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## “Sacrilege toward the Individual”: The Anti-Pride of Thomas More’s *Utopia* and *Anthem*’s Radical Alternative

*John Lewis*

Ayn Rand understood early on that there could be no greater crime against man than to attack his sense of self. In a letter of 1936, thanking a writer for his praise of her novel *We the Living*, she wrote:

I am particularly grateful to you for calling the public’s attention to my book from an angle which is more important to me than any possible literary accomplishment of mine, namely for mentioning the fact that my book is not merely an argument against Communism, but against all forms of collectivism, against any manner of sacrilege toward the Individual. It would be easier for me to conceive of tolerance toward a theory preaching a wholesale execution of mankind by poison gas than to understand those who find any possible ethical excuse for destroying the only priceless possession of man—his individualism. After all, any form of swift physical annihilation is preferable to the inconceivable horror of a living death. And what but a rotting alive can human existence be when devoid of the pride and the joy of a man’s right to his own spirit?<sup>1</sup>

Sacrilege is temple robbery—to take, for secular use, that which properly belongs to the divine.<sup>2</sup> For over two thousand years, man has been told that his refusal to grant God’s supremacy over him is his greatest crime, that his unwillingness to keep to his place as a humble being is insubordination, and that his refusal to forsake ambition and to cringe before an omnipotent power is a sin. The ultimate sacrilege is pride, the queen of the seven deadly sins, a vicious monster in the soul and an affront to the almighty.<sup>3</sup> In the world of Thomas More, a powerful man of the church who projected his views into a literary *Utopia*, man’s pride in himself must be annihilated, and his ambitions subordinated to a communist social system before he can achieve the nirvana of a happy Christian life.

Ayn Rand rejects all of this. Her radical conception is that man as a moral being is worthy of the reverence usually reserved for the divine—and that any attempt to strip him of his individualism is sacrilege. The proud man creates and affirms his own sacred value, and protects it from the prying hands of others. Prometheus, the hero of *Anthem*, guards his own ego as a sacred temple: “For in the temple of his spirit, each man is alone. Let each man keep his temple untouched and undefiled” (96). It is only by obliterating a man’s sense of his own value—by

effacing his pride of self as a thinking, loving, moral being—that he can be reduced to the nadir of living death that *Anthem* portrays. But *Anthem* is not about the political or economic subjugation of man. It goes far deeper into the moral sacrilege that makes physical slavery possible. In contrast to the medieval communism of More's *Utopia*—and the view of man promoted in Christianity generally—*Anthem* offers a radical re-affirmation of man's right to ambition, self-respect and pride.

Since the age of the ancient Greeks, the best of the utopian writers founded their visions upon some conception of man's moral nature. They then condemned man for possessing a nature that did not fit their ideals. Plato's *Republic* is such a world, one of rule by philosopher-kings claiming possession of a special knowledge of non-sensory, perfect, transcendent truths, and endowed with dictatorial powers over those inferior masses who cannot even grasp the nature of the good. This claim to philosophic perfection is a license to coerce and to lie, if they determine that this serves the good of all. But Plato took seriously man's inability to achieve this ideal in real life. In his last work, *The Laws*, he accepted mankind's failure to reach the ideal, and posited a mythical city founded on imperfect, humanly-created laws, imposed by force, as the "second best" way of organizing a political community.

Plato is both the intellectual founder of utopian writing and its most influential spokesman. He provided the basic split between the ideal and the real that has dominated western thought into the present day. To claim that a moral ideal has no reality on earth and is unknowable except to self-anointed leaders leaves no achievement and no pride possible to man. All he can do is obey the leaders without question. What the philosopher Aristotle called the "great-souled man," proud of himself and unwilling to subordinate the truth to the ruler's visions, would be a logjam in the social machine and a danger to the harmony of all.<sup>4</sup> To Ayn Rand, Plato committed the first, and greatest, sacrilege against the individual by robbing the individual of his mind and his freedom.

Augustine, in his *City of God*, took the Platonic *Republic* further, relying on God to provide the standards by which life should be lived. This earth is a vale of tears, life is sordid, man is depraved, and a proud man is a blasphemer. "For pride is the start of every sin" he wrote, quoting from the Old Testament; "what is pride but a perverse kind of exaltation?" A man's first step to virtue is to recognize his own worthlessness. There was no room for pride in Augustine's world, only humility and obedience before the unknowable. "God's instructions required obedience, and obedience is in a way the mother and guardian of all the other virtues in a rational creature."<sup>5</sup> Like Plato, Augustine begins his ethical and political thought with supernatural ideals, and has man take the blame for possessing a nature opposed to those ideals. Man's sin is his inability to change his nature, stifle his pride, subdue his mind, shrink his ambitions, and obey.

Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in 1516, was the first attempt since Plato to portray an ideal political community. It postulates both an idealized world—akin to Plato's *Republic* but based on Augustine's ideals—as well as a place that More claimed actually existed. There was a lively production of such literary works in the following century; Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun*, and James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, among others, created political communities in the image of their authors' ideals. Despite the revolutionary nature of such works, there was no corresponding revolution in the Judeo-Christian values and virtues they embraced; humility and obedience continued to dominate the political thought of the day, and a proud man would be like sand

ground between the gears of a smooth-running social order. Again, man is damned because he cannot change his nature to match the strictures of these ideals.<sup>6</sup>

To Ayn Rand, this is all sacrilege against the individual. The conflict in *Anthem* between the hero, Equality 7-2521, and his brothers epitomizes an age-old battle between every proud man and those who wish to stifle his self-esteem in favor of some alleged higher good. Ayn Rand's radical defense of pride is founded on her total rejection of the Augustinian view of man. It is man—his nature and identity as a thinking, working, proud being—who comes first. Pride returns to its rightful status as the crown of the virtues because man becomes the standard of perfection in a temple of his own making.

A comparison of *Anthem* to More's *Utopia* is a case study of two views of man, and correspondingly two views of pride. From the outset the styles of the two works reveal a fundamental difference in their authors' intellectual premises. More hides his message behind a veil of ambiguity. In contrast to the simple clarity of *Anthem*, he does not want to be understood precisely. On one level *Utopia* is humorous. The main speaker is Hythloday, from the Greek *hythlos* meaning "nonsense." "Utopia" itself is a new word based on Eutopia ("Good place") and Atopia ("No place"); it is impossible to know exactly what More means by his neologism. Its main city, Amaurot, is derived from the Greek for "dim."<sup>7</sup> This dearth of clarity is reflected in the status More claims for his creation. The island of Utopia is real, he asserts, and this is supposedly evidence for the truth of his ideals. Such literary devices are consistent with the views of Plato and Augustine, who thought that our knowledge was only a dim and imperfect reflection of a "higher," non-sensory world, which is real although beyond the range of human examination. Given this premise, clear correspondence to the truth is impossible, all writing is inherently ambiguous, and *Utopia* becomes a metaphor for an indescribable ideal. In contrast, Ayn Rand is able to write clearly, directly, and unambiguously, because she understands that our ideas are a human perspective on the only world that exists: the one we live in.

Although there are differences between the societies of *Utopia* and *Anthem*, there are also physical, social, and political parallels between the two works. In *Utopia*, as in the dictatorship of *Anthem*, each man's ambitions are chained to the requirements of a collectivist social order. More's paradise is an isolated island in the New World, a socialist nirvana devoid of both poverty and wealth, where travel is strictly controlled, freedom of religion is constrained by a mandatory belief in God, thought and action are allowed only if they serve the needs of society, and citizens have attained universal happiness. This new land is solidly in line with the ideals of the medieval Christian tradition, although the Utopians have followed those ideals without knowledge of Christ. The society of *Anthem* is likewise isolated, collectivistic, and bereft of freedom. The solution to man's alleged inability to grasp the truth is to immerse him in a world ordered by the superior knowledge of others.

Utopia itself is arranged in a precise geometrical order.<sup>8</sup> Like Plato and Augustine, More believes that each individual must accept a prescribed place in a greater whole. The basic social unit is the family homestead. Each has at least forty persons, not counting slaves, with a master and a mistress. Every year twenty persons from each rural household are selected by the authorities to move back to the city, and an equal number move from the city into the country. The ideal Utopian home is a cross between a slave plantation in the antebellum American south and a hippie commune under a guru. The houses are grouped under a hierarchy of political officials who elect a single prince, normally for life. A similar organizational rigidity is at work in the dictatorship of *Anthem*, from the enforced regularity of the workday to the arrangement of beds in the dorms.

But who is to design and enforce the ordering of the whole? Despite Hythloday's assertions, people are not equal in Utopia. Like Plato (who advocated the rule of philosopher-kings), Augustine (who was Bishop of Hippo), and Thomas More (the Chancellor of England), Utopia will have as rulers priests and politicians who control the population. Despite More's claims that the Utopians live as they do voluntarily, harsh penalties follow for those who violate the dictates of the rulers. The similarities to the dictatorship of *Anthem* are obvious; the primary means of maintaining the state is through indoctrination masked as education, but the whips come out when the propaganda fails. To get along in such a society a man must not aspire beyond the limits set by the rulers. Although the focus of *Anthem* is not on the leaders but on their victims, the various councils betray an organizational hierarchy that extends from Street Sweeper-Slaves to Council Leader-Masters.

Nor is there any alternative for those who do not submit. In Equality 7-2521's world, the very idea of travel brings to mind paralyzing fear of the Unmentionable Places; there is no need for laws against leaving, given this fear. What of the Utopians? All travel requires the permission of the leaders, and woe to those who wander off on their own:

Anyone who takes it upon himself to leave his district without permission, and is caught without the prince's letter, is treated with contempt, brought back as a runaway, and severely punished. If he is bold enough to try it a second time, he is made a slave.<sup>9</sup>

Similar dictates govern the choice of careers. Upon coming of age, Equality 7-2521 is assigned to work; he has no choice in the matter. A Utopian rather inherits his trade from his father, and may change only if "father and authorities" approve.<sup>10</sup> What careers will be approved? Since money in other societies has led to "superfluous trades" and vicious luxury, workers in Utopia are "assigned" to "useful" tasks, primarily agricultural.<sup>11</sup> Utopia is designed to remain agriculturally based and technologically backward, to prevent the moral decay that More thinks will follow the production of excess wealth. Too much wealth, More thinks, will lead men away from piety and into sloth, another of the seven deadly sins.

