
Ayn Rand's Warnings About Collectivism In "Anthem"

In Ayn Rand's 1938 novella, *Anthem*, Rand explores the life of a young man named, Equality 7-2521 in a 'Dark-Age' communist-like state set sometime in the distant future. The novella follows Equality's struggle to find his identity and purpose in a society that has rejected individualism in favor of collectivism. On March 19, 1944, Ayn Rand wrote a letter in which she states: "Fascism, Nazism, Communism and Socialism are only superficial variations of the same monstrous theme — collectivism." Rand's anti-collectivist and pro-individual standpoint is not only moral, but it is just. Throughout the last century we have witnessed the rise and fall of many collectivist states and the atrocities that follow them such as: the stripping of the individual in the USSR, the importance of the collective in North Korea, and the loss of freedom in China.

There are many parallels in *Anthem* to Soviet Russia as Rand fled her homeland (Russia) in 1926, only a few years after the founding of the USSR. *Anthem's* unknown city's goal is to focus on the needs of the collective rather than the individual, which is the same initial principle that the Soviet Union was founded upon. When we strip man of his individuality and turn him into a pawn of the collective, we come to a moral dilemma and begin to ask tough questions, such as: Why should the individual be more important than the collective? Are the lives of the individual truly more important than the life of the collective? In Chapter 11 Prometheus proclaims, "For the word "We" must never be spoken, save by one's choice and as a second thought. This word must never be placed first within a man's soul, else it becomes a monster, the root of all the evils on earth, the root of man's torture by men, and an unspeakable lie." We see that after Prometheus broke free from the chains of man and understood the value of himself that he asked this, "I wonder, for it is hard for me to conceive how men who knew the word "I," could give it up and now know what they had lost." Prometheus knew that we must never value the collective more than the individual because that is when evil triumphs. When we become so desensitized by altruism that we neglect our own needs and desires, we lose the essence of what it means to be human.

In *Anthem* the people are taught that their only purpose is to serve the collective as they know what is best. The people have no real choice in what they can do with their lives as they are all working towards the government's goal. An example of this being jobs, whilst still living in the unknown city, Prometheus was a street sweeper. He had no choice in the matter as that is what he was taught to believe. Prometheus also had next to no interaction with anyone outside of the other street sweepers besides Gaea, which shows that the 'government' doesn't want any interaction between the people besides their service to one another. The unknown city models a communist style state in which the 'government' has seized the means of production so that all goods and services are designed for collective and their stagnation. The people of the city are

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only living to serve one another, this is pointed out to us in Chapter 7 when Similarity 5-0306 says, "And if this should lighten the toil of men, then it is a great evil, for men have no cause to exist save in toiling for other men." There can never be any true progression in a collectivist state as those who progress would be better than their peers. Similarities of this style of rule are present in North Korea. The people of North Korea's only purpose (in their eyes) are to serve the collective as that is all they know. Those who do not follow this mentality are thrown into prisons which are notorious for being just as bad as the Nazi concentration camps. The dictators of North Korea have brainwashed the people and have fed them lies for decades, leading the people to believe that the collective is more important individual. Over the years as the world's eyes have been opened to the atrocities that go on in the Korean peninsula today, the people continue to suffer in silence, because its what's best for everyone.

One of the critical themes of Anthem is the loss of freedom, and a perfect example of this would be the Chinese government's suppression of civil liberties. The Communist Party of China has been the ruling political party since its inception in 1921 and has been responsible for some of the greatest atrocities in human history such as the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962) and the Tiananmen Square Massacre (1989). Mao Zedong is the most infamous chairman of the Communist Party as he spearheaded the socio-economic campaign, the Great Leap Forward which led to the deaths of 45 million in the short span of four years. It was also the post-Mao social and economic state of China which led to the infamous Tiananmen Square protests where at least 10,000 people were killed by Chinese soldiers. In China these crucial bits of history are blotted out as the government controls what the people can and cannot see. The Chinese people's freedom of speech and press is completely suppressed and those who speak out or try to counter the law are routinely punished.

Here in modern western civilization we can all agree that the Chinese people are treated terribly by their government as most people would believe that the government should not have this kind of power over their citizen. This belief is emulated by Prometheus' quote in Chapter 12 in which he states, "At first, man was enslaved by the gods. But he broke their chains. Then he was enslaved by the kings. But he broke their chains. He was enslaved by his birth, by his kin, by his race. But he broke their chains. He declared to all his brothers that a man has rights which neither god nor king nor other men can take away from him, no matter what their number, for he is the right of man, and there is no right on earth above this right." The Chinese government much like the 'government' in Anthem are oppressors who have stripped the people of their God-given rights to speech, thought, and expression and we see this more and more today as the Hong Kong Protests rage on. The protestors know that once China has their full grasp over Hong Kong, they will lose many of their freedoms.

In the last century we have seen how collectivist ideologies such as communism and socialism have plagued the world in places such as: Russia, China, Cuba, North Korea, Venezuela, Nazi

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Germany, and many more. In these countries we have seen the rise of tyrants and dictators who oppress the masses, eliminate opposition and wreak havoc under the guise of 'what is best for their people'. Ayn Rand's warnings of the dangers of Collectivism are needed now more than ever in today's society. Right now, in the United States, the world's bastion of freedom, we have elected officials who are actively pushing an agenda that wish to topple the pro-capitalism and pro-individual system in order to bring about a new socialist government.

One of Rand's most famous quotes is, "There is no difference between communism and socialism, except in the means of achieving the same ultimate end: communism proposes to enslave men by force, socialism – by vote. It is merely the difference between murder and suicide." A communist/socialist state never has and never will succeed because as we have seen time and time again, the fantasy of equality will inevitably lead to a dark and destructive path. As individuals we must value ourselves more than others. It is not man's duty to care for and love his fellow man simply because they are born. It is a right that one must earn. When we submit ourselves to an ideology that strips the individual of his thoughts and freedoms in favor of the collective like the men and women of Anthem, we lose what it means to be human.

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