clandestine laboratory, and reflects that he feels strange for being so unashamed of his evil behavior. His transgressions, he says, have brought him peace for the first time in twenty years.

Not only is Equality 7-2521’s society backwards in terms of practical achievements, it is also emotionally stultifying. Friendship, one of the most basic human needs, is forbidden—ironically, in the name of camaraderie. International 4-8818’s career trajectory illustrates that the tragic waste of Equality 7-2521’s potential is hardly unique. However, despite these dismal living conditions, both Equality 7-2521 and International 4-8818 appear to have deeply internalized the values instilled in them by society—though International 4-8818 has done so to a greater degree, as he tries to shut down Equality 7-2521’s curiosity.



The tunnel indicates that the people of the Unmentionable Times possessed railroad or subway technology that the Equality 7-2521’s regressive society has abandoned. This is yet another indication that Rand considers collectivism to be counterproductive and backwards. International 4-8818’s willingness to support Equality 7-2521’s transgression illustrates that natural human impulses to explore and defend their friends transcend the incorrect ideologies imposed by collectivism.



Equality 7-2521’s secretive scientific experiments illustrate that his spark of creativity and intelligence can overcome even the most repressive social restrictions. However, the conflict between his socialized shame and his continued enjoyment of science shows that he has yet to break free of the oppression instilled in him since birth.



CHAPTER 2

Equality 7-2521 is captivated by a woman named Liberty 5-3000, even though it is forbidden to take notice of women in this way. Liberty 5-3000 works as a farmer in the Home of the Peasants. When Equality 7-2521 sweeps near her field, he admires her from afar. One day, the two face one another and seem to share a moment of recognition. The following day, the two smile at one another, and they begin to rendezvous in silence every day, gesturing subtly at one another so that their comrades cannot observe their greetings.

Even though it is a sin to give others distinctive names, Equality 7-2521 now thinks of Liberty 5-3000 as “The Golden One.” He thinks of her often, even though men are only permitted to think of women at the Time of Mating. This takes place one day each spring when fertile men and women are sent to the Palace of Mating to procreate impersonally. Equality 7-2521 finds this mating “ugly” and “shameful.”

One day, Equality 7-2521 speaks to the Golden One. He tells her that she is beautiful, and they confide in one another that they are attracted to each other. He then begins to think of the Palace of Mating, and is confused why he would associate Liberty 5-3000 with that place. However, he vows never to let her be sent to the Palace. She is seventeen, which makes her one year away from being eligible to be sent for mating. This thought makes Equality 7-2521 furious, though he cannot understand why. The Golden One notices this anger, and she smiles sadly. Equality 7-2521 muses that she, in her “wisdom of women,” understands more than he. The two part ways, and Equality 7-2521 notices that the Golden One’s hands tremble as she continues her farming.

Later that night, Equality 7-2521 is reprimanded for singing joyfully at the dinner table. It is considered improper to sing without reason. He notices that, while all men are supposed to be happy, his comrades live in fear. One, Fraternity 2-5503, sobs uncontrollably throughout the day. Another, Solidarity 9-6347, often screams out for help in his sleep. Because of the solace Equality 7-2521 finds in his tunnel, he seems visibly content, and the Council of the Home notices this with suspicion.

Before bed, Equality 7-2521 looks out at the Uncharted Forest that lies outside the city. Rarely, some men are rumored to escape the City and hide in the forest, and the forest is also rumored to hold ruins from the Unmentionable Times. The secrets of the Unmentionable Times were erased when the group of people called Evil Ones were defeated just before the Great Rebirth and their writings were burned in the Script Fire.

Essentially every natural need is restricted by Equality 7-2521’s society, and love is foremost among them. Again, Equality 7-2521’s and Liberty 5-3000’s subtle subversion of their social restrictions shows that human nature will prevail over collectivist restrictions.



Equality 7-2521’s distinctive renaming of Liberty 5-3000 illustrates another small breach of his society’s restrictions on individuality. His revulsion to the Palace of Mating demonstrates that his society’s treatment of sex reduces a natural, and ideally joyful, act into a shameful, mechanical ordeal.



Interpersonal interactions have been so de-sexualized, and sex made so clinical, that Equality 7-2521 cannot understand why his romantic attraction would have sexual undertones. He also cannot decipher his individualistic urge to keep the Golden One’s sexual availability to himself. This suggests that Rand’s ideal society might accommodate jealousy and rage more than this collectivist society does.



