

**Imitation, Rebellion and the psychology of learning:
A Bandurian study of the unconquered and the obedient in the
Anthem by Ayn Rand.**

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Abstract

This research paper scrutinizes the intricate psychological mechanisms of conformity and resistance within the context of Ayn Rand's dystopian novel Anthem through the lens of Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. This research analysis intricately examines the divergence and convergence of observational learning and individual agency, where imitation intersects with rebellion by aiming to dissect the characters' cognitive responses within the pressure of totalitarian conditioning and the constraint of oppressive collectivism. Additionally, it unravels the contrasting relationship between passive obedience and autonomous self-discovery as depicted through the novel's central figures. Contrasting with the perspective of environmental determinism and behavioral passivity, the paper critically examines Bandura's framework of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation as mechanisms that enable individuals to embrace cognitive autonomy and break authoritarian traditions. Analyzing the concepts of selective attention, differential retention, and motivational reorientation, this paper elucidates the relationship between the psychology of learning and behavioral outcomes within oppressive systems. Ultimately, this paper presents a compelling argument about the psychological conditions under which resistance emerges, exhibiting how Anthem elucidates the interrelation between observational learning and the capacity for rebellion. The study arrives at the conclusion that the unconquered and the obedient are distinguished not by environmental exposure but by the cognitive processes through which they interpret, retain, and enact observed information under totalitarian control.

Keywords: Social Learning Theory, Albert Bandura, observational learning, imitation, rebellion, conformity, attention processes, retention mechanisms, motivation, the unconquered, the obedient, totalitarianism, dystopian literature, psychological conditioning, individual agency

INTRODUCTION

Human beings do not emerge as isolated entities but are born into complex structures of socialization that shape their perceptions, behaviors, and values. From the earliest stages of development, individuals internalize the rules, norms, and expectations that sustain the social order. Family, religion, and institutions function as central mechanisms of social learning through which cultural values and behavioral codes are transmitted. These forces not only condition individuals on how to act but also define what is desirable, acceptable, and morally legitimate within a community. Consequently, consciousness does not develop independently; rather, it is formed within social and cultural frameworks.

“The true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual.” (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, p. 36)

However, not all individuals submit to the conditions imposed upon them. While many people follow norms and accept collective beliefs, others contest the ideologies that suppress human freedom and creativity. In every society, two psychological patterns emerge: some individuals normalize and reproduce the structures around them, whereas others interrogate and challenge these frameworks. Societies, therefore, comprise two categories of individuals: those who comply and those who resist. This dialectical relationship between conformity and resistance has been extensively examined by numerous scholars. Among these, Albert Bandura has been particularly influential. His Social Learning Theory posits that human learning occurs through observational processes. Individuals can assimilate novel behaviors not only through firsthand experience but also by observing others and witnessing the ramifications of their actions. An exploration of Anthem highlights thematic concerns that may be considered in relation to key ideas associated with Bandura’s theory, which invites its reader into a landscape where the struggle for individual identity resonates with fundamental human yearnings for freedom and self-expression. Sargent (1994) describes dystopia as

“a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of that contemporary society” (Sargent, 1994, p. 9).

Abrams (1999) points out the same quality of dystopia. For him, dystopia represents

“A very unpleasant imaginary world in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected into a disastrous future culmination” (Abrams, 1999, p. 328).

However, the characters’ quest for autonomous thought confronts the harsh reality of absolute collectivism. Anthem embodies the lives of individuals stripped of their very selfhood, the narrative was written in 1938, set in a post-apocalyptic future where civilization has regressed into totalitarian collectivism. Amidst the eradication of the word “I,” the novel detects the individual story of Equality 7-2521, his journey from conditioned obedience to radical self-discovery as well as his pursuit of scientific knowledge, and the restraint of an oppressive society. Both characters represent a distinct response to authoritarian conditioning: Equality 7-2521 has a deep desire for intellectual freedom and questions the World Council’s authority; International 4-8818 has artistic inclinations yet suppresses his talents to conform. These contrasting responses to authority are not merely personal traits but are shaped by the social environment in which behavior is observed, regulated, and reinforced. Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory acts as a cornerstone and enduring attempt at psychological contemplation. His main philosophy is that human behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling rather than solely through direct experience.

