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Breaking the Metaphysical Chains of Dictatorship: Free Will and Determinism in *Anthem*

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> *Dictatorship and determinism are reciprocally reinforcing corollaries: if one seeks to enslave men, one has to destroy their reliance on the validity of their own judgments and choices—if one believes that reason and volition are impotent, one has to accept the rule of force.*
>
> —Ayn Rand, "Representation Without Authorization" (1972)

Anthem tells the story of a man who breaks free from an all-encompassing collectivist society. It is the novel in which Ayn Rand most heavily emphasizes the importance of the individual's will. To understand why, I think one must understand the connection between determinism and dictatorship—and between free will and political freedom. A collectivist society is necessarily at war with individual judgment and choice. And if one realizes that the chains holding down the members of society in *Anthem* are not just moral (the preaching of the idea that the individual should serve the group) and epistemological (the absence of the word "I"), but also metaphysical, one gains a fuller appreciation of the enormous intellectual feat Equality 7-2521 performs to liberate himself from his society.

DETERMINISM AND DICTATORSHIP

One of the startling aspects of the dictatorial society in *Anthem* is how seldom its rulers must resort to the outright use of force. The members of society do as they are told. With no voices raised in protest, people live in whatever buildings they are told to live in, sleep in a row of beds beside whomever they are told to sleep beside, rise when the big bell in the tower rings and go back to bed when it rings again, accept whatever occupation is prescribed to them, and report for procreation duties whenever they are told to report. No soldiers or secret police are needed to roam the streets, because no one thinks of stepping out of bounds. The meetings of the Councils are unguarded; the leaders do not fear for their lives. When members of society break one of the City's oppressive laws, they lack the self-assertion to consider escaping. The cell in which Equality 7-2521 (hereafter "Equality") is placed after he refuses to divulge his whereabouts during a performance at the City Theater has old locks on its doors and no prison guards. The only cries one hears from the populace are cries not of protest but of despair: among Equality's

fellow street sweepers, Fraternity 2-5503 sobs "suddenly, without reason," and Solidarity 9-6347 screams in his sleep, "Help us!" (47).

Why are there almost no instances of self-assertion in the society of *Anthem*? Why do the citizens not shout that their own lives and choices count?

Part of the answer, no doubt, is that the citizens are taught that it is wrong—evil—to assert any element of individuality. They are told that it is a sin to prefer one subject in school more than the others, one classmate over others, one career more than another, one man or woman more than any other.

But this is only part of the answer. If it were the full answer, it would imply that a citizen is an impassioned moralist, personally striving to enact what he recognizes to be the good. But individual understanding, including of morality, is unwelcome in society. Imagine if a citizen viewed himself as competent to discern good and evil, and as acting properly only when he first understands clearly why the action demanded of him is right. If that were the case, more citizens would rebel. The more intelligent ones would grasp the contradiction: their society demands firsthand understanding and choice of collectivist morality—a morality which declares that firsthand understanding and choice are wrong. The more intelligent ones would be able to realize that their society's morality strangles an important element of themselves: their individual understanding, interests, and choices. Thus more overt force would be needed to control the populace: soldiers would march people off to the mating halls and guards would be posted outside the doors of the prison cells. That this does not occur indicates that collectivist morality is not the only force pacifying the populace; as we shall see, collectivist morality plays a crucial role in controlling the subjects, but it is a secondary role.

The corruption of man's ideas by collectivism runs deeper than morality. Morality—the knowledge to distinguish good from evil and the dedication to achieve the good and abide by it in action—presupposes an individual who knows that he is self-governing and that he must select his course of action wisely. To enter the field of morality presupposes that one knows that one is free to judge and to choose one's path (which is why moral concepts are not applied to lower animals). But the citizens have great difficulty conceiving of this precondition of moral understanding and action. Their indoctrination is meant to preclude them from grasping that they are beings who possess free will.

This deeper corruption of course is most eloquently dramatized in *Anthem* by the fact that the rulers of society have expunged the word "I" from the language.[1] Men and women can no longer conceptualize themselves as separate, distinct individuals. They cannot identify themselves as acting on their own power and motive toward a goal, much less conceive of themselves as choosing a goal to pursue, one not shared by others and with which others might even disagree. In their minds, they are inextricably tied to the group, unable, mentally or physically, to detach themselves or carve themselves apart.

When a reader picks up *Anthem* for the first time, and reads through the first few pages of Equality's journal, what strikes him is not that something is askew morally in the world of *Anthem*, but that something is askew *metaphysically*. It is a nightmare universe not because the individual acting alone is regarded as evil, but because the individual acting alone has, seemingly, been wiped out of existence.

If, however, a subject does not regard himself as a self-governing being, able to forge his own soul and character, he still needs an account of where his identity comes from. The only alternative left to fill the void is some version of determinism.[2]

The subjects in *Anthem* are bombarded with determinist propaganda. They are told repeatedly not that it is evil to separate one's own life from the lives of other people, but that it is *impossible*; one is unavoidably tied to the group. For instance, over the portals of the Palace of the World Council is carved in marble (in part): "There are no men but only the great WE, one, indivisible and forever" (19). Five-year-old children are required to chant each night, "We exist through, by and for our brothers who are the State" (21). Though it is whispered that occasionally someone physically separates from the collective by entering the Uncharted Forest, only to find himself powerless to fend for himself and at the mercy of hunger and wild beasts, the rulers deny that this even occurs (48). The rulers go so far as to claim that inanimate actions, not just human actions, are dictated by the group. "[W]ithout the Plans of the World Council," Unanimity 2-9913 declares to Equality, "the sun cannot rise" (74).

But it is not just physical actions that are said to be determined by the group. The subjects are told that there is no such thing as a single mind thinking or judging or reaching knowledge, only a committee of minds. "What is not thought by all men cannot be true," states "the oldest and wisest" member of the World Council of Scholars, Collective 0-0009 (73, 69).

In short, the "Great Truth" is "that all men are one and that there is no will save the will of all men together" (20).

Of course, admonishments that free, individual thought and action are impossible imply that they are possible. The attempt to spread the theory of determinism by persuasion implies that man is free to judge and choose; this is a contradiction inherent in the theory's advocacy.[3] But this does not change the fact that the goal of the rulers is to get the subjects to view themselves as determined beings. Thus, already crippled by the elimination of any concept that refers to the ego—to a mind that possesses free will and chooses its own direction—the individual subject faces a barrage of metaphysical propaganda instructing him how to misconceptualize the facts. You are but a part of a super-organism—his indoctrination goes—able to exist only by permission of the whole, able to know only when the group decrees, and able to act only when the group wills. Unable to conceive of himself as a being capable of independent thought, independent action, and independent existence, the individual subject cannot even wonder whether this kind of life is good, let alone grasp that it is.

Because this metaphysical corruption is the principal method by which the dictatorial power in the City is maintained, the authorities must remove opportunities for willful self-exertion. To permit acts of individual judgment and choice, however minor, would be to leave out in the open the raw data from which an opposing metaphysical view could be developed. Any individual act of discrimination or selection—of saying "Yes" to some thing and "No" to other things—must be stamped out or, better still, eliminated before it has had a chance to begin.[4]

There are, for example, no varied colors or individualized garments; these would afford the opportunity for personal selection and discrimination (90–91). Questions—which imply that something interests one, that one wants to know something more than other things, or that one wants to understand something that one has not understood—are forbidden; group recitation is the method of instruction (23–24, 21). Fighting at school "for any cause whatsoever" is punished severely; to fight with someone could indicate that one regards one's own position as superior to the other person's, that one considers oneself in the right and the other person in the wrong (20). Friendships and love interests are not permitted; emotions of friendship and love require and encourage the formation of individual values. One responds to and chooses the other person because that individual embodies personal qualities which one values (30, 38).[5] Any desire to

choose work that brings one joy is squashed: the Council of Vocations sentences Equality, who passionately wants to be a scholar, to the Home of the Street Sweepers and sentences International 4-8818, a budding artist, to the same fate (22–26, 29–30).

Just as, physically, the authorities strive to prevent a subject from seeing his own individual face and body (61–62), so, spiritually, they strive to prevent him from seeing the operation of his own will.

Thus indoctrinated, the citizens are docile and obedient. Believing themselves to be determined beings, devoid of the power of independent judgment and free choice, they unquestioningly submit to orders. They live where they are told to live, they work at what they are told to work at, and they sleep with whom they are told to sleep. For the authorities, therefore, the overt use of force is rarely necessary.