The dismalness of Equality 7-2521’s collectivist society is further reinforced by its utterly depressing prohibition of joyfulness. The pathetic misery of Equality 7-2521’s comrades shows that in the name of promoting equal happiness, their society has in fact guaranteed that none can live happily—and repressed those who still dare to do so.



Equality 7-2521’s retelling of history shows how deeply the government’s collectivist propaganda runs. His narrative implies that all traces of individualistic society—and all the attendant knowledge—were burned, and any that subscribed to this ideology were given the monolithic label of “Evil Ones.”



Equality 7-2521 longs to learn these secrets, and reflects on the fact that there is an Unspeakable Word that has been lost to language. The only crime punishable by death in his society is to speak the Unspeakable Word. Equality 7-2521 is haunted by the memory of witnessing one speaker of the Unspeakable Word being burned alive in the City's public square. This Transgressor, despite having his tongue ripped out and being set on fire, carries himself with remarkable composure, reminiscent of a Saint. Equality 7-2521 remembers the Transgressor making eye contact with him as he burned to death. He recalls seeing not pain or suffering in the Transgressor's eyes, but simply pride.

Here, we finally see the brutality that the collectivists use to impose their anti-individualistic agenda. It is fairly clearly implied, even at this point, that the Unspeakable Word is "I"—the word that allows individuals to distinguish themselves from the collective. The dignity that Equality 7-2521 sees in the Transgressor foreshadows the dignity he may be able to regain once he, too, can access his individuality.



CHAPTER 3

Equality 7-2521 claims to have singlehandedly “discovered a new power of nature,” and he alone is privy to it. He is ready to accept punishment if need be, and calls the Council of Scholars “blind.” The secrets of the earth should not be available to all, but rather only to those men who are willing to pursue them. Equality 7-2521 goes on to explain the power he has discovered: one night, while dissecting a frog, he noticed that its leg jerked even though it was no longer alive. After many experiments, he discovered that the frog jerked because it was connected to a copper wire that was somehow conducting power into its body.

In this chapter, Equality's tone changes noticeably. Instead of the overly modest and self-effacing wording he used previously, he frames his discovery in far more grandiose and individualistic terms, and is even willing to insult the Council of Scholars.



“Haunted” by this discovery, Equality 7-2521 performs more experiments to learn that metal conducts power from the sky, like lightning. Using the materials he finds in his tunnel, including “globes of glass” (which are almost certainly **light bulbs**), he concludes that men from the Unmentionable Times were familiar with this sort of power. He is determined to continue learning about this new force on his own, because he alone possesses a knowledge greater than that of the Scholars.

Once he has gotten a taste of individual creative achievement, Equality 7-2521 cannot help but pursue more. Rand uses this chapter to illustrate that the human quest to develop and exert personal power is a natural, noble, and irresistible pursuit. By exercising his power, Equality 7-2521 is merely working to restore himself to the state that people occupied during the more individualistic Unmentionable Times.



CHAPTER 4

After many days, Equality 7-2521 finds the Golden One again and speaks to her near her fields. He tells her that he has given her the name, “The Golden One.” She in turn confesses that she does not think of him as Equality 7-2521, but rather as “The Unconquered.” Equality 7-2521 tells her that her thoughts are forbidden, but they both agree that it is better that she thinks them. He then calls her “our dearest one,” a phrase whose poignancy takes them both by surprise.

Together, Equality 7-2521 and the Golden One are working to undo the restrictions on individuality that they had endured. Singling out the Golden One with a superlative adjective by calling her his “dearest one” shows that Equality 7-2521 is beginning to think of human individuals as more separable from the homogenous collective.



The Golden One then offers Equality 7-2521 some water to drink. Because he cannot cross the hedge, she kneels by the moat and brings water to him in her cupped hands. Equality 7-2521 drinks the water from her hands and remains for some time with his lips pressed against her palms. The two both seem confused about what this gesture means. The Golden One then begins to walk away, but cannot bring herself to face away from Equality 7-2521 or to lower her arms to her sides.

This encounter is likely the first sensual human contact in either of the two characters' lives. Because the collectivist society has been designed to eliminate love between two individuals, Equality 7-2521 and the Golden One are unable to make sense of their encounter, because they cannot reconcile it with the world view they have been taught.