“A model who repeatedly demonstrates desired responses, instructs others to reproduce them, physically prompts the behavior when it fails to occur, and then administers powerful rewards will eventually elicit matching responses in most people.” (Bandura, 1977, Pg. 06)

This stance questions whether individuals are merely passive recipients of social conditioning or active agents capable of interpreting and reshaping their circumstances. Moreover, it also examines behavior’s implications in moral and social life through the lens of vicarious learning and reciprocal determinism. Through the exploration of this masterfully written piece of work, we endeavor not merely to detect the narrative but also the relationship between social learning and individual agency. Bandura’s assertion of observational learning illuminates the psychological dimensions inherent in Anthem. His theory proposes that behavior emerges through the interplay of four distinct mechanisms: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Central to Bandura’s framework is the concept of attention, which concerns what individuals notice in their environment and which models they observe. Bandura explains that

“A person cannot learn much by observation if he does not attend to, or recognize, the essential features of the model’s behavior” (Bandura, 1977, p. 06).

This principle of attentional learning becomes particularly significant when examining societies that actively suppress individual observation. Simply exposing persons to models does not ensure they will attend closely to them or select the most relevant characteristics from among the model’s numerous features. The second mechanism addresses retention, considering how individuals encode and store behavioral patterns in memory through symbolic representation. Bandura notes that

“A person cannot be much influenced by observation of a model’s behavior if he has no memory of it” (Bandura, 1977, p. 25).

In a highly controlled society such as that of Anthem, the State shapes retention by conditioning citizens to store only sanctioned ideas such as obedience, fear of transgression, and loyalty to the collective. Thus, the function of memory becomes a political tool: the things one remembers determine the things one is capable of becoming.

The third component of this framework is reproduction, which examines individuals’ physical and cognitive capacity to replicate observed behaviors. Bandura states that

“To achieve behavioral reproduction, a learner must put together a given set of responses according to the modeled patterns” (Bandura, 1977, p. 27).

The amount of observational learning that a person can exhibit behaviorally depends on whether or not he has acquired the component skills. If the constituent elements are present, they can be easily integrated to produce new patterns of behavior; however, if response components are lacking, behavioral reproduction will be faulty. Finally, motivation concerns the incentives or disincentives that determine whether learning translates into action. As Bandura articulates,

“A person can acquire, retain, and possess the capabilities for skillful execution of modeled behavior, but the learning may rarely be activated into overt performance if it is negatively sanctioned” (Bandura, 1977, p. 28).

When positive incentives are provided, observational learning that previously remained unexpressed is promptly translated into action. This means that merely observing a behavior is not enough for someone to reproduce it; whether the behavior is performed depends on both external reinforcement and internal motivation. These four mechanisms collectively explain

why individuals exposed to the same authoritarian models develop divergent responses.

However, the central research questions explored in this study are:

Q. To what extent does selective attention and differential retention explain the psychological divergence between Equality 7-2521 and International 4-8818 in Ayn Rand's Anthem?

Q. Under what conditions does Equality 7-2521 transform observational learning into autonomous behavior while International 4-8818 remains obedient in Anthem?

The mechanisms through which human beings acquire behavior, internalize social norms, and either conform to or resist oppressive systems have constituted a central debate across psychology, sociology and literature. The dialectical tension between social conditioning and individual agency propels continuous discourse on whether human beings are passive recipients of environmental influences or active agents capable of self-determination. Within this theoretical landscape, scholars examine how individuals learn through observation, how reinforcement shapes behavior, and, crucially, why some individuals transcend conditioning while others remain bound by it. Early explorations of social learning accentuate imitation as a key mechanism through which behavior is transmitted and social norms are reinforced. The systematic study of imitation as a social phenomenon predates modern psychology, with Gabriel Tarde's seminal work **"The Laws of Imitation" (1903)** formulating foundational principles for understanding how behavior is transmitted through society.

"Society is imitation and imitation is a kind of somnambulism." (Tarde, 1903, Pg. 87)

Tarde contended that imitation constitutes the elementary social relation and the fundamental process through which society perpetuates itself. Individuals absorb behaviors, beliefs, and customs from their social environment through a process of unconscious replication. Tarde suggests that most human behavior occurs through automatic imitation rather than conscious deliberation.

"Since the somnambulist is for the time being deprived of this power of resistance, he can illustrate for us the imitative quiescence of the social being in so far as he is social." (Tarde, 1903, p. 118)

This positioned human beings as fundamentally imitative creatures whose actions largely mirror those they observe in their social milieu. This perspective is further encapsulated in **Filiz Erdoğan Tuğran's (2021) analysis of Babis Makridis' film Pity (2018)**, where the protagonist's emotional behaviors are shown to emerge through the imitation of his social

environment. Tuğran proposes that the main character develops his identity by replicating the behaviors of those around him, including cultural and cinematic models. This aligns with Tarde's assertion that human actions largely align with social stimuli and demonstrates that imitation not only shapes overt behavior but also the formation of affective responses.

