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# The Construct of Individualism as a Leadership Achievement

## Globally Sized Personal Agenda

Self versus society, it is an idea that has been struggled with for many years, now. For decades, not only have things as little as a two-person friendship struggled from the idea, but also things as big as nations. The idea of living for oneself and living for the people that surround them is the root of many arguments, worldwide, but it is also the founding basis for ideas such as individualism and communism. In this paper, the founding ideals behind individualism will be explored, as well as some contrasting ideas and some works of literature that help contribute to the development of these ideas.

The construct of Individualism says that “the individual’s life belongs to him” and that he has the right to “live life as he sees fit,” (Biddle, 2016). This implies that every man should be to himself. Every individual’s main priority should be themselves and making sure that they, as a person are accounted for. In a society that is based upon individualistic ideals, the possibilities are endless. People are free to get the jobs they want, they have a say in how to run their own lives, and they are allowed to make money on their own time. Many countries, such as the one we are in now, agree with the concept of the said individual having control of themselves and the path in which they take in life. Other countries, however, such as Russia are set up on ideas that contrast greatly to American ideals. In places such as Russia, North Korea, and China, people work collectively. There is no such thing as watching one’s own back in a communist country, as everyone is expected and obliged to provide for and contribute to their society. As far as many people are concerned “In a [Communist] society, the liberal economy is doomed and freedom and economy are not possible,” (Kaulingfreks, 2008). These ideas came about, especially during the time of the Cold war when the ideas of capitalism, communism, and such all started gaining momentum as more and more people began to talk about them and their effects on the world around them.

Coincidentally, one of the authors most famous for developing ideas and concepts such as Individualism and Objectivism happens to be Ayn Rand. She was born in Russia and moved to the Americas in pursuit of a career. Rand was never a particular fan of the collectivism idea, and fought against it to the best of her ability. She wrote many novels and short stories that revolve around the idea of prioritizing oneself over their society such as *The Fountainhead*, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, and *Atlas Shrugged*. However, for the sake of this paper, *The Anthem* will be the focus of the paper.

Ayn Rand uses a lot of symbolism and figurative language in order to highlight her themes of Individualism and ironically Collectivism in her novella *The Anthem*. The two themes contrast the other so well that it emphasizes her points on each well enough for everybody to pick up on both. For example, in the first chapter Rand has the main character Equality 7-2521 explain that “It is a sin to write this,” as he is writing “for himself,” (Rand, 1938). By doing that, Rand is also developing the setting of the story, as well. However, with the statements quoted previously, she is making it known that being a part of a collective group is considered highly important in Equality's society and that self-indulgences are frowned upon. Nonetheless, Rand has

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Equality's character reject the rule almost immediately by exposing that he is participating in such an activity that could cause him a lot of trouble. Furthermore, Rand also has Equality 7-2521 speak about himself with second-person pronouns, highlighting the collectivism of his society.

To make matters even trickier for her main character, she gives him a bit of a rebellious streak and makes him an outlier in comparison to his peers. Equality finds this to be an issue as he considers it a "curse" of sorts as his society requires that "all men must be alike," (Rand, 1938). This is an issue mostly because in a society where everyone is supposed to blend in, standing out really is a curse. As if things were not already that bad for Equality, he is physically and mentally set apart from everyone else, which makes him even more so disliked by the people that surround him. Rand spends the entirety of the novella explaining how important it is for Equality to be just like all of the other people that surround him only for the character to end up running away at the end of the novel, defying every rule in the book as well as every single odd that has been stacked against him. This is a particularly good turning point for the protagonist of the novella as it is the one point of the story in which he is rewarded for acting upon his individual agenda instead of the agenda of his fellow peers and the people in charge of him.

That is the point in the novel where Individualism finally overcomes the overbearing practice of collectivism in Equality's society. Equality even goes as far to say that his past transgressions have "brought him peace for the first time in twenty years," (Rand, 1938). This is an important turning point within the novella because it finally points out what good has finally come out of him acting upon his own impulses and indulgences. For once, Equality can rest assured that he will not get in trouble for something he did a while before he ever left him in the first place.

Equality is finally seen as the stereotypical individualistic hero/protagonist. The basis that *The Anthem* is written also happens to be the basis for many other novels, novellas, short stories and more with similar themes that are trying to get across similar points. Novels such as *The Giver* focus on the idea of collectivism vs individualism as the protagonist, Jonas, is a member of a society that does not allow them to do much as see color. Even more so, and less expectedly, individualism plays a really big role in the plots of western novels. In most western novels, the cowboy is seen as limitless. Due to the limitlessness of the cowboy, he is forced out of town to live as an outcast, because people of the town can not bare to live with the fact that "they cannot be heroic," (Kaulingfreks, 2008). This can be a particularly big issue because it obviously makes the people of the town feel as if what they are doing is not enough to sustain them, when in reality, they would be just fine without the cowboy. However, the cowboy is still a good illustration of what a good person should be.

This is somehow an admirable trait in today's American culture and media. It is extremely popular for one to sacrifice the well being of a few other people for the greater benefit of themselves or maybe a group of people that they may find interest in. Even better, it is not only Americans, but it is spreading out to other people everywhere else as well. There is even a country believed to be more fond of individualistic ideals than the people of the United States, which may come off as a strange idea to many people. Who could be more into supporting personal agendas than the Americans, right?

Granted, the people of the United States have made a name for themselves in the lines of pushing their personal wants and needs onto their fellow peers and even other countries, but it

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turns out that the country of Venezuela ranks highest in individualistic thought. Turns out people from “emerging and developing economies are generally more optimistic about the future,” (Wener-Fligner, 2014).

Individualism has developed immensely over the course of the past few decades and continues to do so. It is a concept that many people have either come to hate or depend on. It is an idea that defines how people view themselves and the world around them. Individualism can play a major role in the treatment that people give other people. It can define communities and nations. The concept of individualism alone is enough to cause wars. Just a little insight into the concept can go a very long way in the lines of assisting people in understanding so much more about themselves and the world they live in.

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