CHAPTER 5

Equality 7-2521 has successfully created a strange device that he describes as a glass box housing a glowing wire—in other words, a **light bulb**. He begins to comprehend the scope of his discovery: men will be able to illuminate all the Cities of the world using nothing more than metal and wires. Mankind can harness power from the skies and use it to do their will.

There is strong symbolic significance to Equality 7-2521's discovery: not only is he rescuing his brethren from literal darkness, but he is also rescuing them from the figurative darkness that their bleak collectivist culture has imposed upon them. His self-empowerment allows him to harness the literal power of electricity.



Equality 7-2521 decides that he will promote his discovery so that all men can use it. Next month, the World Council of Scholars will meet in his City, and he will present his **light bulb** to them. He hopes that the Council will understand that his invention was worth the transgressions he committed to develop it.

Here, Equality 7-2521 seems to have struck a balanced compromise between individualism and collectivist altruism. He is willing and able to pursue his own constructive passions, but he is also committed to sharing his resources to the betterment of his fellow man. It is unclear whether Rand, later in her career, would have advocated the altruistic way in which Equality 7-2521 plans to share his invention.



As he thinks about his invention, Equality 7-2521 realizes that he is proud not just of what he created, but also of himself for being capable of creating it. He notices how strong his arms are, and he wonders for the first time what he looks like. It is forbidden to see one's own reflection, but for reasons he cannot understand, Equality 7-2521 is very interested in seeing his.

Equality 7-2521's evolution into a fully-fledged individual continues in this scene. He is now able to conceptualize his invention as an individual achievement—one for which he, and he alone, is responsible.



CHAPTER 6

Thirty days have passed since Equality 7-2521's last journal entry. On the night he created his **light bulb**, he forgot to watch his hourglass to make sure he returned to the City Theatre on time. He returns alone to the Home of the Street Sweepers, and is questioned about what he had been doing. Equality 7-2521 will not give up his secret, so the Council of the Home has him taken to the Palace of Corrective Detention and lashed. He suffers countless blows, but refuses to disclose where he has been, and only says "the light...the light...the light..."

Again, Equality 7-2521's individual willpower proves too much for his collectivist society to overcome. No matter what the establishment tries to do, they are unable to get him to yield his individual secret. This is one of Rand's ways of illustrating the perseverance of the individual will over oppressive conditions.



The interrogators give up and leave Equality 7-2521 imprisoned for many days. Finally, Equality 7-2521 decides to escape, because the World Council of Scholars is scheduled to meet the next day. He easily breaks the old locks on the doors, which have been left in disrepair because no man has dared defy the Council by attempting an escape.

Equality 7-2521 runs back to his tunnel hideout. The next day, he will show his invention at the Home of the Scholars. He is confident they will collaborate with him to use the power of the sky for the benefit of all mankind. Equality 7-2521 feels that in a day's time he will no longer be a social outcast.

Equality 7-2521's easy escape shows that his peers have become so mindlessly loyal to the establishment that they will not even exert their individual wills against the Council by attempting to escape from prison.



Up to this point, it seems as though Equality 7-2521 may be conducting his experiments with the overall interest of the collective in mind, rather than his own personal benefit. However, this sort of selfless behavior is something Rand condemns, and something Equality 7-2521 will be rid of by the time the book is over.



CHAPTER 7

Equality 7-2521 is now in the Uncharted Forest. He will live there until he is ripped apart by the forest beasts. He describes appearing before the World Council of Scholars that morning and greeting them. The luminaries are aghast to find that a Street Sweeper has dared to present himself before them. Equality 7-2521 tells the Scholars that he holds “the future of mankind” in his hands, and proceeds to demonstrate his **light bulb**. Once the device begins to work, the Scholars react in fear and cower against one another. Equality 7-2521 tries to win them over with encouraging words about the **light bulb's** usefulness, but one of the Scholars, Collective 0-0009, condemns him for being audacious enough to create something on his own. The other members of the Council contemplate horrible punishments that Equality 7-2521 deserves, and decide that he will be placed before the World Council to be disciplined.

The Scholars tell Equality 7-2521 that his invention—and his presumption that it will help empower mankind—go against the principles of equality. “What is not done collectively cannot be good,” says one. The Scholars then conclude that the device must be destroyed. Dismayed, Equality 7-2521 snatches his invention and escapes by jumping out of a window. He runs into the Uncharted Forest with the box cradled in his arms.