Even when overt force is needed, it is rarely resisted by the subjects. Believing themselves to be appendages of a super-organism or intertwined parts of a large machine, they accept the use of force as natural and as sometimes required. If someone deviates from the course set for him by the collective, what alternative do the authorities have but coercion? If one has crooked teeth, one does not argue with one's teeth to persuade them to *choose* to return to proper alignment; one simply clamps them with a brace. If a cable from the battery of one's car becomes loose, one does not reason with the cable to persuade it to *choose* to reattach itself; one simply screws it back on. So when a citizen inexplicably strays from his path, he is forcibly realigned or reattached to the whole. And the person subjected to such treatment regards it as proper. Some inexplicable defect about himself has caused him to depart from the group; for his own sake he needs to be coercively oriented back to the collective. With such an indoctrinated populace, the authorities need not fear for their lives, and the prison cells will not require secure locks or human guards.

In short, the citizens resemble automatons more than individual human beings. In their indoctrinated minds there is no such experience as: "*I* accept this idea because *I* have followed the chain of evidence that makes it true" or "*I* choose to take this action because *I* have followed the reasoning that shows it will be good for me." There is only: "outside forces have determined this idea to be 'true' or this action to be 'good.'" To swallow determinism is to lobotomize oneself. A lack of conviction is the consequence.

There is little moral fire left in the subjects for what their society proclaims as the good. Morality presupposes choice; moral passion presupposes an unswerving dedication to that which one knows is good. But knowledge, dedication, and choice are concepts alien to the populace. A mind relieved of the responsibility to reach truths and form values is an empty shell, devoid of ego. The citizens are thus like the living dead; going to and fro, they perform their duties with stony, expressionless faces and lifeless movements.

Consider for example how Equality describes the five members of the Council of Vocations, who sentence him to be a street sweeper. "They sat before us and they did not move. And we saw no breath to stir the folds of their white togas. But we knew that they were alive, for a finger of the hand of the oldest rose, pointed to us, and fell down again. This was the only thing which moved, for the lips of the oldest did not move as they said: 'Street Sweeper'" (26). Or consider Equality's description of his fellow subjects: they have bowed heads, dull eyes, hunched shoulders and drawn muscles, "as if their bodies were shrinking and wished to shrink out of sight" (46). They dare not speak to one another and instead "are glad when the candles are blown for the night" (47). Or consider when Equality is finally caught sneaking back from the tunnel: even when a law has been broken, the members of the Council of the Home question him

without curiosity or anger; then the oldest member, in a bored voice, orders Equality to be lashed at the Palace of Corrective Detention (63–64).

The only moral fervor one observes in the City is directed not toward promoting what is considered good, but toward eradicating any obviously threatening element, any element that could awaken a sense of personal knowledge and values. In the case of the subjects, we witness this when the Saint of the pyre is set aflame for discovering the Unspeakable Word. The citizens in the crowd do not try to shrink out of sight: they collectively shriek and scream and spit curses at him (50). They do so *not* because they know he is evil or guilty: they do not know what the Unspeakable World is or why it is destructive, let alone that the Saint uttered it. Nor is he the image of a monster. But his posture and countenance do suggest independence and pride, and this could make the subjects wonder whether their status as automatons is self-made. Their mass, vehement, ungrounded denunciations of him obliterate in their minds the need to face the issue.

We witness similar behavior on the part of the rulers. Equality first describes the members of the World Council of Scholars, for example, as sitting around a long table, "shapeless clouds huddled at the rise of the great sky" (68). But when they learn of Equality's invention, they vehemently denounce it, unanimously crying out that his electric light "must be destroyed!" (74). The rulers are more conscious of the forces that enable them to retain their power. Their concern is not the well-being of the citizens, to whom the electric light would be an enormous boon, but rather the eradication of anything or anyone that provides evidence for the existence of their enemy: independent judgment and choice.

Such moral denunciations on the part of the subjects and the rulers are a clue to why a moral code still exists in society. Insofar as the inculcation of determinism is successful, a morality is not actually needed to control the citizens. The indoctrinated citizen does not need guidance on the "correct" choices to make, since he believes he functions without choice: he believes his course is set inexorably by outside forces, i.e., by the group. And so he does not judge or choose but obeys and follows. Should an individual, however, succeed in overcoming the obstacles placed in front of him: the elimination of the word "I," the constant determinist propaganda, and the campaign to stamp out any evidence of his own will—should he somehow remain on the path toward conceptualizing the fact that he has a self which thinks, chooses, and desires—the forces of collectivist morality are unleashed against him.

Part of the purpose of collectivist morality is to warn such developing individuals that any move toward living for self and away from living for others is evil. Since these individuals have a glimmer of the fact that they possess choice, the warning carries some meaning. "Everything which comes from the many is good. Everything which comes from one is evil. Thus have we been taught with our first breath," Equality writes (85). But this instruction presupposes the existence of a single, individual valuer. It presupposes someone facing a choice, wondering to himself down which road lies good and which evil (as Equality is beginning to wonder). For the rulers, the need to offer such counsel actually represents defeat.

The more insidious purpose of collectivist morality is to tell a developing individual that his very question—What do I think is true and false, right and wrong?—is *morally* wrong, that this *question* should be barred from his mind as depraved. To ask what is true and good, to personally want to understand the world and select the proper course of action in it—in other words, the existence of a thinker and valuer—is evil. The goal is to prevent the developing individual from fully discovering the sphere of judgment, choice and morality—by using his nascent sense of morality against itself.

"How dared you think that your mind held greater wisdom than the minds of your brothers?" Collective 0-0009 asks Equality (71). "How dared you, gutter cleaner, to hold yourself as one alone and with the thoughts of the one and not of the many?" Fraternity 9-3452 asks him (72). "What is not thought by all men cannot be true," Collective 0-0009 informs him (73). Regardless of the content of the thought, "there is no transgression blacker than to . . . think alone," Equality has been told all his life (17).

In this regard (as in many others), a parallel with *The Fountainhead*, which Rand was working on at the time of writing *Anthem*, is striking. Ellsworth Toohey destroys souls struggling to become valuers, like that of Catherine Halsey, by the same type of inner corruption. Catherine enters Toohey's study to voice the convulsions of her dying soul. She regards herself as vicious because she has always wanted to do what is right, but, having done so by becoming a social worker, now finds herself miserable and starting to detest the person she is becoming. Uncertain from the start of her ability to judge issues of morality—"I knew that I'm not a brilliant person and that it's a very big subject, good and evil"—she accepted and tried to live up to what Toohey and all the great moralists of history say: selfishness is evil and that "one can find true happiness only in dedicating oneself to others."[6] Now, facing her own unhappiness and struggling to retain the conviction that she should want to do what is right, she is beginning to glimpse the perversion in what she has been taught and, haltingly, to question accepted notions of right and wrong. She tells Toohey:

> Don't you see what it is that I must understand? Why is it that I set out honestly to do what I thought was right and it's making me rotten? I think it's probably because I'm vicious by nature and incapable of leading a good life. That seems to be the only explanation. But . . . but sometimes I think it doesn't make sense that a human being is completely sincere in good will and yet the good is not for him to achieve. I can't be as rotten as that.[7]

In delivering his death blow, Toohey uses Catherine's sense of morality against itself. He counsels her that it is selfish and thus vicious for her to want to know or do what is right, that if "your first concern is for what you are or think or feel or have or haven't got—you're still a common egotist." If this idea is difficult for her to accept because she does not, personally, understand it—that is the very proof of her corruption. One must abandon the quest for understanding as selfish; to be good, one "must stop wanting *anything*," Toohey tells her. "We are poisoned by the superstition of the ego. . . . We must destroy the ego first. . . . We must not think. We must *believe.* Believe, Katie, even if your mind objects. Don't think. Believe. Trust your heart, not your brain. Don't think. Feel. Believe."[8]

She obeys him: "I always thought that I must think. . . . But you're right, that is, if right is the word I mean, if there is a word. . . . Yes, I will believe. . . . I'll try to understand. . . . No, not to understand. To feel. To believe." This submission is an act of spiritual self-destruction; it is described in the novel thus: "She sat still, composed, but somehow she looked like something run over by a tank."[9] When we last meet Catherine in the novel, she is remarkably like the "brothers" in *Anthem*: a lifeless, mindless body moved not by personal thoughts or values but by outside opinions, interpreting the world in deterministic terms.[10]

A necessary condition of morally valuing something is choosing to pursue it because one understands that it is good; it requires an act of thought and of will, and for this reason must be eliminated in the society in *Anthem.* To ban it as immoral is a master stroke of deviousness—and a reason why all totalitarian dictatorships strive to hold a monopoly on morality. Just as in the

physical realm the subjects in *Anthem* are told not to venture forth into the Uncharted Forest, because there lies only destruction, so in the spiritual realm the general prohibition against thought warns them in effect not to venture forth into the uncharted world of morality, because there lies only evil. And so, like Catherine in *The Fountainhead*, in the name of the *good* the budding moralist will slash away the questions from his mind, and merge back into the unthinking collective.