What of privacy and love? For Equality 7-2521 and his brothers, these have been replaced by communal dining and the Palaces of Mating; it is a sin to be alone, and to prefer one person over another. The social hierarchy adopted by the Utopians is patriarchal, but attains the same result: the father is absolute head of the household, and "wives kneel before their husbands and children before their parents, to confess their various failures and negligences, and beg forgiveness for their offenses."<sup>12</sup> Does a Utopian wish to dine alone or with his spouse? Common meals are arranged by family, with fifteen chairs on one side, fifteen on the other. Women sit apart from men, so they will not disturb the men should they fall into pain from childbearing. What if a Utopian wants to use his spare time to simply relax? The leaders do not allow sloth. In such a society,

there is no chance to loaf or kill time, no pretext for evading work; no taverns, or alehouses, or brothels; no chances for corruption; no hiding places; no spots for secret meetings. *Because they live in full view of all*, they are bound to be working at their usual trades, or enjoying their leisure in a respectable way.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, in *Anthem*, "The laws say that none among men may be alone, ever and at any time, for this is the great transgression and the root of all evil"(17).

Further, throughout Utopia there are slaves who do the kinds of jobs that might corrupt virtuous citizens. Slaves work in slaughterhouses, for instance, and prepare meals.<sup>14</sup> Adulterers are made slaves, as are those who travel without a permit, who have been captured in wars, and who commit serious crimes.<sup>15</sup> More sees no problem in having multitudes of slaves—those who do not conform—do the menial work in his ideal state. They are the Street Sweepers of *Anthem*.

Economically, the crucial feature of Utopia is the communism of property. All things are held in common, and everyone has enough to live on because no one has more than enough. Hythloday asserts that without “drones,” i.e., the idle rich who plague Europe, the Utopians attain universal prosperity by working six hours per day.<sup>16</sup> With everything free in Utopia, no one covets clothing beyond an undyed wool cloak, or material goods beyond the needs of survival. The Utopians invert the hierarchy of material values by turning iron into a valuable commodity, shackling slaves in golden chains and giving children precious gems as trinkets. They do not use locks. Because they do not value material things, there can be no rivalries—no conflicts—over things, and no misery derived from one man exploiting another. There are no heretics in Utopia; everyone—presumably even the slaves—is happy.

The society of *Anthem* might, to an external observer, appear to be just as happy. There are no wars, rivalries, or conflicts and no mass starvation. The society’s apparently peaceful order is founded on the apparent happiness of its members, who are allowed to make no displays of unhappiness. Ayn Rand was asked why happiness was against the law in *Anthem*; her answer was: “Because the rulers wanted no complaints; they wanted the slaves to pretend to be satisfied with the conditions of their existence.”<sup>17</sup> The societies of both *Anthem* and *Utopia* are built on appearances; the people appear to be happy, and the rulers appear to provide perfect sustenance for the people. But the purpose, in each case, is to maintain an order that is profoundly opposed to the nature of human life. Right down to the orderly arrangement of the beds in Equality 7-2521’s dorm, and the lives organized by the clanging of a bell, the harmony of the social whole is the greatest value. Everyone is held in bondage by the ideas that underlie their world, although the whips and chains are ready for dissenters. But Ayn Rand’s focus on the individual in *Anthem*—the very person missing in *Utopia*—allows her to penetrate beneath appearances, to see the society from an internal perspective and thus to expose the seething unhappiness in the souls of the best men that *Utopia* does not confront.<sup>18</sup>

All of this prevents a man of ambition and self-esteem from flourishing.

But the war against ambition goes far deeper than economics and the concerns of material wealth. What if a Utopian wishes to pursue scholarly work? There is a class of priests who function as guardians and teachers of public morality. These priests are above the law: “if one of them commits a crime, he is not brought into a court of law, but left to God and his own conscience.”<sup>19</sup> If the priests recommend it, and the political leaders agree by a secret vote, a Utopian may be made a scholar, and freed from physical work.<sup>20</sup> But a scholar must always be on guard not to say, or think, the wrong things, since he is constantly under the threat of demotion by the priests. More replaces the wealthy nobility (the “drones”) with a class of political and religious elites, who get their jobs through political pull and intellectual conformity. It is no accident that the Utopians, who take a delight in learning, have no accumulated literature. “Learning” here must be akin to medieval memorization and replication, not any expansion of knowledge; to learn is to give up all intellectual ambitions, to repeat and to obey.

In presenting the society of *Anthem* and its philosophical base, Ayn Rand takes this idea to its logical conclusion: there is no truth except that discovered by the collective, and no justice except that proclaimed by the group.<sup>21</sup> The man of independent intellect is enslaved. Equality 7-

2521 is torn between his curse—his natural desire to learn and to understand, the intellectual parallels to his physical strength—and the dictates of society, which demand that he think only with the permission of the leaders. What might an ambitious Utopian feel, except the same pervasive fear that his sin might be discovered? And what might his reaction be when caught, except relief that he can now do penance for his sins? *Anthem* refuses to hide the private agony of the intellectually ambitious, which More fails to see or dares not discuss. Although there is no reason to think that More understood the truth about the collectivism of Utopia, a reader might wonder if Hythloday—like Americans who visited the USSR in the 1920s but were never shown the famines sweeping the countryside—was led around by guides who did not allow him to see the agonized individuals who cried out in the night, stifled in the nightmare of a living death.