As he wanders the forest, Equality 7-2521 concludes that he is “doomed.” He finds solace in his invention, which he crafted in the spirit of discovery. He resigns himself to an imminent death. Finally, he comes to the painful realization that he will never see the Golden One again. Equality 7-2521 is distressed by this thought, but concludes that it will be for the best for the Golden One to forget about him.

This encounter signifies Equality 7-2521's ultimate disenchantment with the collectivist establishment. His presentation of the light bulb should represent a triumph of the individual inventive spirit and a boon to his society as a whole, but his collectivist overlords are so backwards that they reject his monumentally useful achievement out of fear and jealousy. Notable here are the parallels to the Prometheus myth, referenced later in the book—however, instead of accepting Equality 7-2521's life-changing gift of light and power, as the ancient humans did with Prometheus's gift of fire, the Council of Scholars is so detached from its own self-interest that it rejects the light bulb outright.



The Council's slogans are so blindly and unthinkingly collectivist that they become a parody of their ideals. Rand uses this backwards caricature of collectivism to exaggerate the negative aspects of the movement, and by contrast, highlight egotism as an empowering, progressive, and moral way of life.



At this point, it seems as though Equality 7-2521 will be martyred in the name of individualistic achievement, much like the Transgressor of the Unspoken Word. Interestingly, he appears not to be entirely self-sufficient; rather, his concern for the Golden One makes him feel some remorse for disappearing completely.



CHAPTER 8

Equality 7-2521's first day in the forest has turned out to be a refreshing, liberating encounter with nature. He climbs a tree and realizes that he is laughing aloud in delight. He makes his way through the forest, eating when he is hungry, satisfied by his ability to hunt to obtain what he needs. Equality 7-2521 comes across a stream and is taken aback by his reflection, which he sees for the first time. He is struck by his beauty—his face and body do not inspire pity, like the features of his comrades do. Heartened by his appearance, he realizes that he has “nothing to fear” in his own company.

Equality 7-2521 walks through the forest until nightfall. He then recalls that he is now a complete outlaw—one of the “Damned.” Instead of distressing him, this thought only makes him laugh. He concludes that he has a great deal to speak about on his own, but has yet to find the words to express his thoughts. He cannot yet speak of his thoughts because he cannot yet understand them.

Once he is away from collectivist society's toxic influence, it does not take much time for Equality 7-2521 to begin appreciating life as he should. His first-time experience of his own reflection is another definitive moment in his separation from the collective. Equality 7-2521's strong, comforting appearance further sets him apart from his pathetic comrades and makes it clear that individualism is a safe and proper way of life.



Gradually, Equality 7-2521 is losing touch with the collectivist values that had been inculcated in him all his life. Though he still thinks of himself as a damned sinner, he is beginning to embrace that understanding and to see that there is nothing wrong with his lifestyle.



CHAPTER 9

Many days have passed since Equality 7-2521 has written in his journal. He did not have any desire to speak, and has not needed to record his experiences in words in order to remember them. On his second day in the forest, Equality 7-2521 hears footsteps behind him and hides. He sees someone clad in a tunic and leaps out to confront them. It is the Golden One; she rushes towards him.

Equality 7-2521 asks the Golden One what she is doing in the forest, but she answers only by saying that she has found him. She then explains that she followed him into the forest after news of his escape spread throughout the City. After running away from the Home of the Peasants, she tracked him through the wilderness, undisturbed by the cuts and bruises she suffered on the way. The Golden One explains that she will follow Equality 7-2521 wherever he goes, and is even willing to die alongside him. “You are damned, and we wish to share your damnation,” she explains.

The Golden One continues to speak, with “bitterness and triumph” in her voice. Equality 7-2521, she says, is fierce, hard, and defiant; unlike his brothers, who are weak and deferential. She kneels and bows before him. When Equality 7-2521 reaches down to help her up, they touch lips. The feeling of kissing is foreign and thrilling to them, and Equality 7-2521 is struck that he lived 21 years without knowing that he could experience such great joy.

Equality 7-2521's experiences in the wilderness have been so individual and personal that he hasn't even felt the need to share them with his own journal.



The Golden One occupies an interesting space in between Equality 7-2521's individualism and her utterly conformist society. After all, she has the strength to break free of her culture, but she remains at Equality 7-2521's beck and call. It is in moments like these that it becomes very clear that the Golden One is designed as a secondary character, meant to complement, but not to challenge, Equality 7-2521's rugged individualism.