For a dictatorship the inculcation of metaphysics, not morality, is the final, fundamental way of maintaining power. Every dictatorship in history has relied on some version of determinism, some version of the idea that human life is controlled by outside forces—from the doctrines of a caste system to a supernaturally-favored priestly class to racism to a divinely-appointed nation to an historical progression of economic forces. The slave society in *Anthem* is no exception; it also maintains its dictatorial power by preaching determinism. Should anyone be able to resist its metaphysical indoctrination—to retain a glimpse of the fact that he has a will which is free and to question the tenets of his society—collectivist morality descends upon him. It is evil to be self-programming, it is evil to demand to be convinced before one accepts an idea, it is evil to think—collectivist morality declares. Instead, one must let outside forces (i.e., the group) dictate one's convictions and actions. If the resistor succumbs to this litany, he commits spiritual suicide by drowning himself in the collective. He becomes, like those who did not resist, a cog in the machine (as Catherine becomes in *The Fountainhead*).

But to appreciate why there are so few resistors in the first place even though the truth is on their side, why those like Equality and Liberty 5-3000 and International 4-8818 are such rare exceptions, it is important to understand fully Rand's point that dictatorship and determinism are reciprocally reinforcing (see the quotation that heads this chapter). For one can observe in *Anthem* how day-to-day existence in a dictatorship reinforces the inculcation of determinism.

In the actions that comprise his daily life, a subject functions only on orders from others. Men do not work at a job unless they have been ordered to do so (25); "men may not write unless the Council of Vocations bid them so" (17); men do not walk through the city streets unless they have been told to do so (35). In brief, "everything which is not permitted by law is forbidden" (31).

Physically, the citizens are tied to one another, never allowed space to be alone or a moment's time to think alone. Equality's life as a street sweeper vividly illustrates this (27–28). He sleeps in a hall with a hundred other street sweepers. They rise together when the bell rings, dress, and then eat on tables which each seat twenty people. They work in teams. After dinner, they march together to one of the "City Halls," to attend a "Social Meeting." There they listen to speeches about their duties and the day's business at the City Council. Afterward, they sing hymns together. They are then afforded three hours of recreation—"Social Recreation." This consists of watching, in a crowded theater, plays about toil, performed without actors, only choruses. Then they return to their hall to sleep, to regain the energy to repeat the ordeal the next day.[11]

A person brought up in this kind of society will have great difficulty envisioning a human mind that generates its own thoughts and content, a mind filled not by the speeches, songs, and stories of others. And he will have great difficulty envisioning a human life that can exist apart from the collective.

It is thus not surprising if a citizen should find the collectivist, deterministic slogans of his society tempting. For in his society, a person's existence *is* (as far as is possible) determined by outside forces: his mind is filled by the voices of other people and his actions are dictated by

the group. Moreover, awareness of any alternative mode of existence has been wiped from his mind. The riches of the Unmentionable Times have been destroyed, the books burned, the language expunged of any trace of individualism. It is not absurd—although still an error—for someone subjected to these conditions to believe that determinism is an inexorable, metaphysical fact about human nature. In his mind, the existence of his dictatorship confirms the "truth" of the theory of determinism—and so reaffirms the appropriateness of his dictatorship.

Determinism and dictatorship thus create a vicious circle, one exceedingly difficult to break free from. The theory of determinism preaches that man exists without thought, judgment, and choice. This leads people to accept obedience and force as the appropriate ways to govern human relationships. The actual existence of a dictatorship, of a society demanding obedience and ruled by force, leaves people feeling personally helpless and out of control. This can lead them to believe that they are in fact determined beings who would be doomed if separated from the collective that controls them.

How does Equality break free from this vicious circle?

FREE WILL AND POLITICAL FREEDOM

The key to the answer is that Equality is, in the most exalted sense, a thinker. This provides him simultaneously with the data necessary to grasp that he is a sovereign being and the means by which to grasp it.

From the dawn of his mind, Equality "wished to know" (23). He develops a probing mind, a mind keen to observe and categorize what it has seen, a mind striving to connect its ideas together, and a mind which takes its own ideas seriously. Questions, Equality tells us, give him no rest; from a young age he asks so many "that the Teachers forbade it" (23–24). He has an active, insatiable curiosity, which makes him think "that there are mysteries in the sky and under the water and in the plants which grow" (23). To learn more about these mysteries, he collects discards from the Home of the Scholars—glass vials, scraps of metal, and dried bones—and wishes he had a place to hide them (29). In the tunnel, he meticulously collects whatever he can find from the Unmentionable Times (53–54).

But Equality is not content to rest with questions and mysteries; he attempts to answer and solve them. He does this by careful examination, by cataloging what he observes, by testing, by paying close attention to similarities and differences, and then by trying to *identify*, to put into words, what he has seen and discovered. In the tunnel, for instance, Equality experiments with strange metals, mixes acids, and dissects animals in order to contrast and compare aspects of the physical world and thereby learn "secrets of which the Scholars have no knowledge" (35–36). For whatever new phenomenon he encounters or new discovery he makes, Equality seeks to *name* it. After seeing the leg of a dead frog move unexpectedly, he tries to identify the cause and learns that copper and zinc immersed in brine produce a new power. He investigates this new power, catalogs its properties, and discovers that it causes lightning. He christens the new power, "the power of the sky" (52). When we first meet Equality, as he writes the opening pages of his journal, he is trying to name this strange new activity of his: "It is as if we were speaking alone to no ears but our own" (17). When Equality sees Liberty 5-3000 (hereafter "Liberty") for the first time, he names to himself what is distinct about her, different from the other women he has seen: "Their body was straight and thin as a blade of iron. Their eyes were dark and hard and glowing, with no fear in them, no kindness and no guilt. Their . . . hair flew in the wind, shining and wild, as if it defied men to restrain it. They threw seeds from their hand as if they deigned to

fling a scornful gift, and the earth was as a beggar under their feet" (38–39). The new, intense, personal feeling of longing that he experiences for the first time at the sight of her he classifies as "pain more precious than pleasure" (39). When he creates his electric light, he attempts to explicitly identify what made the invention possible: "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" (57). Later, he struggles to understand his new life in the forest on its own terms and to find his own words to describe it, undistorted by the lies of his teachers (78–80). Even when Equality cannot find the words by which to understand his experiences, such as when he is wondering what concepts have been lost from the Unmentionable Times (48–49), he remains on the premise of always seeking to expand the range of his awareness.

Nor is Equality content to rest with a splintered set of ideas. He tries to connect his conclusions together, to relate them to one another, to make them fit into a whole. He connects his discovery of the tunnel to the whispered tales of the Unmentionable Times, and grasps that the tunnel is evidence confirming that those times did in fact exist (19, 32). As he thinks more about the tunnel and the pleasures it has brought him, he tries to figure out why the discoveries and inventions from the Unmentionable Times have been destroyed and what words have been lost. When he identifies a new feeling of pain more precious than pleasure upon seeing Liberty, he does not stop there; he relates his experience to what he feels when he is among his "brothers" and what his "brothers" seem to feel—unhappiness and fear (45–46). And of course over a period of two years he slowly pieces together evidence for the existence of a new force of nature, electricity.

As a result of all this firsthand mental activity and effort, Equality takes the conclusions of his mind seriously. Even as a youngster, he opposes and fights with his brothers.[12] Later, he ignores the orders of the Councils and pursues instead his interest in science. When the World Council of Scholars threatens to destroy his electric light, he knows its value and so flees to the Uncharted Forest.

Clearly, to say that Equality is a thinker is not simply to say that he is a scientist, intent upon studying electricity. His field of vision is *all* of reality. He wants to understand his world and thereby successfully chart his journey through it. Equality is what Rand would later describe as a conceptualizer:

> The process of concept-formation does not consist merely of grasping a few simple abstractions, such as "chair," "table," "hot," "cold," and of learning to speak. It consists of a method of using one's consciousness, best designated by the term "conceptualizing." It is not a passive state of registering random impressions. It is an actively sustained process of identifying one's impressions in conceptual terms, of integrating every event and every observation into a conceptual context, of grasping relationships, differences, similarities in one's perceptual material and of abstracting them into new concepts, of drawing inferences, of making deductions, of reaching conclusions, of asking new questions and discovering new answers and expanding one's knowledge into an ever-growing sum. The faculty that directs this process, the faculty that works by means of concepts, is: *reason.* The process is *thinking*.[13]

But granted that Equality is a thinker, a conceptualizer, what does this fact have to do with the existence and discovery of his free will?

