

The merit of ipseity



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BUSTER**

José Martí once asserted that “ The first duty of a man is to think for himself.” When society favors mindless obedience over independent thinking, ego, forward progress, and knowledge all but disappear.

Indubitably, objectivism is vital for humankind to persist and prosper. In her novella, *Anthem*, Rand advocates her philosophy of objectivism through Equality’s aspiration, value in realism, and the triumph of the individual.

With rational self-interest being a key principle of objectivism, aspiration supplies the individual with an objective to pursue in life. Contrastingly, unconditional allocentricity and submissiveness resonate a sense of meaningless and the inability to live one’s life to the fullest. In *Anthem*, the egregious collectivism subjugates the population to relinquish all desires in favor of laboring for the prosperity of society; “ There is no life for men, save in useful toil for the good of their brothers. But we lived not, when we toiled for our brothers, we were only weary. There is no job for men, save the job shared with all their brothers” (Rand 86). Consequently, the notion of pursuing one’s own interests is an utterly foreign concept. However, through valuing objectivism and thusly the pursuit of happiness, Equality endows himself with the will to defy the decrees of the society and to fulfill his yearning of knowledge. When Equality questions the unstoppable curse and evil that drives him to “ thoughts which are forbidden”, he fails to realize that it in fact represents his intention to put nothing above his inquisitiveness. This passion instills in Equality the power of martyrdom; the strength of his will to bestow upon mankind the gift of electricity is enough to conquer the pain of punishment. No number of lashes and scars can drive this lust out of him, for it is immortal. Furthermore, it is his ambition that

prompts him and gives him the energy to free society from the grasps of subjectivism; “ I ... shall build our new land and our fort. And it will become as the heart of the earth ... I shall break all the chains of the earth, and raze the cities of the enslaved ... and each man will be free to exist for his own sake” (Rand 104). It is the will to achieve that prompts Equality to hold Prometheus as a figurehead; holding the individual as paramount, he resolves to bring the light of truth to society. Without ambition, there is no direction, no hope, and no life.

As is conventional with dystopias, deception is naturally prevalent in Equality’s society, which highlights the indispensability of objectivism. As the paramount concern of the World Council is to eradicate everything that evidences the sole enemy, independent judgment and choice, a subjective society has been established to suppress the truth. Hence, reality has become a principle built upon collective perception, which is regarded as infallible, instead of reason or logic; “ We learned that the earth is flat and that the sun revolves around it, which causes the day and the night ... We learned how to bleed men to cure them of ailments” (Rand 23). The populace accepts this deception to the extent that they believe the rising of the sun and existence itself are wholly dependent on the of the World Council. Furthermore, as a result of the subjective emphasis, forward progress is impossible; because reality and knowledge are internal and influenced in the mind, comprehensive education and free access to information are regarded as unnecessary and thus nonexistent. Ergo, nobody, not even the Scholars, has the ability to achieve anything consequential. Correspondingly, all past knowledge has been purposely

forgotten, branded as incorrect in relation to the accepted contemporary understanding of reality; not only has society not ameliorated, but it has regressed into a technologically backward dark age; one devoid of electricity, a resource almost as fundamental as water. Hence, objectivity is especially crucial as it permits one to distinguish between false and true based solely on the facts of reality, which is impossible to alter. Equality defies the established understanding that existence is purely in the mind and instead seeks to extract knowledge from the world around him; his vocation, science, eminently demonstrates his reality-orientation. He seeks to understand himself, his society, and human nature, by not only identifying what he perceives, but by continually expanding on this understanding; “ We have learned things which are not in the scripts ... of which the Scholars have no knowledge ... we wish ... to feel as if with each day our sight were growing sharper than the hawk’s and clearer than the rock crystal” (Rand 36). In carefully recording his observations and piecing facts together into a conceptual whole, Equality utilises both concept formation and inductive logic to obtain knowledge. Indeed, objectivism is the education that allows him to rid incorrect convention and reestablish reality, piece by piece.

Individualism is the essence of mankind, permitting personal independence, exploration, and development. However, under the misguided governance of collective morality, Equality’s society regards the concept of ego as anathema. Driven by the illusion of a greater good, not only does it restrict thought, speech, and will, but it castigates nonconformity. As is evident through the inscription over the portals of the World Council and the absence of the word “ I”, the subjects in Anthem are cautioned not that independence

is evil, but that it is impossible; “ The word ‘ We’ is as lime poured over men, which sets and hardens to stone, and crushes all beneath it ... It is the word by which the depraved steal the virtue of the good, by which the weak steal the might of the strong, by which the fools steal the wisdom of the sages” (Rand 97). In essence, when society values collectivism, it defrauds mankind of the ability to feel joy, accomplishment, or any other moral feeling that accompanies being. Auspiciously, it is the individual that ultimately prevails. Objectivism secures the liberty and rights of the individual and frees him to act as he likes, under the pretension of pursuing happiness and productive achievement as his absolute. Accordingly, the triumph of the individual frees Equality from the chains of collectivism. He need no longer endeavor for the sake of toiling for society, but only for his own happiness and achievement. He need no longer restrain his natural desire to express affection or happiness, for they are key to living a rich, fulfilling and independent life. Moreover, he, who is proactive and diligent, need no longer obey and share his fruition with the frail and shiftless that is society. Each person is a single entity with a unique value who is not governed by any force but himself; “ It is my eyes which see ... it is my ears which hear ... it is my mind which thinks, and the judgment of my mind is the only searchlight that can find the truth. It is my will that chooses, and the choice of my will is the only edict that I must respect” (Rand 94). Consequently, each is equal in the sense that no man lives for anyone but himself. Yet, above all, individualism brings with it progress; when the individual is free to experiment with himself and his environment, what he can achieve is limitless. The stark contrast between the modernist architecture, abundance of literature, and sophisticated technologies of the Unmentionable Times and the present evidences only a

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fragment of the scope of achievement possible. Just as wisdom perished when man established collectivism, Equality sets himself to recover it with the guidance of individualism. Withal, through objectivism, the individual is unconditionally liberated.

In the form of passion, judgment, and ego, objectivism supplies Equality with the spirit to liberate himself and his companions from the deceit and immorality of subjectivism. Objectivism frees man to think, feel, and will for himself, and to distinguish himself from others. Those who choose to conform and subserve are mere faceless wastes intimidated and silenced by the collective. Truly, a man who is unable to think for himself is not a man at all.