It is unclear just how flattering Rand seeks to make her portrayal of the Golden One's deference to Equality 7-2521. By kneeling and bowing before Equality 7-2521, she certainly portrays herself as much less of an assertive individual than he.



Equality 7-2521 tells the Golden One that she has nothing to fear about the solitude of the forest. Their comrades and their internalized notions of good and evil are unnecessary. The two go off hand in hand, and later that night Equality 7-2521 comes to learn that having sexual intercourse with a woman is an ecstasy, not a source of shame.

The two walk through the vast forest for days. Equality 7-2521 enjoys distancing himself from the City. He has made a bow and arrow, which he uses to hunt birds for food. At night, he and the Golden One set up camp in a clearing and surround themselves with **fires** to prevent the wild animals from attacking them while they sleep. He resolves to one day build a house and stop wandering, but feels no need to rush to do so.

Equality 7-2521 finds his new life far more straightforward than his previous one. He reveres the beauty that surrounds him—both of nature itself and of the Golden One. He ponders how the solitude he has found could possibly be considered a sinful, corrupting force. “If this is the great evil of being alone, then what is good and what is evil?” he asks himself. Though he has broken the law before, he had never doubted it until this moment. He reflects that the only meaningful life he had thought possible was spent in toil for his fellow brothers, and that the only joy he thought possible had to be shared with his brethren. But his most profound joys have come from the solitary experiences he has had while creating his **light bulb**, and in his relationship with the Golden One. The delight he finds in solitude puzzles him.

The Golden One tells Equality 7-2521, “**we** love you.” But something sounds wrong about that phrase, and she takes it back. She tries to express that she alone loves him alone, but cannot express this thought in the proper words. Equality 7-2521 ends the chapter by saying that he feels distraught and in need of a particular word he does not know.

CHAPTER 10

Equality 7-2521 sits at a table and writes this journal entry on paper that is thousands of years old. He is in a house that he and the Golden One found at sunrise that very morning. It is nestled in a beautiful, uncharted mountain range—very isolated from the Cities. The house appeared to the two wanderers at sunrise, and the reflection of the **sunlight** in its windows made it appear to be aflame. The house is largely made up of windows, and Equality 7-2521 wonders how it has remained standing.

It is worth considering whether the two lovers' mutually enjoyable sexual encounter is a representation of individual self-sufficiency, or an indication that some aspects of human fulfillment are indeed collective.



Just as Equality 7-2521's invention of the light bulb served to differentiate him from his dull, dark surroundings, the fires he uses to defend himself and the Golden One while they sleep are another symbol of their individual strength and their abilities to prevail over their environments.



Equality 7-2521 begins to still more vigorously investigate and question the dubious principles of collectivism that he has internalized. Finally, Equality 7-2521 is on the verge of doubting the collectivist principles he has accepted unquestioningly for his entire life. He has already adapted to a fulfilling, individualistic lifestyle; the only missing piece is for his moral sensibilities to align with his real-life behavior, so that he can act as he wants to without feeling like a transgressor.



The couple's collectivist society has literally controlled the way they think and speak, by denying them the ability to think of themselves as an individual with the word “I.” However, the discomfort they feel after hearing this phrase suggests that they are on the cusp of fully realizing their individuality.



Again, the imagery of light symbolizes a break from the dark forces of collectivism. This house, a remnant from the Unmentionable Times, will likely bring Equality 7-2521 knowledge and empowerment similar to what he experienced after harnessing the light-making power of electricity.



Before entering the house, Equality 7-2521 asks the Golden One if she is scared, and she says no, so the two enter the house together. Inside, they find artifacts from the Unmentionable Times that Equality 7-2521 says will take years to understand. They are taken aback by the colorful décor, the mirrors that line the walls, and the fact that the house is designed for only two occupants. Equality 7-2521 also finds books written in a language he understands, but with many unfamiliar words. He is impressed by their composition, which is too neat to be the result of writing by hand, and vows to begin studying them the next day.

After inspecting the house, Equality 7-2521 tells the Golden One that they will inhabit the house until the end of their days. She replies, “your will be done.” Equality 7-2521 collects water and kills a mountain goat for food, which he will prepare using the house’s unfamiliar cooking implements. Meanwhile, the Golden One stands and admires her body in a mirror.