To think is an act of choice—the primary act of will, according to Rand. At the latest by the time of completing *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand had concluded that man's (only) volitional faculty is reason. According to her philosophy, "will" is not a separate faculty, in addition to man's rational faculty. The power of choice is an aspect of reason. "The key to what you so recklessly call 'human nature,' . . . is the fact that *man is a being of volitional consciousness.* Reason does not work automatically; thinking is not a mechanical process; the connections of logic are not made by instinct. The function of your stomach, lungs or heart is automatic; the function of your mind is not."[14] One's primary choice, the area in which each individual is sovereign, is whether he chooses to think or not.

> In any hour and issue of his life, man is free to think or to evade that effort. Thinking requires a state of full, focused awareness. The act of focusing one's consciousness is volitional. Man can focus his mind to a full, active, purposefully directed awareness of reality—or he can unfocus it and let himself drift in a semiconscious daze, merely reacting to any chance stimulus of the immediate moment, at the mercy of his undirected sensory-perceptual mechanism and of any random, associational connections it might happen to make.[15]

Although Equality's depiction as a volitional being is not made in terms of the primary choice, which Rand grasped only later,[16] essential to Equality's characterization is a crucial aspect of this choice. Equality will never surrender control of his mind to others; he will never let others program the content or direction of his thought; he will follow the evidence wherever it leads, not where others say it leads. Made consistently, this choice is, like Howard Roark's in *The Fountainhead*, the root of Equality's independence. Since one has total power to set one's mind in purposeful motion or to leave it adrift, to deploy one's intelligence and mental resources or to leave them idle, one has complete control over whether or not an idea will pass beyond the threshold of one's mind. For any idea advanced in one's society, one retains the power to bring it before the tribunal of one's conscious mind and ask "Do I see that it is true?"—and to allow it to pass only if the answer is "Yes." This sovereign power Equality never relinquishes. In the terms of *Atlas Shrugged*, Equality never places a "they say" above an "I know": a "mystic is a man who surrendered his mind at its first encounter with the minds of others. . . . At the crossroads of the choice between 'I know' and 'They say,' he chose the authority of others, he chose to submit rather than to understand, to *believe* rather than to think." Equality makes the opposite choice.[17]

Equality chooses "I know" over "they say" from his birth as a conceptual being. As I have suggested, the fact that at an early age he fights with his "brothers" in the Home of Infants indicates that he will not place others' views above his own. Even more clearly, at the age of ten Equality witnesses a Transgressor, tongue cut out, being burned alive for discovering the Unspeakable Word. Observe Equality's thought process as he is forced to behold this horrifying event. The discovery of the Unspeakable Word is a great evil, the leaders of his society say, the only crime punishable by death. The Transgressor, they say, is the devil incarnate. The other members of the crowd shriek and scream and spit curses at the Transgressor. In contrast, Equality observes the scene firsthand and arrives at his own conclusions. He notices that as the Transgressor walks toward the pyre, blood running from the corner of his mouth, he does not falter; his face is calm and happy, his lips smiling. As the Transgressor is being burned alive, there is no pain in his eyes, "only joy in them, and pride, a pride holier than it is fit for human pride to be" (51). However forbidden the idea may be—"a monstrous thought came to us then,

which has never left us" (50)—Equality concludes that the man before him is not the image of a sinner but of a saint.

What gains standing and permanence in the young Equality's mind is not a baseless "they say," but only that which he actually grasps. Equality knows on what factual basis he evaluates the image of the Transgressor as that of a saint not a sinner, and he is offered no understandable reason for the opposing conclusion held by society. The two ideas therefore do not compete in his mind. The first connects to what he sees and to his other knowledge, such as the meaning and potential causes of joy; the second is disconnected both from what he observes and from other things he knows. The two mental states are different and are experienced as different. The first is what it means to know, to be aware conceptually; the second is not.

One might maintain, however, that there is one area in which the young Equality accepts, at least to some extent and for a period of time, what "they say": the realm of morality. But to maintain this I think would be a mistake. There is a sense in which Equality, for a time, accepts his society's view of good and evil. But he accepts it firsthand, not simply because others say it; he accepts it cognitively, as a thinker. His error, therefore, remains open to later correction.

In the Home of the Students, Equality masters his lessons too quickly; his teachers disapprove and deprecate him for being different from his "brothers" (21). Bored and frustrated at school, Equality is unable to figure out why he is unhappy; but the fact that he is, is evidence that something is wrong and that a change in course might be warranted. In such a situation, it is not unreasonable for a child to think that the elders he respects possess wisdom greater than his, that they grasp that certain things are good and bad which he is not yet in a position to grasp. They may know the cause of his frustration as well as a cure. But if their advice proves wrongheaded, he will quickly abandon it as the counter-evidence presents itself. Thus Equality does briefly try to emulate a student whom his teachers approve of, Union 5-3992, "a pale boy with only half a brain" (21). But it does not work (because it cannot work, as I discuss later); Equality's lashings continue, and he abandons the attempt.[18]

Later, as a result of his devotion to knowing, Equality develops a passionate interest in science. But he abandons his interest (temporarily) because the leaders of his society brand such a desire as evil. To understand Equality's action here, it is again important to appreciate the context. As a budding chooser and self-programmer, Equality is forming a genuine sense of personal values and interests. But he is given no conceptual tools to understand this fact. Like Catherine in *The Fountainhead*, Equality takes morality seriously and wants to be good, but even more so than for Catherine in *The Fountainhead*, Equality's only notions of good and evil are the collectivist ones advanced in his society. Equality does not yet possess the evidence—which he will garner from his own later life—to explicitly challenge these notions. Further, an element of what his teachers say about the good makes sense to him, namely, that the good lies in the happiness of himself and his "brothers." At this point he has no reason to suspect that his leaders and teachers are monsters, and some reason to think that they know things that he does not yet know and do in fact seek the happiness of all. So for his personal desire to be sent to the Home of the Scholars, Equality is ready to accept, proudly, his punishment as street sweeper.

The crucial point here is that in the process of accepting his punishment, he never discards his mind. Unlike Catherine in *The Fountainhead*, Equality does not doubt his ability to understand issues of good and evil; he does not think that, somehow, others can grasp things that must forever remain a mystery to him. Since he is doing what is good, he expects happiness to result; he expects to learn why the Council of Vocations was right to think that he should be a street sweeper and not a scholar. But what does Equality observe in the ensuing months? The

mind-crushing routine of a street sweeper's life, when he is capable of so much more; a life which leaves him bored and, along with his fellow street sweepers, unhappy. So again the promises of his leaders fail to materialize. And given the counter-evidence (his actual unhappiness), Equality's suppressed desire to be a scholar reemerges, and he begins collecting discarded scientific materials from the Home of the Scholars. There is here no mindless following of what "they say."

The refusal to allow a "they say" to rule his thoughts, born in Equality's youth, characterizes his mature mind as well. For instance, he tells us in the tunnel that when he is tempted, he repeats to himself the slogans carved over the portals of the Palace of the World Council, but the slogans do not enable him to resist. Dogma has no power in his mind. But most eloquent in this regard is his discovery of (and subsequent stealing away to) the tunnel. It marks Equality's transition from childhood to adulthood and is an important turning point in the story. Let us see why.

Equality stumbles upon the entrance to the tunnel when he is looking to dispose of the scientific materials he has collected but is unable to hide. He goes in, against International 4-8818's counsel. He enters the tunnel with the same attitude that he collects discards from the Home of the Scholars: not with defiance but, simply, with insatiable curiosity. He is an explorer and investigator, who wants to know. But when Equality emerges from the tunnel, he declares to International 4-8818, in a voice that is hard and without mercy, his face white: "We shall not report our find to the City Council. We shall not report it to any men" (33). Why the dramatic change?

When Equality goes into the tunnel, he certainly is not paying any attention to what "they say." International 4-8818 reminds him that what is not permitted is forbidden, but Equality, who sees no reason for this rule that stifles knowledge, says he is going in nevertheless. What does Equality discover when he enters? Concretely, a tunnel. But his mind does not stop there. He connects what he sees to his other knowledge, and realizes that he has discovered a place beyond the ability of any men of his day to construct. Connecting his discovery still further, he realizes that he has found a remnant from the Unmentionable Times, evidence which confirms that those times existed and contained wondrous things. Thus what Equality discovers is evidence that the authorities likely have been deceiving the citizens, concealing facts from them. Given this discovery, he is now much less likely to put credence in what the authorities say, as he did occasionally in his youth, on the premise that they have reached knowledge that he has yet to reach. He is much less likely to give them the benefit of the doubt, even for a short period of time, that he is ignorant while they know. And further, from a positive perspective his discovery confirms his sense that, contrary to what the Scholars say, there are indeed "mysteries in the sky and under the water and in the plants which grow," mysteries that need to be (and can be) solved (23).