Both *Utopia* and *Anthem* present statist political systems. Statism refers to any system in which the decrees of the state take precedence over the rights of individuals. As Ayn Rand wrote in her journals, “The essence of Statism is the idea that government must be all-powerful and must control the existence of men.”<sup>22</sup> Under a statist system, there are no individual rights. Any “freedoms” that do exist are by permission; they are permitted if they support the regime, but forbidden if they do not. A statist-religious system (a theocracy) will control the lives of individuals according to religious ideals. A man is not free for his own sake in a statist system; he will be granted “freedoms” only to the extent that his “freedom” benefits the regime in power.

This is sacrilege against the individual. Ayn Rand later wrote about the nature and goals of statism:

Politically, the goal of today’s dominant trend is statism. Philosophically, the goal is the obliteration of reason; psychologically, it is the erosion of ambition.

The political goal presupposes the two others. The human characteristic required by statism is *docility*, which is the product of hopelessness and intellectual stagnation. Thinking men cannot be ruled; ambitious men do not stagnate.

“Ambition” means the systematic pursuit of achievement and of constant improvement in respect to one’s goal. Like the word “selfishness,” and for the same reasons, the word “ambition” has been perverted to mean only the pursuit of dubious or evil goals, such as the pursuit of power; this left no concept to designate the pursuit of actual values. But “ambition” as such is a neutral concept: the evaluation of a given ambition as moral or immoral depends on the nature of the goal . . .

The common denominator [for every form of ambition] is the drive to improve the conditions of one’s existence, however broadly or narrowly conceived. (“Improvement” is a moral term and depends on one’s standard of values. An ambition guided by an irrational standard does not, in *fact*, lead to improvement, but to self-destruction.)<sup>23</sup>

Every word of this applies to the dictatorships of *Utopia* and *Anthem*. For More, reason means contemplation of the mysteries of God, and improvement is the affirmation of man’s inferior status before Him. Given that the state is dominated by priests, who have the power to excommunicate, and political leaders, who can make a man into a slave, any Utopian who wished to improve himself independently through productive thought and work would immediately clash with the state. He would be tied to the same rack that brought suffering to Equality 7-2521, torn between his natural drive to improve himself and the demand of the state

that he limit his ambitions. In either case, the state demands conformity and stagnation, and the individual must obey, lest he become a sinner and a criminal.

But More's war against ambition extends even deeper than economics, politics and education. His greatest concern is Christian virtue, and his political order is intended to subordinate every aspect of human life to his Christian ideals. Humility is his goal; the great enemies of virtue are ambition, pride and self-esteem. More limits ambition to make room for obedience. Although Hythloday claims that there is no organized religion (despite the priests with power above the law), and freedom of worship is given lip-service (despite the illegality of atheism), such "freedom" is set within strict limits. It is tolerated as long as it does not threaten the state, and may be withdrawn at any time.

The founder of Utopia, King Utopus, who seized power amidst religious strife, allowed each man the freedom

to choose what he would believe. The only exception he made was a positive and strict law against any person who should sink so far below the dignity of human nature as to think that the soul perishes with the body, or that the universe is ruled by mere chance, rather than divine providence.<sup>24</sup>

Such views have implications for any Utopian who might be tempted to rise above his ascetic lifestyle. To keep him in line, Utopia is governed by an all-encompassing emotion of terror. According to More, man's laws will be followed only under fear engendered by God. Terror of the afterlife allows the Utopians to hold onto their paradise, otherwise a person "would undoubtedly betray all the laws and customs of society, if not prevented by fear."<sup>25</sup> In More's mind, the threat of eternal hell-fire is the only foundation for law and morality. Because priests have the right to excommunicate those who do not follow their moral commandments, this fear must take the form of an immediate, personal terror of the religious hierarchy and the scholar-class from which they are chosen. This is More's solution to religious strife in England, a reaction which is poignant given More's own choice to be executed by the king rather than to disobey the dictates of the pope. When More said that we must subordinate ourselves to religious authorities, he meant it.

The dictatorship of *Anthem* is also dominated by a particular religion, "the worship of the state, of the collective."<sup>26</sup> A positive and strict law against questioning this religion was the foundation of Equality 7-2521's world. This society had its saints: the Saints of Labor, the Saints of the Council, and the Saints of the Great Rebirth (50). As in Utopia, there is also a pervasive atmosphere of fear, a characteristic of theocracies and communist dictatorships across history. Hythloday does not speak of dissidents, but this is not surprising, given that More never writes about individuals, and has no concern for heretics other than to enslave or kill them. His need to make his creatures happy behooves him to silence malcontents. In *Anthem*, the façade of compliance with the inhuman demands of society falls away to reveal the internal turmoil of victims who have been told to deny their own natures in deference to an ideal that is in mortal conflict with their own lives.