At nightfall, the Golden One falls asleep, and Equality 7-2521 carries her to bed. He stays up reading the manuscripts by candlelight, knowing that he will not be able to sleep that night. He looks through a window and senses that the landscape seems to hold great gifts and promise for him, but also expects a gift from him: that he give the world meaning. Equality 7-2521 looks at his hands and sees them coated in centuries-old dust, and he feels reverence for the secrets and evils it holds. He hopes knowledge will come to him, so that he can fully grasp “the secret [his] heart has understood and yet will not reveal.”

CHAPTER 11

For the first time, Equality 7-2521 narrates in the first person. “I am. I think. I will,” he writes. The words he has found are “the answer.” He stands on a mountaintop with arms outstretched and reflects that he has found the meaning of things: he himself is the meaning. “I need no warrant for being, and no word of sanction upon my being,” he says. He exists as his own human being; therefore his existence is warranted and sanctioned.

It is Equality 7-2521’s eyes that give beauty to what he sees, and his hearing is what allows for song. His own judgment is the only route to truth, and his own will is the only authority to which he must defer. The only words that he respects as holy are: “I will it.”

Clearly, Rand aims to use this house and its lively amenities to emphasize that people lived a life of variety and luxury in the Unmentionable Times, compared with the dreariness people are forced to endure under collectivism. The fact that Equality 7-2521 can understand the books he finds suggests that the relative success of the Unmentionable Times occurred in the recent past—a warning that the regressive forces of collectivism can undo progress in little time.



The Golden One shares Equality 7-2521’s vanity and interest in personal appearance, but her subservient remark illustrates that she does not interact with him as an equal.



Equality 7-2521’s intellectual curiosity is unmatched. His yearning to give meaning to his surroundings is an enactment of Rand’s notions of individual purpose: to the extent any individual has a purpose, it is to give his own personal meaning to his surroundings.



This moment marks the definitive breakthrough in Equality 7-2521’s character development. At the beginning of the work, he was ashamed to even flirt with self-assertion. Now, his discovery of the pronoun “I” has allowed him to become an utter egoist.



In this monologue, Equality 7-2521 is essentially a mouthpiece for the views that would go on to inform Rand’s egocentric ideological system, called Objectivism.



Equality 7-2521 says that he does not know whether the earth is the center of the universe or an insignificant speck, but it doesn't matter to him either way. He now understands what happiness he can achieve on earth, and this happiness is all that matters to him. It is an end in itself, and needs no other goal or purpose. Instead of being a tool for others' use, he is a man in charge of his own power. He is not obligated to share his "treasures" with anyone; he lives for no other man, and asks no other man to live for him.

Equality 7-2521 is neither a friend nor an enemy to his fellow man, and will only give them the treatment that they earn from him. He may choose friends, but he will never subjugate himself to another. Each man, Equality 7-2521 says, is alone in the "temple of his spirit," and this temple should remain undisturbed by others. The word "we" represents a defilement of this temple. It is a monstrous thing to place the collective before the individual, Equality 7-2521 says. "We" is used to allow the weak to steal from the strong, to foster servitude and shamefulness. Equality 7-2521's god, his route to fulfillment, is the word "I."

CHAPTER 12

Equality 7-2521 explains that he first encountered the word "I" in the first book he read in the house he discovered. Upon understanding what this word meant, he dropped the book and burst into tears. He cried both because he felt as though he had achieved salvation, and because he pitied the rest of mankind. The "curse" he had felt while a member of society was in fact his greatest attribute, and all of his transgressions were in fact his noblest features. He now comes to understand that the individualistic spirit of man cannot be defeated even by centuries of oppression.

After reading for days, Equality 7-2521 summons the Golden One and tells her what he has learned. The first words she says to him are "I love you." He responds by telling her that it is improper to live without names, and that they should pick names for themselves. From his readings, he chooses the name **Prometheus**, after the figure from Greek mythology who stole fire from the Gods and brought it to mankind. Prometheus suffered for this offense, as all who bear this sort of burden must.

Equality 7-2521 has also read about Gaea, the mythological earth-mother. He gives the Golden One this name, saying that she will be the mother of a new race of gods. She accepts the name.

Here, again, Equality 7-2521 simply expounds upon the principles that will form the basis of Objectivism. Note his particular focus on power, which is the currency used both to subjugate individuals under collectivism, and the route towards the awakening of the individual ego.