From this point forward, there is on Equality's part growing defiance and rejection of what his society says—or, more precisely, Equality pays less and less cognitive attention to what the authorities maintain. From this point in time, he will follow only his expanding knowledge and convictions. For over two years after discovering the tunnel, he ignores what they say in their plays about the virtues of toil (28) and instead escapes to the tunnel to study alone for three hours each day. When he catches his first glimpse of Liberty while sweeping the streets, he pauses to admire her, the two later exchanging furtive glances and silent greetings (39–40). Observe that Equality does "not wonder at this new sin of ours" and takes "no heed of the law which says that men may not think of women, save at the Time of Mating" (41). His leaders say

that it is wrong "to feel too much joy" or to be glad to be living, but Equality is glad to be alive. "If this is a vice," Equality writes, "then we wish no virtue" (46–47).

True, Equality does struggle with himself when thinking about the words that have been lost from the Unmentionable Times and, later, when naming the fact that he discovered a new power of nature (electricity) alone. But he struggles with himself not because he believes that what the authorities say might be true: he fears what they might do to him for stating truths. He does not want to think of the "words of the Evil Ones," not because this might mire him in error, but because he does not want to "call death upon our head" (49). And through his resolve to know, he overcomes the fear; he ends this journal entry by writing "What—even if we have to burn for it like the Saint of the pyre—what is the Unspeakable Word?" (51) Similarly, when Equality soon afterward discovers the power of electricity, he is reluctant to name the fact that he discovered it alone and that the Council of Scholars is "blind." He is reluctant not because he thinks the opposing views of his leaders might be true, but because he does not want to be punished. "It is said," he writes after naming the facts about his discovery. "Now let us be lashed for it, if we must" (52).

Thus in choosing both as a child and as an adult to follow what he knows, not what "they say," Equality constantly exercises his will. And to exercise his will is a precondition of discovering it explicitly. But it is only a precondition. By repeated acts of choice, Equality makes himself into an independent thinker. But how does he come to identify this fact? Equality, I have said, is a conceptualizer, but by what specific steps does he put himself on the path toward conceptualizing his free will? Other members of his society could have read the books that Equality found in the house from the Unmentionable Times—and been unchanged by them. But because Equality has paved the road to them not only physically but also intellectually, he is enlightened: he grasps the books' truths. This is a remarkable achievement, especially since Equality must overcome the obstacles that his collectivist society deliberately erects to prevent an individual from identifying the fact that he has a will which is free. How does Equality accomplish this feat?

To begin, Equality must find the time and privacy to think. Prior to discovering the tunnel, Equality can think only in brief snatches, such as late at night, before he drifts off to sleep (24). The tunnel affords him opportunity to study and concentrate for long, uninterrupted stretches of time. The tunnel, of course, is not the cause of his thinking but, if anything, the effect. Equality is able to carve himself out physically, below the surface of the City, only because he has already carved himself out spiritually from society. He finds and enters the tunnel only because in his personal quest to know, he ignores what "they say." The point here is that the tunnel offers indispensable time for his thought to develop further.

Once in the haven of his tunnel, Equality must continue to exercise his will: he must continue to think. This he does, with materials he has collected and stolen throughout the city. Early on in his studies, he notices the leg of a dead frog jerking for some unknown reason. For over two years, he pursues the cause relentlessly (52–53).

But if this were the only thinking that Equality did, as great as it is, he would not become the liberator of mankind. If his were a compartmentalized mind, exerting prodigious effort to investigate scientific phenomena but proceeding uncritically and conventionally when dealing with matters of morality and human nature, he would never have discovered his free will (or the tunnel, for that matter). Equality's mind, as I have indicated, is on the premise of understanding *all* of reality. Within his field of vision, Equality seeks to identify what he observes—and thereby to expand that field continually, "to feel as if with each day our sight were growing

sharper than the hawk's and clearer than rock crystal" (36). For both the outer world and the inner world, Equality desires to know. He extrospects *and* introspects—as he must, if he is to discover his free will.

Thus the fact that Equality keeps a journal is much more than a fiction writer's device employed by Rand. His journal writing, Equality tells us, takes valuable time away from his scientific studies (18); that he still decides to write shows how vital it is to him to understand himself and his society. Maintaining a journal is a crucial step in his self-liberation. It is at once a physical manifestation of and an aid to his introspection. Equality wants to understand himself, his society, and human nature. And therefore, as in the case of material phenomena, he carefully records his observations and tries to piece the facts together into a conceptual whole.

Equality's quest, however, would be doomed if he felt a sense of personal, profound guilt for his actions. Collectivist morality preys on guilt. It counts on one's self-esteem being impaired, but one not understanding why or knowing how to restore oneself to health. It then offers a spurious and deadly explanation of one's lack of self-esteem. You are feeling self-reproach, collectivist morality declares, because you are too concerned with your self, your ego, your thoughts, your personal understanding of good and evil. This is precisely how Toohey poisons Catherine, who with reason is beginning to dislike herself. Because of his commitment to thought and his fierce intellectual honesty, Equality maintains a soul fundamentally untouched by guilt—and therefore renders himself immune to such poison. This point requires some elaboration.[19]

In regard to the world, as we have seen, Equality maintains an active mind whose purpose is not to impress or defy others, but simply to know. "We must know that we may know," Equality writes (24). The ruling question in his mind is always "What *is* it?"—and over the answer neither the words nor the actions of others can take precedence. This same intellectual honesty is evident when Equality thinks about his own life and mind.

There is no attempt at self-deception as Equality tries to understand the differences between himself and his "brothers"—no attempt to paint himself in an unwarranted light—to excuse his crimes on the grounds that he did not really know what he was doing—to rationalize his sins against society as actions his rulers would actually approve of if only they understood his full context—or to pretend that the meaning of his actions is other than what it in fact is. In the effort to understand himself, and in the terms he possesses at the time, Equality carefully identifies his own actions: both their nature and their consequences. To take one of many examples, Equality openly admits at the beginning of *Anthem* that it is a sin to write down one's thoughts on paper: it is "base and evil" to act "as if we were speaking alone to no ears but our own" (17). But he also observes that this sort of action has brought him the first peace he has known in his life (37).

Precisely because of such ruthless intellectual honesty, Equality preserves a clean soul. He experiences no fundamental guilt for his "sins." Since Equality is committed to know the truth about himself and to do what he actually sees to be right, he has no reason to feel guilty. He never consciously indulges in that which he grasps firsthand to be false or evil.

Absence of guilt characterizes Equality's soul whether he is rejecting or (momentarily) accepting the tenets of his society. Sitting alone in the tunnel writing his journal, Equality catalogs his sins and transgressions. This explicit categorization is of course in the only terms of good and evil that Equality possesses, his society's. But he also knows, at least implicitly, that he has never been given much reason to think that what is branded as evil is in fact destructive of happiness, a value his society claims to work toward. Further, Equality has positive evidence to

think that there is something suspect in the views he has been taught. The Saint of the pyre is classified as the height of evil, yet the Saint's posture and countenance suggested otherwise to Equality. Most important, his own life and inner experiences do not integrate with his explicit categories of good and evil. Emulating Union 5-3992, for instance, brought Equality not contentment but further lashes, and abandoning his desire to be a scholar brought him not happiness but ignorance and boredom; whereas the "evil" of deciding to enter the tunnel has brought him much knowledge unknown to his teachers (36).

So at one level Equality struggles with himself when he wants to do that which is forbidden as evil. But at a deeper level, he is not actually convinced that the action is evil and has reason to think that it might be a path to pleasure, knowledge, joy. And therefore when he does that which is forbidden, he does not experience guilt. This is why at the conclusion of his first journal entry, after stating that the "evil of our crime is not for the human mind to probe," Equality can accurately write:

> 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. (37)

Even when Equality followed the claims of his society in his youth, he did not earn guilt. As a child, he momentarily accepts the idea that he should be like Union 5-3992. But, as discussed, there are reasons for his action: he is miserable and his teachers might possess wisdom he lacks; his action does not occasion guilt because it did not require the suspension of thought. Later, when Equality accepts his sentence as street sweeper, he does so not because he had felt guilt. Granted, he does write "We knew we had been guilty" (26)—but this is not the same thing as having experienced guilt. Equality is here viewing his action from a third-person perspective: he acknowledges that the wish to be placed in a particular profession is declared to be evil and something that should be suppressed. To identify himself as guilty here is but another example of Equality's intellectual honesty—of stating openly, as best he can, the nature of his actions. But the desire itself is not experienced as corrupt; there exists no genuine cause for self-reproach. And notice that what Equality feels when sentenced is pride. What he is in fact experiencing is a child's step toward adulthood: the pride of learning (from adults' advice) to put what he thinks are his long-term interests ahead of his short-term desires, the pride of mastering oneself. When Equality learns that this is not what he has done—when he begins to sense that he has actually stifled his self—his interest in science returns.