While Tarde emphasized the automaticity of imitation, contemporary research reveals that this process is far more complex, precisely because these operations require selective attention, motivational factors, and cognitive evaluation of consequences. Albert Bandura's work on social learning theory delineates how individuals can observe models, internalize behaviors, and selectively reproduce them based on anticipated outcomes. As Bandura stated,

“Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do” (Bandura, 1977, p. 22).

This perspective illuminates the intricate mechanisms through which individuals engage in deliberate hermeneutic processing of observed phenomena and subsequently execute volitional behavioral reproduction. Imitative action, therefore, emerges as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses both teleological intentionality and contextual contingency.

Behaviorism's ascendance over imitation theory effectuated a profound theoretical reconfiguration that repositioned humans as wholly constituted through environmental contingencies, though this conceptual rupture simultaneously eclipsed the observational learning dynamics that had formed the cornerstone of Tarde's analysis. The architectural foundations of this radical epistemological departure were systematically constructed through John B. Watson's classical behaviorism, articulated in his groundbreaking manifesto **“Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It” (1913)**, which ought

“To learn general and particular methods by which I may control behavior” (Watson, 1913, p. 168)

and rejected introspection and consciousness as legitimate subjects of psychological inquiry. Watson advanced what he termed “The older idea, the idea which grew up before we knew as much about what early shaping throughout infant life will do as we now know,” arguing that

“The behaviorist... recognizes no such things as mental traits, dispositions or tendencies. Hence, to him, there is no sense to the question of the inheritance of talent as the question is ordinarily used” (Watson, 1924, p. 77-78).

He proclaimed that

“Everything we have been in the habit of calling ‘instinct’ today is a result largely of training — belongs to man’s learned behavior. As a corollary from this I wish to draw the conclusion that there is no such thing as an inheritance of capacity, talent, temperament, mental constitution, and characteristics. These things again depend on training that goes on mainly in the cradle” (Watson, 1924, p. 75; 1930, p. 94; emphasis in originals).

Watson asserted his ability to shape any infant into any type of specialist regardless of the child’s inherent talents or inclinations, asserting the supremacy of environmental conditioning over innate predispositions. This radical environmental determinism positioned human beings as passive recipients of external forces, devoid of agency in their own behavioral development. B.F. Skinner later reinforced this approach, stating,

“Radical behaviorism is the philosophy of a science of behavior treated as a subject matter in its own right apart from internal explanations, mental or physiological” (Skinner, 1989, p. 122)

However, social learning theory evinces the significance of observation and imitation, thus presenting an integrative and conceptually precise explanation of how human behavior is shaped and enacted. Unlike strict behaviorism, which privileges direct reinforcement, Bandura’s model elucidates how individuals actively interpret and assimilate observed behaviors, thereby integrating environmental influences with deliberate cognitive processes. This perspective reveals that behavior is not only shaped by social stimuli but also selectively enacted through reflective evaluation. While this emphasizes the role of mental processes, early behaviorist research shifted the focus toward observable responses to environmental stimuli. Watson’s theories found practical application in Mary Cover Jones’ (1924) study of Little Peter, detailed in her seminal work **“The Elimination of Children’s Fears.”** Jones successfully employed systematic desensitization to eliminate a child’s phobia of rabbits through repeated exposure paired with pleasant stimuli. This pioneering research demonstrated the malleability of emotional responses through conditioning and established behavioral

modification as a legitimate therapeutic approach. However, the study's exclusive focus on stimulus-response mechanisms failed to account for the child's cognitive interpretation of the therapeutic process or his capacity for self-directed behavioral change.

Subsequently, B.F. Skinner extended behaviorist principles through his theory of operant conditioning, articulated comprehensively in **"The Behavior of Organisms" (1938)** and later popularized in **"Beyond Freedom and Dignity" (1971)**. Skinner's radical behaviorism posited that all behavior, including complex human actions, could be explained through reinforcement contingencies without reference to internal mental states. He argued that concepts such as freedom, dignity, and autonomous choice were illusory constructs that obscured the environmental determinants of behavior. As Skinner (1974) himself acknowledged,

"A person does not act upon the world, the world acts upon him," emphasizing the primacy of environmental factors in shaping behavior." (Skinner, 1971, P.181)

However, Skinner's position on private events was more nuanced than simple dismissal. While he outright rejected dualism and mentalism, which attributed independent causal agency to the mind and its derivatives, he clarified his stance on feelings and thoughts:

"A science of behavior must consider the place of private stimuli as physical things, and in doing so it provides an alternative account of mental life. [The question he raises then is] What is inside the Skin and how do we know it? [He goes on to say] The answer is, I believe, the heart of Radical Behaviorism" (Skinner, 1974, p. 211-212).