Equality 7-2521's new philosophy is a complete reversal of the collectivist requirement that everyone must depend on everyone else. His categorical rejection of behavior that does not benefit him—even if it may benefit others—could be said to lack empathy. However, Equality 7-2521's personal experience of liberating himself from shame as soon as he escapes the City does corroborate his view of collectivism as a route to shame and cowardice.



Rand posits here that collectivism teaches the exact opposite of the impulses people need to healthily assert themselves as individuals. Equality 7-2521 was so brainwashed by collectivism that he thought his greatest strengths were a "curse."



Equality 7-2521's redefinition of himself as Prometheus is a testament to the gift he has given humankind. Like Prometheus, who in Greek myth brought fire to humans, Equality 7-2521 has brought another sort of empowering illumination—electric lighting—to his people. The hard exile Equality 7-2521 must endure because of the collectivists' ungratefulness parallels the punishment Prometheus receives for his transgression.



Again, the Golden One shows herself to be more of a passive character than her mate. By taking on the role of matriarch, she is actually—in a certain, narrow sense—being used as a tool for populating Prometheus's individualistic society.



Equality 7-2521, now **Prometheus**, sees his future clearly before him. He is the successor to the Saint of the pyre—the man who was executed for speaking the Unspeakable Word. He will live in this house, earn his food through his own struggles, and earn his knowledge through his own study. Over time, this will allow him to replicate the achievements of the Unmentionable Times in ways that are impossible to his brothers, who remain chained to the weakest members of society.

Prometheus has learned that his **light bulb** relies on something the men from the Unmentionable Times called Electricity. He understands that the house was powered by this technology and will endeavor to repair the wiring and light fixtures. He will use his understanding to protect his house with wires and light, and his mind will be his defense against others.

Gaea is pregnant with a child, and Prometheus says he will teach his son to live as a man and speak “I” proudly. After Prometheus has read the books in the house and established his home, he will return to the City where he was born and seek out his comrades, like International 4-8818. Prometheus will try to convince these people to come to his homestead with him, and together they will “write the first chapter in the new history of man.”

“Freedom,” to Prometheus, simply requires that man be free from his brothers. At first, men were enslaved by Gods, then by kings, and then by attachments of family or race. Over time, though, this enslavement was broken when mankind realized that each individual had inalienable rights independent of his fellow man. However, when people began to worship the concept of “**We**,” they lost these achievements and became weak and spineless.

Prometheus ponders how such greatness in human spirit could have faded to such cowardliness, but knows from his time in the City that men can willingly bring horrible misfortunes upon themselves. He imagines that there may have been a courageous group of men who resisted collectivism, and salutes their heroic struggle. He vows to continue this struggle, to prove that the spirit of man can never be broken, despite whatever darkness it is forced to endure. Prometheus’s mountaintop fortress will be the center of a new society that will one day reclaim the world from the collectivist Councils. He will fight for the freedom, dignity, and honor of mankind. There is one word, Prometheus concludes, that will never die. That sacred word, he says, is “ego.”

Prometheus’s living situation represents Rand’s ideal for self-sufficiency and self-motivated accomplishment.



This realization places Prometheus as a clear successor to other individualistic thinkers. Rand’s implication here is that only individualists will be able to maintain, and improve upon, the advances their individualistic forebears have pioneered. If later generations stray into collectivism, the world will plunge into another dark age.



It is difficult to say decisively whether Prometheus’s plan to liberate his peers from collectivist mindlessness in the Cities is an individualistic effort, or an act bolstered by underlying altruism and concern for others.



Here, Rand outlines what she sees as a clear, positive progression in human sophistication across history. As individuals become more delineated from groups, and their obligations to others diminish, their powers grow commensurately.



Prometheus’s final vision is an excellent outline of Ayn Rand’s vision for her own philosophy. By preaching Objectivism and egocentrism, she likely saw herself as liberating her followers and bestowing upon them the freedom, dignity, and honor they lacked while they subscribed to collectivism. It is significant that Rand picked a word with such a negative connotation—“ego”—to serve as Prometheus’s “sacred word.” This choice may be meant to show that people still possess internalized biases against individualism; once “ego” and “egotism” do not sound like pejorative concepts, Rand will be further on her way towards crafting her ideal society.





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