Thus the key to understanding Equality's intact self-esteem is his profound intellectual honesty—his choice to place nothing above his attempt to know the facts. But despite his intellectual honesty, Equality at first misconceptualizes the introspective data when he reflects on his own life and mind. Initially, he thinks that the reason he is different from his "brothers" is that he is cursed: "We were born with a curse. It has always driven us to thoughts which are forbidden. . . . We know that we are evil, but there is no will in us and no power to resist it" (18). There is, in other words, some unknown, deterministic element within him that controls his mind and pushes him forward, an element that he possesses and which others seem to lack, an element he cannot resist. Equality's error here is not surprising—and contains the seeds by which he will learn to correct it.

Remember, first, that Equality has no concept of a mind or will that is free and self-governing. He is beginning to grasp firsthand that there is some causal difference between the functions of his mind and those of his brothers. To the extent that any causes are known in his society, they are instances of physical, deterministic causality, which he would have learned while studying the Science of Things. It would be natural for Equality at first to accord a new, unidentified cause the same status. Moreover, his society explicitly and deliberately accounts for human action in deterministic terms, so when Equality observes a difference between his mental life and that of his "brothers," it would again be natural to explain this difference in deterministic terms. There must, he thinks, exist some causal difference between himself and others that *makes* him act in a different way.

Second, there can appear to be an element of compulsion in thought, something easily mistaken as deterministic, especially if determinism is the only theoretical framework one has for interpreting one's mental life. This compulsive element is particularly salient when one faces a demand to accept the unsupported or the unintelligible—as Equality constantly faces. So long as one continues to make the basic and solemn choice to think, to make awareness of reality one's goal, one *must* implement this goal by unwaveringly choosing to follow the evidence wherever it leads. To choose otherwise, to accord anything precedence over truth, is to abandon thought. If one continually chooses to think, no command to oneself to accept what others believe will affect one's mind. There is no way for one to inject a "they say" into one's thought process without derailing it.

Equality experiences this fact repeatedly. Alone in his tunnel, he writes that his curse is that he sees his actions to be evil, but performs them nevertheless. "This is our wonder and our secret fear, that we know and do not resist" (18). But as we have seen, he has little reason to think that what he is doing is evil, and he is accumulating evidence that his actions bring positives—and thus he cannot resist. For what could he do to prevent himself from acting? Equality tries repeating to himself the words inscribed over the portals of the Palace of the World Council: "We are one in all and all in one. There are no men but only the great WE, one, indivisible and forever" (19). But it has no effect. This empty slogan cannot convince him that his actions are wrong or obliterate from his mind the evidence that his actions are in fact yielding values. A mind that is choosing to think cannot command itself to be deflected by an unsupported, even unintelligible, "they say." To obey such a command would be to choose to abandon awareness of reality as one's ruling goal—but setting awareness as his ruling goal is precisely the choice Equality is making. Yet if one has not conceptualized one's sovereign choice, this situation can be easily mistaken for one of compulsion. Equality orders himself to stop his "evil," but for some unfathomable reason his order is not obeyed.

In actual fact, Equality's observation that "there is no will in us and no power to resist it" is, misconceptualized, his first explicit grasp of his free will (18). He has caught a glimpse of the fact that his mind and will are free—he self-consciously tries to resist his "curse"—but this freedom seems ephemeral and causally impotent: it does not enable him to resist. And thus he still conceptualizes the essence of his mental life not as free but as determined.

Consider the other instances where Equality views himself as cursed. He says that his curse makes him understand his school lessons too easily (21), which his teachers frown upon. He decides to try to emulate Union 5-3992, but finds that he cannot. So his mind again seems unruly. But of course it is not: so long as one continues to choose to think, to deploy fully one's intelligence, one cannot *not* understand. Deliberate, thoughtful mindlessness is impossible. To have succeeded in emulating Union 5-3992, Equality would have had to have chosen to let go of

the reins of his mind—something his teachers hope for but a choice he will not make. Or: Equality's curse makes him prefer the Science of Things to his other school lessons (22). But if Equality chooses to maintain his commitment to know, it is understandable that he would prefer a subject in which he encounters (some) factual grounds for the claims being made to subjects in which no such grounds are offered. Or: Equality's curse makes him ceaselessly ask questions (24). But so long as one is choosing to think, to ask questions is unavoidable. To choose to stop asking questions Equality would have to choose to stop thinking. Or: through a long process of thought Equality comes to ask himself what the words are that have been lost from the Unmentionable Times. He castigates himself for this question, viewing himself still in some way as a victim of an outside power: "We had no wish to write such a question, and we knew not what we were doing till we had written it. We shall not ask this question and we shall not think it. We shall not call death upon our head" (49). But as we have seen, to implement the choice to think one must choose to follow the evidence wherever it leads, no matter others' commands or threats. And so Equality's next words are "And yet . . . And yet . . . (49)—and he returns to thinking about the lost words from the Unmentionable Times (49–51).

From such inner experiences as these we can understand Equality's error in conceptualizing his will as determined.[20] But precisely because Equality preserves his commitment to thought and because his own mental life actually provides the introspective counter-evidence to his erroneous conclusion, he will correct his error. Given the opportunity to think, given his considerable intelligence, and given his commitment to using it, Equality will grasp that his mind is not determined but free.

I think the moment Equality first grasps this fact is when he discovers the power of electricity (52). Why does he grasp that his mind and will are free at this point? Two interrelated conditions are I think crucial. First, he needs to engage in a process of thought in which he is not constantly ordering himself to stop and finding that, mysteriously, his order is disobeyed; he needs to see his will not as causally impotent but as potent. His two-year quest for the power that made the leg of the dead frog move is such a process of thought.

Second and perhaps more important, he needs to be engaged in a sustained process of thought that ends successfully. When the terminus is reached, he can look back on the journey and ask himself what caused it and made it possible. What does Equality see when he looks back at his discovery of electricity? He sees months of prodigious effort, of active experimentation—"we melt strange metals, and we mix acids, and we cut open the bodies of animals" (35)—of trial and error—"we tested it in more ways that we can describe" (53)—all of which would have involved making false starts, asking innumerable questions, hitting dead-ends and starting over, etc.[21] The result of the process is new knowledge. The conclusion to draw, Equality sees when looking back on his journey, is that a process of thought (and so its product) is not determined outwardly by the group or inwardly by a "curse." It is not determined at all; it is *self*-initiated and *self*-governed. Knowledge is reached by choice, by willful self-exertion. In his journal Equality writes: "We, Equality 7-2521, have discovered a new power of nature. . . . The secrets of this earth are not for all men to see, but only for those who will *seek* them" (52, emphasis added).

Although he does not yet have the exact words to identify his discovery, at this point Equality has broken the basic chain of his dictatorship. From this point forward, he no longer views himself as cursed. From this point forward, he no longer describes his mind as though it were controlled by some outside power or force. He knows that it is he who controls and directs his mind.[22] The metaphysics of collectivism, which declares that the individual's mind and will

are governed by the group—the Great Truth, which states "that all men are one and that there is no will save the will of all men together" (20)—has lost any hold on Equality.

But this does not mean that Equality is ready to flee the City. As we have seen, the dictatorship inculcates not just the view that the individual's mind is controlled by the group, but that his whole life is. Any attempt to exist apart from the group, the subjects are told, spells death. To grasp (implicitly) that his mind is not determined but free is not yet for Equality to grasp that he can live alone. To complete the job of liberating himself from the nightmare universe in which the individual has, seemingly, been obliterated, Equality must come to see himself not simply as a free mind and will, but as an individual *being*, capable (and worthy) of independent existence.

To break this chain is difficult, because a dictatorship drives a wedge between mind and body. Even if a subject in the society in *Anthem* is able to preserve some small realm of private thought, that thought is irrelevant to his existence. Down to almost every detail, a subject's daily actions are prescribed by his rulers. What goes on in his head has no bearing on what goes on in his life. Equality must grasp the perversity of this. He must see his body not as a deterministic, interchangeable hunk of matter—as it is regarded in his society—but as a living thing animated by his will. He must see that his mind and will are eminently practical faculties, and that his body is the tool indispensable to fulfilling their edicts. He must grasp that his body deserves the same respect as his will. He must grasp that his mind and body form a unity.

