

Free Will and *Anthem*

1. Begin by reading what the Ayn Rand Foundation has to say about free will and how it is seen in *Anthem*.

FREE WILL:

One of the oldest and most important philosophic issues is the problem of free will vs. determinism. Those like Ayn Rand, who advocate free will, contend that people can make choices, can make up their own mind, can make decisions, can direct their own lives by the ideas and values they adopt. Those who advocate determinism contend that people are by nature in the grip of forces beyond their control, that their beliefs and values are the result of some force such as God, other people, the stars, economic conditions, instincts or one's racial heritage.

Anthem shows what it means to have free will, and it does so in a particularly interesting way. It depicts a world where people's lives seem to be determined but it's actually a world where people have free will. Students often believe that in *Anthem* only the heroic characters have free will, that the masses are indeed brainwashed, with no power to control their own lives. However, as Ayn Rand presents them, even those who submit to the authorities have free will. They are robots, but they are robots by choice: they were not forced to obey; they do so because they voluntarily abdicated the responsibility to think for themselves. They are depressed, without hope or ambition; they make no effort to accomplish anything; they merely obey and go along with orders. Ayn Rand holds that free will means "the choice to think or not." Most of the citizens have chosen not to think, which leaves them no alternative but to do whatever they're told to do.

How is free will manifested in *Anthem*? Prometheus relies on his own judgment rather than take the beliefs of his leaders as automatically true. His rediscovery of electricity is the prime example of free will: he himself initiates the thinking required to understanding the world around him; this is what makes him independent. Neither he nor his friends are bound by tradition.

That the past is "unmentionable" does not prevent them from mentioning it; that the forest beyond their city is "uncharted" does not prevent them from reaching it. And this is the ultimate meaning of a free-will approach to life: the future is open to man; what you attain is up to you; your values and your ultimate happiness are achievable. In Ayn Rand's view, man has the power to think and direct his life; he isn't doomed to a life of despair and defeat. If he is willing to rely on himself rather than be pushed by events, he can, like the heroic characters in *Anthem* achieve self-confidence.

2. Next, read the attached article "Free Will Fuel Accountability". Annotate this article as you read focusing on statements that are made that relate to the use of free will in *Anthem*.

3. Once you have read both pieces pertaining to free will, write a reflection. To reflect means to have serious thought or consideration, so tell me what you think. How does the article reflect the views of free will compared to *Anthem*? Does Mele take a different view or is he expressing the same opinion as Rand? Make sure to use paragraph format including a topic sentence, support statements and text evidence. Yes, you must cite!