Hythloday's insistence that the Utopians favor the pleasures of the mind over those of the body requires them to follow the ideology of the Utopian state without exception. This means accepting the same level of material survival granted to Equality 7-2521—who, More might observe, did have enough to eat, and did not have to work *that* hard. To More, "happiness" is possible only after a war against ambition and achievement—an internal *jihad* in which a person pushes his own spirit down to the level of physical survival and ties his mind to the prescribed

ideas. Attaining a victory over one's own ambitions is a precondition of happiness. And if a potential heretic falters in his war against his self, he can remember the threats of the whip, slavery, and eternal damnation. This is the rack that nearly tears Equality 7-2521 in two—until he rejects the ideals, flees into the Unmentionable Places, and affirms his own nature. As Hythloday concludes:

Now that they have rooted up the seeds of ambition and faction at home, along with most other vices, they are in no danger from internal strife, which among us has been the ruin of many other states that seemed secure. As long as they preserve harmony at home, and keep their institutions healthy, the Utopians can never be overcome or shaken by envious neighbors, who have often attempted their ruin, but always in vain.<sup>27</sup>

Imagine a Utopian who fails to deny his desire to achieve, and who undertakes to invent something, but without permission. How would the priests and leaders react to him? Their response could be taken from *Anthem*:

We have much to say to a wretch who have broken all the laws and who boast of their infamy! . . . And if the Councils had decreed that you should be a Street Sweeper, how dared you think that you could be of greater use to men than to sweep the streets! (71–72)

In her 1961 essay “For the New Intellectual,” Ayn Rand recognized the presence in history of those who claim to rule by commanding physical reality (the Attilas, the “mystics of muscle”), and those who claim a special form of knowledge (the Witch Doctors, the “mystics of the spirit”). Utopia is ruled by such men, the Prince and the Priests, who are designated by a sheaf of grain for the Prince, and a candle for the Priest.<sup>28</sup> The symbols are appropriate; the one controls the material wealth of the island, which he divides up as if he were the patriarch of an extended family; the second claims possession of the special knowledge required of a moral and intellectual censor. Each is supported by the Producers, those victims who work and sustain the rulers. Although we are not given the details of how *Anthem* is ruled—a necessary consequence of Ayn Rand's focus on the individual hero—a similar material and spiritual regime is behind the control held by the various councils over every aspect of life, and in the special class of “Leader” for those selected to rule.

The result:

The damnation of this earth as a realm where nothing is possible to man but pain, disaster and defeat, a realm inferior to another, “higher,” reality; the damnation of any values, enjoyment, achievement and success on earth as a proof of depravity; the damnation of man's mind as a source of *pride*, and the damnation of reason as a “limited,” deceptive, unreliable, impotent faculty, incapable of perceiving the “real” reality and the “true” truth; the split of man in two, setting his consciousness (his soul) against his body, and his moral values against his own interest; the damnation of man's nature, body and *self* as evil; the commandment of self-sacrifice, renunciation, suffering, obedience, humility and faith, as the good; the damnation of life and the worship of death, with the promise of rewards beyond the grave—*these* are the necessary tenets of the Witch Doctor's view of



existence, as they have been in every variant of Witch Doctor philosophy throughout the course of mankind's history.<sup>29</sup>

Thomas More was a persecutor of Protestants, a burner of heretics who also wrote treatises on heresies. He professed to hating the vices of the heretics more than the heretics themselves, and destroyed them only after trying to get them to see the error of their ways. Like the heretics who refused to repent, he was willing to lose his own life rather than betray what he saw as a principle—the authority of the pope to forbid a divorce to King Henry VIII of England. This is a power that the priests would have in More's ideal commonwealth. The absolutism with which he held his ideals has no better expression than in his own willingness to kill, and to be killed, for them. This is a Witch Doctor, in the service of Attila.

As to the fate of a man who refused to deny his own individual nature in deference to the rulers of a collectivist universe, consider the Saint of the pyre (as Equality 7-2521 calls him) in *Anthem*:

As the flames rose, a thing happened which no eyes saw but ours, else we would not be living today. Perhaps it had only seemed to us. 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. And it seemed as if these eyes were trying to tell us something through the flames, to send into our eyes some word without sound. And it seemed as if these eyes were begging us to gather that word and not to let it go from us and from the earth. But the flames rose and we could not guess the word.  
(51)

It is Equality 7-2521's pride that brought him into conflict with the regime, and forged a connection with the Saint of the pyre. It is Equality 7-2521's pride that must be beaten down to the level of the mob, if the state and its collectivist creed is to survive. There is no middle ground—no possibility of compromise—between the totalitarian state and "I." So it is in Utopia. The Utopians—and More's readers—must hold no pride in themselves or their work, if More's ideal is to become real. More makes this easy for them, by caricaturing pride as the basest opponent of human life:

And in fact I have no doubt that every man's perception of where his true interest lies, along with the authority of Christ our Saviour (whose wisdom would not fail to recognize the best, and whose goodness would not fail to counsel it), would long ago have brought the entire world to adopt Utopian laws, if it were not for a single monster, the prime plague and begetter of all others—I mean Pride (*Superbia*).