This he does by observing his interactions with Liberty, his time alone in the tunnel, and his life alone in the forest. Equality's admiration of Liberty stirs in him a passionate physical desire, which he does not understand but which he endeavors to. At first, he sees no connection between the judgment of his mind and the response of his body. He admires her because she shares his independent soul—her eyes are "dark and hard and glowing, with not fear in them, no kindness and no guilt" (39). The result is a violent physical desire for her, a "pain more precious than pleasure" (39). Equality's realization that he has singled her out because of her unique character—she is "not like the others" (41) and is someone who he hopes also thinks forbidden thoughts (56)—grows concurrently with his knowledge that he wants to be in physical contact with her. He waits painfully for an hour each day to catch sight of her, then exchanges physical greetings with her from afar, then speaks to her, then touches her lips with his hands. Finally, in the forest when they sleep together, Equality learns "the one ecstasy granted to the race of men" (84); he learns that his evaluation of her (and hers of him) demands physical expression.

Perhaps even more important to Equality's discovery of the connection between mind and body is his invention of the electric light, a device revolutionary in its practical consequences. Equality's discovery of a new power of nature does not remain at a theoretical level; he uses it to create something that will radically improve his life and the lives of everyone in his society. And for the creation of the light, he now realizes, his body was the instrument. "We made it. We created it," Equality declares. "We alone. *Our hands. Our mind.* Ours alone and only" (59, emphasis added). And so at this precise moment, he comes to value his body and desires to know what he looks like:

> For the first time do we care about our body. For this wire is a part of our body, as a vein torn from us, glowing with our blood. Are we proud of this thread of metal, or of our hands which made it, or is there a line to divide these two?

> 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. (61)

This connection between the thought of his mind and the value-oriented action of his body is confirmed and expanded by his experiences in the Uncharted Forest. At first he is in despair because he was not ready to flee the City but had to because his electric light was threatened. He does not think he can survive alone in the forest and expects to be devoured by wild beasts. But then he learns the pleasures of deciding when to rise and act, the joy of exerting his body, the satisfaction of using his mind to gain food by his "own hand" (79). He is learning that life alone, chosen and directed by himself, apart from the collective, is possible. When he sees his own reflection for the first time, he gains a visual record of the fact that he is not just a free mind or will, but an independent being capable of independent existence. "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" (80). The next day, when the Golden One joins him in the forest, he tells her not to be afraid because "There is no danger in solitude" (83).[23]

In the quotation that heads this chapter, Rand observes that a human being who does not trust himself will welcome dictatorship. Equality is not such a human being—and at this point, he *knows* it. Against his dictatorship's attempt to inculcate the metaphysical theory of determinism in regard to both man's thought and action, Equality has broken free. Just as he knows that he is capable of individual, successful thought apart from the collective, so he now knows that he is also capable of individual, successful life apart from the collective. He is ready to learn the words for his discoveries from the books of the Unmentionable Times.

Remember, however, that in the society in *Anthem* a secondary force suppresses the burgeoning individual: collectivist morality. Equality, as we have seen, does not succumb to its only lethal weapon: the command to stop thinking. So essentially he is beyond its reach. But to conclude, let me briefly indicate how Equality frees himself fully from this chain as well.[24]

The more Equality sees himself as a self-governing mind and then a self-governing being, the more he sees his need to choose his own actions and select his own goals. He will question and reject what his society considers virtuous action before he questions and rejects what it considers noble goals.

At first, Equality has no quarrel with the idea that the good is to achieve the prosperity and happiness of all, including his own. Of course he is happy, a member of the Council of the Home tells Equality, "How else can men be when they live for their brothers?" (45). Equality accepts his sentence as street sweeper in part because he thinks it is proper to "work for our brothers" (26). When he decides later to bring his invention to the Scholars, whom at that point he still regards as fellow thinkers, he is ready to work with them to "give our brothers a new light" (60). But the means to achieve the happiness of all, his teachers declare, is to tie men together into a super-organism. This is the first moral "truth" Equality will question.

From the exercise of virtue, his society declares, the good must result. But what is considered vice and virtue in his society? It is vicious to think or act alone (17), virtuous to horde together, everyone equally afraid of speaking his mind (47)—vicious to ask questions, virtuous to mindlessly swallow one's lessons (23)—vicious to take any action that is not expressly permitted, virtuous to do as one is told (23)—vicious to wish something for oneself, virtuous to think of others (24)—vicious to engage in work which has no purpose "save that we wish to do

it," virtuous to toil for one's brothers (36)—vicious to take notice of an individual of the opposite sex, virtuous to regard them all as interchangeable (38)—vicious to care whether one lives or dies, virtuous to regard oneself as a cog in the machine (46–47).

Equality's ruthless commitment to thought, however, leads him to take vicious action. And what he gradually discovers is that his "vicious" actions bring values. By taking an action that is not permitted, he discovers the tunnel. By thinking alone and asking questions, he learns things "not in the scripts" and solves "secrets of which the Scholars have no knowledge" (36). By admiring and pursuing Liberty, he experiences a profound pleasure. By following his own desire to be a scientist and to study for no other purpose than to know, he discovers electricity and invents an electric light. Personally, the overall result of his "vicious" actions is joy. He sings aloud, happy to be alive—and is looked at suspiciously by his leaders. "If this is a vice," Equality concludes, "then we wish no virtue" (47).

In stark contrast to his own life, the lives of his "brothers" who follow the path of virtue are desolate. The normal state of his "brothers," Equality comes to grasp, is fear and suffering (47). There is something wrong, Equality is beginning to see, with what his society says about virtue and vice. At the very least, other roads also lead to happiness.

When Equality decides to bring his electric light before the World Council of Scholars, he expects that they will understand and forgive (61). As fellow thinkers, they will understand his wayward path even if they themselves do not take it. Even if Equality has found a different means to the noble goal of happiness for all, they will welcome him as one of their own since the gift he has to offer for the well-being of his fellow citizens is so great. The Council's hostility shocks Equality. The Scholars, faced with the choice of progress and happiness, or stagnation and misery—and at this point Equality knows implicitly that it is a choice—choose the latter. They demand that the electric light be destroyed. Even though he cannot put into words his feeling when he hears their verdict, Equality senses immediately that their goal is monstrous. So in protection of the supreme value that is his electric light, he seizes his invention, smashes the windowpane, and runs.[25]

Wandering through the forest with Liberty, thinking about his life and the issue of good and evil, Equality realizes that he reached values only when *both* his means and end were individual and solitary: "the only things which taught us joy were the power we created in our wires, and the Golden One. And both these joys belong to us alone, they come from us alone, they bear no relation to our brothers, and they do not concern our brothers in any way" (86). By contrast, when his end was collective, he was miserable. "There is no life for men, save in useful toil for the good of all their brothers. But we lived not, when we toiled for our brothers, we were only weary" (86). If that which actually brings knowledge, invention, joy, and happiness is labeled evil, and that which actually brings ignorance, stagnation, suffering, and misery is labeled good, then perhaps the goal—the standard for determining virtue and vice—is misguided, even inverted. Thus for the first time Equality asks himself: "what is good and what is evil?" (85).

Equality has now freed himself from the metaphysical and moral chains of his dictatorship; he is ready to learn the words for his discovery of individualism. The books from the Unmentionable Times help Equality conceptualize what he is on the verge of grasping: that he is a being whose thought and will are free, a being who is individual and independent and should live for himself. To such a being, Equality sees, political freedom is an indispensable value. If one's mind is not free to judge and follow the evidence wherever it leads but is instead

shackled to the beliefs of others, blindness results. If one's will is not free to choose one's own good but is instead subordinated to the wishes and needs of others, misery results.[26]

The goal of his collectivist society, Equality now sees, is not to raise men up to happiness but to grind them down to the level of chained animals. This is why it destroyed the concept of "I"—of a self which possesses free will. This is why it turned virtues into vices and vices into virtues. This is why it permits no political freedom.

But Equality is done with the vicious circle of determinism and dictatorship. The free society that he will erect will replace this vicious circle with a virtuous one. First created by the minds and actions of individuals, a free society in turn demands independent judgment and choice from its members. Because success in a free society requires exercise of an individual's thought and will, Equality knows that "the roads of the world will become as veins which will carry the best of the world's blood to my threshold" (104).[27]

Given the metaphysical discovery that made possible both the escape from his society's vicious circle and the envisioning of a new society, it is only fitting that in his penultimate chapter Equality declares: "Many words have been granted me, and some are wise, and some are false, but only three are holy: 'I will it!'" (94–95).[28]

NOTES

1. For a discussion of the steps Equality must perform to recapture the concept "I," see Gregory Salmieri, "Prometheus' Discovery: Individualism and the Meaning of the Concept 'I' in *Anthem*," in the present volume.

