

## FIRST PLACE



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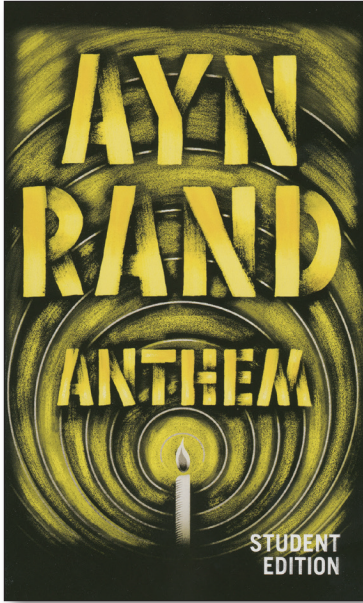
**For the following statement from *Anthem*, explain its role in the story, its relation to the themes and message of the story, and its relevance to your own life: “Indeed you are happy,” they answered. “How else can men be when they live for their brothers?”**

### **The Invisible Handcuffs: Collectivism in Anthem**

The Austrian diplomat Klemens von Metternich once said, “Ten million ignorances do not constitute one knowledge.” Such is the totalitarian society that Equality 7-2521 and his brothers find themselves in, chained by invisible handcuffs that they do not even know exist. Trapped by a society aiming to crush all aspects of human individuality, its citizens are left in the darkness of ignorance. The existence of knowledge has been erased, even eradicated: a forbidden evil that has no place in the sea of ten million ignorances.

Unique amongst his brothers through his tall physicality and his intellectual curiosity, Equality begins to chip at his own invisible handcuffs as he works alone in his secret tunnel, tirelessly exploring to satisfy his hungry curiosities that have caused him punishment. Equality also starts to escape the restrictions society has placed upon him and his ability to love someone. Liberty 5-3000 becomes the object of Equality’s affections, and even though his internal admiration of her purposeful eyes and her beautiful golden hair is a clear Transgression of Preference, Equality himself says that he “do[es] not wonder at this new sin.” His jubilation at confessing his love for Liberty 5-3000 expresses itself openly when he begins to sing “without reason” as he walks back to the Home of the Street Sweepers. Upon this, Equality is reprimanded, to which he replies that he “is singing because we are happy.” The Home Council member responds, “Indeed you are happy, how else can men be when they live for their brothers?”

Such is the view of a society that sustains itself off of ignorance. Such is the response of a totalitarian world that refuses to accept, or even acknowledge, the alternative—that happiness can be achieved for oneself rather than for others. The placement of this quote in *Anthem* is especially important as well, as it represents Equality’s realization as the handcuffs around him and his peers finally become visible. The cracks of reasoning in the statement by the Home Council member become apparent as Equality notices the dulled eyes and the hunched shoulders of his brothers, who, according to the society, can—and must—only be happy since they are living for others. But as Equality realizes, the milieu of the society and its citizens is not happiness at all, but fear. Fear—fear of persecution, fear of punishment, but most of all, the fear of realizing



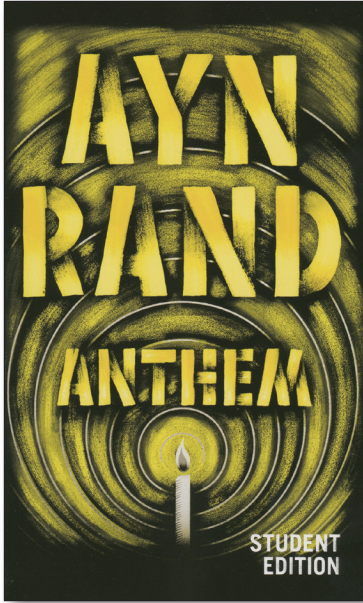
that the Home Council member is wrong, and that they are not truly happy. These deeper thoughts are significant, as Equality begins to think about the Unspeakable Word. The cornerstone of *Anthem*, and the central point of the climax, the Unspeakable Word enters Equality's mind, and for Equality, it is justification for all of the sins and transgressions he has committed thus far. Ironically, although the Home Council member's words were meant to stifle Equality's desire to express happiness for himself, he inadvertently ignited a spark in Equality to find the Word. Internally, Equality has now realized that not only is he not living for his brothers, he is not happy with his society, save Liberty 5-3000. However, Equality, like the Saint of the pyre, is now willing to sacrifice himself to find the truth, a critical point in *Anthem* that defines the rest of Equality's actions as he ventures to escape the handcuffs the society has forged for him.

The Home Council member's statement strikes at the heart of *Anthem*, as well as Ayn Rand's works as a whole. Her masterful construction of the society presented in *Anthem* is a stark representation of collectivism to the point where the individual is so subordinate to the collective group that it ceases, or is forbidden, to exist. The philosophy behind the themes of individualism versus collectivism is the premise of many of Ayn Rand's works, such as *The Fountainhead* and her debut novel, *We the Living*. In the latter, Ayn Rand explored life in post-revolution Russia, ruled by a totalitarian government that suppressed many basic human rights.

The words of the Home Council member were those frequented in propaganda by such governments, including communist China and post-revolution Russia. Although the collectivist practices of these societies were less severe than those of *Anthem*, they draw parallels in their stripping of individuality and the deprivation of fulfillment for oneself through a facade of happiness through brotherhood. Their views reflect what Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*, which writes, "Then the world will be for the common people, and the sounds of happiness will reach the deepest springs." However, communism, and subsequently collectivism, fails to answer: How can one be happy when society only recognizes the people, and not the person?

The triumph of the individual over a collectivist society is one of the main messages in *Anthem*, and the quote serves as a warning: an ominous signal of the false promises that rulers of such societies use to silence the people into forced submissiveness, where they are afraid to speak up out of fear. When I read, and reread, *Anthem*, this quote is always one that stands out to me. Ayn Rand's encapsulation of totalitarian governments' apparent values in a fifteen word sentence is, essentially, virtuosity. Learning about Mao Zedong, Communist China, and how the words of the Home Council member resulted in very real and disastrous consequences during the Great Leap Forward was astounding. Poring over books about post-revolution Russia with tales of individuals forced

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into societal molds by the state, including protagonist Kira Argounova in *We the Living*, was disquieting. Through all of these experiences, both in history and literature, I am able to gain a fundamental, deeper appreciation for the individual. I am grateful for the fact that I live in a democracy, and that I have the choice to vote for my country's leader when I am eighteen. I am grateful that, unlike Equality and his peers, I do not have to succumb to the mold that his society fit all of its citizens into. I have a choice of what career I want to pursue. I have a choice for what emotions I want to feel. I even have a choice for when I want to make these decisions. In the words of Ayn Rand herself, collectivism requires "self-sacrifice," and this is the concept that comes to my mind when I read "Indeed you are happy, how else can men be when they live for their brothers?" Citizens of Equality's society are forced to make this self-sacrifice to live only for their brothers, yet never achieving the happiness that is promised to them. I am happy that I do not have to live for others and make this sacrifice. I am happy that, as an individual, I have the freedom to be happy for myself. Most importantly, I am happy that I am myself, and no society, government, or person has the power to take this away from me.