Pride measures her advantages not by what she has, but by what other people lack. Pride would not condescend even to be made a goddess, if there were no wretches for her to sneer at and domineer over. Her good fortune is dazzling only by contrast with miseries of others, her riches are valuable only as they torment and tantalize the poverty of others. Pride is a serpent from hell which twines itself around the hearts of men; and it acts like the suckfish in holding them back from choosing a better way of life.<sup>30</sup>

As More describes it here, the Latin *superbia* means arrogance or haughtiness towards others. *Superbia* in this sense is not an emotion related to the achievement of positive values; it rather rejoices in superiority achieved by destroying the values of others. *Superbia* wishes not to increase its own wealth through productive activity, but rather to destroy the wealth of others. It is a *dependent*, not an *independent*, concept; it evaluates every person *relative* to others, not in terms of an independent standard. Its closest English equivalent is *envy*: a desire that others lose what they have. But as we shall see, More's description of *superbia* as "envy" in *Utopia* does not express his deepest view of what constitutes this "suckfish" that prevents men from achieving virtue.

More's description of *superbia* in *Utopia* is a way to convince his readers to forego material prosperity in order to achieve the positive consequences of the Utopian system. But for More, pride has a deeper tie to vice than greed or sloth, and it is bad for reasons much deeper than its alleged social consequences. The worst of man's sins is a positive view of himself. This is the suckfish that must be purged from man's soul. In his *Treatise of the Passion*, More is direct about this deeper view of pride. To achieve a deeper reverence towards God, a "pestilent pryde," implanted into man by the devil, must be expunged:

Let us here now good readers before we proceed further, consider well this matter, and ponder well this fearful point, what horrible peril there is in this pestilent sin of pride, what abominable sin it is in the sight of god, *when any creature falls into the delight and liking of itself*: as the thing whereupon continued, inevitably fails not to follow, first the neglecting and after the condemning and finally with disobedience and rebelling, the very full forsaking of God.<sup>31</sup>

More continues in his *Passion*, laying out the social consequences of this pestilence of self-esteem:

And if it be a thing detestable for any creature to rise in pride, *upon the respect and regard of beauty, strength, wit or learning of one's person*, or other such manner of thing as by nature and grace are properly their own; how much more foolish perversion is there in that pride, by which we worldly folk look up on height, and solemnly set by our self, with deep disdain for other far better men, only for very vain worldly trifles that properly be not our own?<sup>32</sup>

More is well aware that people can hold their own persons in high regard without hurting others—and he rejects this as the basest sin. The social concerns of *Utopia* are used to smuggle in a deeper agenda: to denigrate the prosperity—and self-esteem—rising in England, and to return to the medieval ideals championed by Augustine. This is an end in itself. Deeper than ambition, it is pride—in the sense of self-esteem and moral ambitiousness—that must be destroyed, before men can live devout, austere, Christian lives. To convince the readers of *Utopia* to follow this path, he buries his deepest view of pride beneath a social construct that equates pride with the destruction of others, and creates a package deal of envy and pride. This conceptual redefinition leaves men with a false alternative: between the sin of unlimited rapacity and the virtue of abject humility. This destroys all "respect and regard of beauty, strength, wit or learning of one's person."

To lower man's head before God, every man's estimation of himself must be lowered before those who claim to know God's will. The communism, the rules, even the claim that the Utopians are really happy—all of it is intended to break any elevated sense of self in More's readers. To help his readers along this path, More arms them with Newspeak ideas that make it impossible to express thoughts that do not conform to the demands of the Utopian state: prosperity is subsistence; achievement is usefulness to others; lawfulness is fear; thinking is following the orthodoxy; freedom is asking permission; happiness is humble conformity; virtue is subordinating oneself to the group; self-esteem is self-abnegation.

The translators buy into this sacrilege against the individual by translating *superbia* as “pride,” thus equating a positive view of oneself with attempts to denigrate others. This historic error is reflected in the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of pride, which conflates it with envy:

The quality of being proud.

I.1.a. A high or overweening opinion of one's own qualities, attainments, or estate, which gives rise to a feeling and attitude of superiority over and contempt for others; inordinate self-esteem.

The lack of an independent concept of pride in More's *Utopia*—and in western thought for centuries—left human beings no way to even conceive of, let alone achieve, earned self-esteem and non-sacrificial rewards. This concept of “pride”—similar to the “vain-glory” of Thomas Hobbes—engenders warfare, since it can only be expressed in terms of contemptuously beating another person.<sup>33</sup> It leads to tyranny, since the “proud” man demands absolute power.<sup>34</sup> It brings economic exploitation, since it claims that one can become rich only by unjustly seizing the property of others. This kind of “proud” man acts as a rapacious beast, destroying others before they have a chance to destroy him. He then feels superior given his ability to dominate others. It should be obvious that this perverse equation of “pride” with “envy” has nothing to do with the self-sufficient and rational egoism of Prometheus, who does not measure his own value in relation to others. His pride blossoms fully only after he flees alone into the woods, and sees his own image for the first time.

