

NOTES FROM: *Anthem*, by Ayn Rand

SUMMARY: This short, dystopian novel is *not* widely read, and not discussed *nearly* as often as (great) books like *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* - even though *Atlas Shrugged* is about 400 pages too long.

Anthem, however, is super short and *incredibly* powerful. It's about a future, collectivist society where its citizens are deprived of human names and identities, and everyone refers to themselves as "we." *No one* uses the word "I."

The State controls the lives of the entire population, where "we" are conceived in "Palaces of Mating" and die in the Home of the Useless. The main character, Equality 7-2521, however, is curious and intelligent, eventually renaming himself "Prometheus," and falling in love with Liberty 5-3000, though she never becomes *as* developed in the novel as he does.

Eventually, Prometheus rediscovers electricity (fire) while conducting experiments in an abandoned tunnel he finds, and ends up creating a lightbulb. When he tries to offer his new invention to the Council in the hope of gaining recognition for his ingenuity and initiative, it goes about as well as you'd expect.

Personally, I think this is one of Ayn Rand's strongest books, and I feel fortunate that I discovered it before I suffered through all 500+ pages of *We the Living*. Although she didn't change my opinion that *no one is self-made* - that we live, grow, and expand ourselves with the help of others - she strengthened my *own* sense of "I," my unshakeable belief that, ultimately, *I am my own person*, possessed of my own thoughts and ideals, *immovable* against the forces of cultural gravity that conspire to try and turn me into everyone else.

"The greatest guilt today is of people who accept collectivism by moral default; the people who seek protection from the necessity of taking a stand, by refusing to admit to themselves the nature of that which they are accepting; the people who support plans specifically designed to achieve serfdom, but hide behind the empty assertion that they are lovers of freedom, with no concrete meaning attached to the word; the people who believe that the content of ideas need not be examined, that principles need not be defined, and that facts can be eliminated by keeping one's eyes shut. They expect, when they find themselves in a world of bloody ruins and concentration camps, to escape moral responsibility by wailing: 'But I didn't mean THIS!'"

"Those who want slavery should have the grace to name it by its proper name. They must face the full meaning of that which they are advocating or condoning; the full, exact, specific meaning of collectivism, of its logical implications, of the principles upon which it is based, and of the ultimate consequences to which these principles will lead. They must face it, then decide whether this is what they want or not."

“We could ask questions of these, for they do not forbid questions. And questions give us no rest. We know not why our curse makes us seek we know not what, ever and ever. But we cannot resist it. It whispers to us that there are great things on this earth of ours, and that we can know them if we try, and that we must know them.”

“We alone in this hour are doing a work which has no purpose save that we wish to do it.”

“We do not wonder at this new sin of ours. It is our second Transgression of Preference, for we do not think of all our brothers, as we must, but only of one, and their name is Liberty 5-3000. We do not know why we think of them. We do not know why, when we think of them, we feel of a sudden that the earth is good and that it is not a burden to live.”

“The secrets of this earth are not for all men to see, but only for those who will seek them.”

“And now we look upon the earth and sky. This spread of naked rocks and peaks and moonlight is like a world ready to be born, a world that waits. It seems to us it asks a sign from us, a spark, a first commandment. We cannot know what word we are to give, nor what great deed this earth expects to witness. We know it waits. It seems to say it has great gifts to lay before us, but it wishes a greater gift from us. We are to speak. We are to give its goal, its highest meaning to all this glowing space of rock and sky.”

“We look ahead, we beg our heart for guidance in answering this call no voice has spoken, yet we have heard. We look upon our hands. We see the dust of centuries, the dust which hid great secrets and perhaps great evils. And yet it stirs no fear within our heart, but only silent reverence and pity. May knowledge come to us! What is the secret our heart has understood and yet will not reveal to us, although it seems to beat as if it were endeavoring to tell it?”

“And now I see the face of god, and I raise this god over the earth, this god whom men have sought since men came into being, this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride. This god, this one word: ‘I.’”

“Centuries of chains and lashes will not kill the spirit of man, nor the sense of truth within him.”

“There is nothing to take a man's freedom away from him, save other men.”

“It is hard for me to conceive how men who knew the word ‘I’ could give it up and not know what they lost.”

“And I wish I had the power to tell them that the despair of their hearts was not to be final, and their night was not without hope. For the battle they lost can never be lost. For that which they died to save can never perish. Through all the darkness, through all the shame of which men are capable, the spirit of man will remain alive on this earth. It may sleep, but it will awaken. It may wear chains, but it will break through. And man will go on. Man, not men.”

“I am. I think. I will.”