2. In this context I regard indeterminism not as a separate theory but as a version of determinism: whether a person thinks that his life, mind, and actions are necessitated by outside forces or "ruled by chance" matters not.

3. Rand later argued that the theory of determinism is self-contradictory. For a conceptual, fallible being to know that the theory is true (and then to argue for its truth), he would have to be exempt from the theory. He would have to accept the theory *not* because he was determined to do so—irrespective of the evidence—but because he had the freedom, and actually did choose, to follow the evidence where it leads. But this means that, in logic, the evidence cannot lead to the theory of determinism. See Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: paperback, New Meridian, 1993), 69–72. Another way of stating the contradiction inherent in the theory of determinism is that it "steals" the concept of truth: in denying the concept of free will it has no logical right to use the concept of truth (or falsity). For more on how the collectivist language in *Anthem* is replete with stolen concepts, see Salmieri, "Prometheus' Discovery," in the present volume, p. 260–62.

4. Rand used the language of "Yes" and "No" in the 1938 edition of *Anthem* but cut it from the 1946 edition (234). She also used it in *The Fountainhead*: see Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943; Signet fiftieth anniversary edition paperback, 1993), 503; and in her journals: see David Harriman, ed. *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 80 and 252–54. The language may have been suggested to her from reading Nietzsche: see Robert Mayhew, "*Anthem*: '38 & '46," in the present volume, p. 39.

5. As Howard Roark states in *The Fountainhead*, "To say 'I love you' one must know first how to say the 'I'" (Rand, *Fountainhead*, 366).

6. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 362.

7. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 364.

8. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 365–66.

9. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 366.

10. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 595–601. In this final scene between Catherine and Peter Keating, her last scene, Catherine claims that economic factors determine the course of the world, she explains human actions in terms of reflexes and conditioning, and she compares her pain from Peter having failed to go through with his marriage proposal to her to a physical, deterministic response: contracting measles.

11. In this regard the society in *Anthem* obviously resembles actual totalitarian dictatorships, like that of Soviet Russia, where a citizen's life is made almost completely social. And of course Rand was aware of this fact and depicted this aspect of communist life in Ayn Rand, *We the Living* (New York: MacMillan, 1936; Signet sixtieth anniversary paperback edition, 1996).

12. It is not explicitly stated in *Anthem* why Equality fights with others as a young boy; though fighting at this age can often be the result of impulse, I think the rest of the story suggests why the young Equality would be fighting with his "brothers." Interestingly, Rand wrote many years later about the evil of Progressive nursery schools and the "problem children" who reject the schools' conditioning; some of these "problem children," she wrote, are "violently rebellious." See Ayn Rand, "The Comprachicos," in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution*, ed. Peter Schwartz (New York: Meridian, 1999), 51–95.

13. Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 21–22.

14. Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Random House 1957; Signet thirty-fifth anniversary paperback edition, 1992), 930. At the time of writing *Anthem*, I do not think Rand regarded will as only an aspect of reason. This is more clear in the 1938 edition of *Anthem*, where thought and will seem to be treated as separate and equal powers, or even faculties; see especially 234–37. In the 1946 edition, thought and will are brought closer together, but still seem separable (if not separate). Crucially, however, even if, when writing and editing *Anthem*, Rand viewed reason and will as separate faculties of the mind, she viewed them as in metaphysical harmony. This of course makes sense if the conclusion she was progressively moving toward is that the faculty of reason is volitional. Note also that in her nonfiction writing after *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand continued to speak of the faculty of volition while simultaneously stating that volition is but an aspect of man's rational faculty. See for instance Ayn Rand, "The Metaphysical Versus the Man-Made," in her *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1982; Signet paperback edition, 1984), 23–34.

15. Rand, *Virtue of Selfishness*, 22. The life-or-death meaning of this primary choice is dramatized fully in *Atlas Shrugged.* For a discussion of one aspect of this dramatization, see Onkar Ghate, "The Death Premise in *We the Living* and *Atlas Shrugged*," in *Essays on Ayn Rand's* We the Living, ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 335–56.

16. I think the closest Rand comes in *Anthem* to naming the primary choice is the passage where Equality asks why he must know—and finds no answer: "We must know that we may know" (24). One's primary choice is to activate one's faculty of reason or not, and about this choice one cannot legitimately ask "Why?" The need and value of being conscious at the conceptual level of awareness is known to anyone; there is no competing mode of awareness to entice one with the promise of greater rewards; the only alternative to choosing the conceptual level of awareness is to relegate one's mind to emptiness. To ask *why* one must know—to ask for a *reason* to be conscious at the conceptual level—already presupposes the activation and value of one's rational faculty. For more on this last point, see Peikoff, *Objectivism*, 59–60, 153, and 211–12.

17. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 960–61. The heroes in *Atlas Shrugged* also make the opposite choice. When a childhood Dagny Taggart faces what "they say," namely, that she is unbearably conceited and selfish, but receives no answer when she asks what is meant—she dismisses their claims and wonders to herself "how they could imagine that she would feel guilt from an undefined accusation" (Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 54). In this respect Dagny is Equality's heir.

18. To tell a child to "be like Mike"—basketball superstar Michael Jordan—may make sense to him; to tell him to be like Union 5-3392 will likely not. A thinking child will try to be like Union 5-3392 only if he is miserable, which Equality is at this point in his life.

19. There is an interesting parallel between one of the heroes in *Atlas Shrugged*, Hank Rearden, and Equality. Both accept tenets of altruist-collectivist morality, tenets meant to engender guilt and enable society to harness Rearden and Equality. Early in the novel, for instance, Rearden calls himself (and Dagny) "a couple of blackguards"; he says this "indifferently, as a statement of fact." But fundamentally Rearden, like Equality, remains immune to the poison of altruism-collectivism because as a thinker and achiever he feels not guilt but its opposite. In the same scene where he calls himself a blackguard, he is described as "looking at his mills beyond the window; there was no guilt in his face, no doubt, nothing but the calm of an inviolate self-confidence." Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 87–88. And in time Rearden is able to grasp the error in his ideas because of his intellectual honesty.

20. For more of Rand's observations on this "compulsive" element in thought, I suggest reading her haunting article "The 'Inexplicable Personal Alchemy,'" *Return of the Primitive*, 119–29. Rand discusses the plight of some young dissidents trapped in the Soviet Union, who had for a few moments, seemingly against their will, spoken openly on Red Square about their country's invasion of Czechoslovakia. For another, fictional treatment of the issue, see Ayn Rand, "The Simplest Thing in the World," in her *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, revised edition (New York: Signet, 1975), 173–85. In this short story a serious fiction-writer who is struggling financially orders himself to

accept a baseless view of what "good," sales-deserving fiction is. He discovers that his mind will not obey, that he cannot write under such an order.

21. Compare this to Rand's description of Hank Rearden's invention of Rearden Metal in *Atlas Shrugged*, 35–36.

22. Equality refers to himself as cursed only in Chapter I and, looking back on his life, in Chapter XII. The last time he regards his thought process as outside of his (full) control is when he starts thinking about the words from the Unmentionable Times in Chapter II. From Chapter III on, he knows that he is in control of his mind.

23. For more on Equality's intellectual development in the forest, including why it is important that he see himself as the selector of his values, see Gregory Salmieri, "Prometheus' Discovery: Individualism and the Meaning of the Concept 'I' in *Anthem*," in the present volume.

24. For more on Equality's development of the morality of individualism, see Salmieri, "Prometheus' Discovery," in the present volume.

25. I do not mean to suggest that prior to this event Equality has no reason to question the goal of living for the happiness of all. He does, for instance, feel a violent hatred toward his brothers when he thinks of Liberty being sent to the Palace of Mating (44–45). He does not yet understand his reaction, but it is initial evidence that there might be a profound conflict between his own happiness and the "needs" of the collective.

26. In the 1938 edition of *Anthem* Equality states: "And so I guard my will before I guard my life. Let no man covet my will and the freedom of my will" (237). Rand cut this passage from the 1946 edition, probably because it is too strong and the language is more appropriate for a nonfiction treatise. In her own later nonfiction, Rand said that there are "two activities which an actually selfish man would defend with his life: judgment and choice" (Ayn Rand, "Selfishness Without a Self," *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, 50).

27. Rand discusses the virtuous circle of a free society in Ayn Rand, "What Is Capitalism?" *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: New American Library, 1966; Signet expanded paperback edition, 1967), 11–34.

28. I wish to thank Robert Mayhew, Shoshana Milgram, and Gregory Salmieri for comments on an earlier version of this paper.