The war against ambition and pride is a moral war against the mind. As Ayn Rand wrote in her introduction to *The Fountainhead*:

Just as religion has pre-empted the field of ethics, turning morality *against* man, so it has usurped the highest moral concepts of our language, placing them outside this earth and beyond man's reach. “Exaltation” is usually taken to mean an emotional state evoked by contemplating the supernatural. “Worship” means the emotional experience of loyalty and dedication to something higher than man. “Reverence” means the emotion of a sacred respect, to be experienced on one's knees. “Sacred” means superior to and not-to-be-touched-by any concerns of man or of this earth.

Ayn Rand's great achievement in *Anthem* is to smash the false dichotomy between rapacity and humility in matter and in spirit, and to regain the proper sense of man's highest abstractions. She re-establishes pride as the crown of the virtues by providing an objective means for a man to evaluate, improve, and honor his own life. Her break with the Judeo-Christian condemnation of ambition and pride removes the stigma of otherism—either of one's neighbor,

or of a higher transcendent reality—from moral evaluations, and leaves man free to understand and value this world and his own person by an independent moral standard. As she later elaborated in her essay “The Objectivist Ethics”:

The virtue of Pride can best be described by the term: “moral ambitiousness.” It means that one must earn the right to hold oneself as one’s own highest value by achieving one’s own moral perfection—which one achieves by never accepting any code of irrational virtues impossible to practice and by never failing to practice the virtues one knows to be rational—by never accepting an unearned guilt and never earning any, or, if one has earned it, never leaving it uncorrected—by never resigning oneself passively to any flaws in one’s character—by never placing any concern, wish, fear or mood of the moment above the reality of one’s own self-esteem. And, above all, it means one’s rejection of the role of a sacrificial animal, the rejection of any doctrine that preaches self-immolation as a moral virtue or duty.<sup>35</sup>

This is the central ambition possible to man: a self-created moral character, achieved according to an objective standard. As philosopher Leonard Peikoff elaborated, the virtue of pride has both existential and intellectual aspects. Existentially, to be proud one must actually do something worthy of praise. The society of *Utopia* is designed to eliminate any possibility of actually achieving anything to be proud of. Equality 7-2521 is in just such a position. But, when he breaks free of his prison and runs into the woods, he proclaims, for himself and for his readers, that he can achieve his values. In his transformation into Prometheus, he discovers the existential aspect of pride as a moral virtue, in the act of procuring a meal for himself:

We stopped when we felt hunger. We saw birds in the tree branches, and flying from under our footsteps. We picked a stone and we sent it as an arrow at a bird. It fell before us. We made a fire, we cooked the bird, and we ate it, and no meal had ever tasted better to us. And we thought suddenly that there was a great satisfaction to be found in the food which we need and obtain by our own hand. And we wished to be hungry again and soon, that we might know again this strange new pride in eating. (79)

This discovery of his own efficacy is his gateway to the discovery of the intellectual aspect of pride. His implicit recognition of the value of his own self is precisely what he vaguely felt earlier as a sin. His prior acceptance that his brothers had an unimpeachable claim on what “we” do left him no means of achieving pride—as it would be impossible for the Utopians to achieve. By condemning the products of ambition, *Utopia* roots out the existential basis for pride. By debasing human nature and substituting the good of the community and reverence for God, *Utopia* uproots the intellectual basis by which pride can be achieved. The only people in *Utopia* who can tolerate the misery are those who bow their heads and accept the substitution. (It is More’s fervent wish that the entire world do so.) Prometheus follows a different road: he takes his own achievements—his light bulb, and his sense of self—and he learns to live by his own actions.

The vision of Prometheus, triumphant after producing his own meal and in awe of his own image, is Ayn Rand’s vision of what is possible to each one of us. Her radical return to Aristotle’s conception of pride as the crown of the virtues is a deep challenge to the views of

man held by Plato, Augustine, More, and a long line of western thinkers. Her scope extends far beyond the other utopian—and anti-utopian—writers of the twentieth century. She corrects the sacrilege of the ages by placing man at the center of her thought, and deriving her ideals from his nature as a moral being. No longer needing the warrant and the sanction of either medieval ascetics or modern socialists, man can now take his place as “this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride” (97). The sacrilege ends when each man’s sacred temple, and the values it holds, are placed off-limits to others. In Ayn Rand’s thought, pride is no longer a “perverse kind of exaltation” but the only kind of exaltation truly possible: man-worship.

By focusing her efforts on what is truly the highest and noblest, Ayn Rand provides a truly revolutionary Eutopian vision. Her world is based not on Platonic idealism and a doomed struggle by each victim to shape his nature into the form of unreal ideals, but rather on an Aristotelian vision in which one recognizes as ideals those standards that conform to man’s true, elevated nature. Each man can rise ambitiously to the height of his own perfection, and can exalt in his own achievement. In her world, as in that of Aristotle, man can truly become good, and then see himself as good—the reward of pride. “It is truly hard to be proud,” said Aristotle, “since it is not possible without being fine and good.”<sup>36</sup> But the ideal is possible, for it is real, and of this earth. As Equality 7-2521 says, anticipating the rebirth of man: “our son will be raised as a man. He will be taught to say ‘I’ and to bear the pride of it” (100).

## NOTES

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1. Michael S. Berliner, *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 33–34; letter dated July 5, 1936.

2. “Sacrilege” is a combination of the Latin *sacer*, “sacred” and *legere*, “to gather up or take away.”

3. *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991): “pride” (B.I.1.d) reckoned the first of the deadly sins; see also “deadly” (5).

4. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 101 (4.3, 1124.a1).

5. St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 1984), 571 (14.12–13, citing *Ecclesiastes* 10.13).

6. That More was concerned to extend the communism of Plato’s *Republic* even to wives is stated by Desiderius Erasmus; see David Wootton’s introduction to Thomas More, *Utopia: With Erasmus’s The Sileni of Alcibiades*, ed. and trans. by David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 5.

7. More is consistent with other writers of the Northern European Renaissance, such as his friend Erasmus, whose own book, *Praise of Folly*, plays on More’s name (in Latin, the book is titled *Encomium Moriae*, “Praise of More”) and uses a character, Folly, to hide Erasmus’s own views. It is impossible to know whether the “Praise” is Erasmus’s praise of Folly, or Folly’s praise of the things that Erasmus is attacking.

8. “*Utopia*” refers to the book; “Utopia” to the island portrayed in the book.

9. Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Robert M. Adams (New York and London: Norton, 1975), 49.

10. More, *Utopia*, 40. Normally this requires adoption into another family.

11. More, *Utopia*, 42.

12. More, *Utopia*, 86. The Utopians oppose attempts at physical beauty by women. They “consider cosmetics a detestable affectation. From experience they have learned that no physical beauty recommends a wife to her husband so effectually as truthfulness and reverence,” 68.

13. More, *Utopia*, 49, emphasis added.
14. More, *Utopia*, 46, 47, 58. Given that slaves are often criminals being punished for crimes, and given that the purpose of punishment is to lead men to virtue (19) to place slaves in vicious conditions is contradictory. Perhaps these particular slaves are foreigners, captured in war. In any case, Utopia is a slave society, and the Utopians must fear being turned into slaves.
15. More, *Utopia*, 61, 64–65, 67.
16. The idle rich are a feature of many utopian works of the time; Campanella's *City* has an idle and avaricious majority. See Henry Morley, *Ideal Commonwealths* (New York: Hippocrene, 1988), 158.
17. Ayn Rand, "Questions and Answers on *Anthem*," in *The Ayn Rand Column*, ed. Peter Schwartz (New Milford, CT: Second Renaissance Books, 1991), 118.
18. *The Silent of Alcibiades* by Erasmus deals with an ugly sculpture that has a beautiful figure inside it. This contrast between internal and external viewpoints is, to Wootton, needed to understand *Utopia*. See Wootton's introduction to his translation of More's *Utopia*.
19. More, *Utopia*, 84. Priests get preferential treatment in hospitals, 46. More's solution to conflicts between church and state is to establish a class of church officials with their own laws.
20. More, *Utopia*, 43. More stresses, more than once, that scholarship is "assigned" in a "class" (or "order") of learned men, e.g., 53.
21. Ayn Rand, *Anthem*: "the Councils are the voice of all justice, for they are the voice of all men" (22); "What is not thought by all men cannot be true" (73).
22. Ayn Rand, "An Analysis of the Proper Approach to a Picture on the Atomic Bomb," in *Journals of Ayn Rand*, ed. David Harriman (New York: Dutton, 1997), 314.
23. Ayn Rand, "Tax-Credits for Education," in her *The Voice of Reason: Essays in Objectivist Thought* (New York: paperback edition, Meridian, 1989), 247.
24. More, *Utopia*, 80.
25. More, *Utopia*, 80.
26. Schwartz, *Ayn Rand Column*, 118.
27. More, *Utopia*, 90–91.
28. More, *Utopia*, 68, including Adams's note 2: "The grain (prosperity) and the candle (vision) obviously symbolize the special function of each ruler."
29. Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual* (New York: Random House, 1961; Signet paperback edition, 1963), 18.
30. More, *Utopia*, 90. English translator Ralph Robynson (1551) emphasized "pride" by repeating the word several times; More only says *superbia* once, and makes further references in the form "she."
31. Thomas More, *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 13., ed. Garry E. Haupt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 7, 14 (language modernized, emphasis added). The *Treatise on the Passion* was written late in More's life, probably during his imprisonment in the Tower, from April 17, 1534, to July 6, 1535, and immediately before his execution. More had earlier acknowledged his debt to Augustine for the phrase "wicked . . . pryde"; see 246, note to sec. 14/3.
32. More, *Complete Works*, vol. 13, 8 (emphasis added).
33. Thus the poet Vergil, in his epic *Aeneid*, charts Rome's destiny as follows: "Roman, these will be your arts: to teach the ways of peace to those you conquer, to spare defeated peoples. Tame the proud (*superbos*)." *The Aeneid of Vergil*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 160 (6.850–53).
34. The name of the last King of Rome, Tarquinius Superbus, is commonly translated as "Tarquin the Proud." Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, trans. A. de Sélincourt (New York: Penguin, 1971), 101, 105. He was overthrown for his tyranny and debauchery.
35. Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," in her *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 27.
36. Aristotle, *Ethics*, 101 (4.3, 1124.a3–4). Irwin's translation "magnanimous" is here altered to "proud" for clarity.