Despite this acknowledgment of private events as physical phenomena, Skinner's framework ultimately reduced human action to mechanical responses to external reinforcement schedules. This reductionist schema systematically expunged any meaningful role for conscious decision making or self-determination. Despite this deterministic perspective, social learning theory later highlighted that individuals do not simply react to stimuli; they observe, interpret, and selectively reproduce behaviors, integrating environmental influence with cognitive processes. However, Skinner's framework reduced human action to mechanical responses to external reinforcement schedules. This reductionist schema systematically expunged any meaningful role for conscious decision-making or self-determination. Despite this deterministic perspective, social learning theory later highlighted that individuals do not simply react to stimuli; they observe, interpret, and selectively reproduce behaviors, integrating environmental influence with cognitive processes.

Furthermore, the application of Skinnerian principles is exemplified in Anthony Burgess' dystopian novel **"A Clockwork Orange" (1962)**, where the protagonist Alex undergoes the Ludovico Technique, a state-sponsored form of aversive conditioning. Burgess incorporates these principles directly into Alex's narrative: after two years in prison, he volunteers for a behavioral-conditioning program to obtain early release. As Lodge (1992) notes, Alex **"Agrees to undergo Pavlovian aversion therapy, in which exposure to films reveling in the kind of acts he committed is paired with a nausea-inducing drug."** (Lodge, 1992, p. 101)

Through this depiction, Burgess not only dramatizes the mechanisms of behaviorist psychology but also raises questions about autonomy and the ethics of state-controlled conditioning.

Complementing these developmental perspectives, Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, articulated in **"The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function" (1949)**, delineates a psychoanalytic model whereby identity is fundamentally constituted through external images and social reflection. Lacan proposed that between six and eighteen months of age, infants experience a crucial moment when they recognize their reflection in a mirror. This recognition is paradoxically both jubilant and alienating: the child perceives a unified, coherent image that contrasts sharply with their actual experience of bodily fragmentation and motor incapacity. The mirror stage establishes a foundational misrecognition in which the self is constituted through an external image rather than internal essence. This creates what Lacan terms the "Ideal-I," an imaginary identification that forever situates the ego in a fictional direction, apart from authentic selfhood. The mirror stage thus positions identity formation as inherently dependent on external validation and social mirroring. It suggests that the self is always already alienated, constructed through the gaze of the Other rather than autonomous self-determination. Extending this psychoanalytic framework, **Shiting Lu (2017)** traces Dorian's psychological trajectory in **"Lacanian Interpretation of Dorian Gray's Self-Identifying under the Influence of Others,"** examining how Lord Henry Wotton, Basil Hallward, and the portrait function as maternal, paternal, and reflective agents mediating Dorian's passage between Lacan's Imaginary and Symbolic orders. Lu's analysis reinforces that identity crystallizes not from inherent essence but through externally projected images. It positions selfhood as perpetually governed by symbolic registers beyond autonomous control. Yet where Lacan

foregrounds foundational misrecognition in ego constitution, Bandura posits evaluative cognition as central, arguing that individuals discriminately appraise observed models and weigh anticipated consequences before selectively adopting or rejecting behavioral patterns.

Gabriel Tarde, John Watson, B.F. Skinner and Jacques Lacan have all left lasting marks on how we understand conformity, learning, and social influence. Their work explains much about human behavior, but it tends to present individuals as products of circumstances and larger structures. People emerge from these frameworks as relatively passive subjects controlled by forces beyond their control. These theories certainly illuminate dimensions of how societies shape their members, but they inadequately address the mental processes people engage in when they encounter social models. They do not fully account for how individuals observe, weigh, question, and sometimes reject what they see around them. Albert Bandura's social learning theory addresses this aspect. Bandura argues that people are not simply conditioned by their environments. They are active participants in their own development. They observe others, evaluate what they see, and decide whether to imitate or resist. This process involves cognition, interpretation, judgment, self-reflection. Bandura's framework has been widely used in psychology, education, and media studies, but literary scholars have not yet made full use of it. This represents a notable oversight, given how often literature depicts characters who learn by observing others, who internalize or challenge behaviors after careful observation, and who change through reflection rather than mere stimulus and response.

Data Analysis

The operational dynamics of totalitarian societies depend fundamentally upon the systematic manipulation of observational learning, wherein individuals internalize behavioral patterns not through personal experience alone but through continuous exposure to modeled actions and their consequences. The psychology of learning in such contexts reflects itself through two opposing trajectories: imitation, which sustains authoritarian control through behavioral replication, and rebellion, which emerges when cognitive processes resist environmental programming. Bandura's discernment of how humans acquire behaviors through observation, modeling, and witnessed consequences explicate the psychological mechanisms that enable authoritarian systems to achieve widespread conformity while also exposing the vulnerabilities within such systems that permit resistance to emerge. Ayn Rand's *Anthem* depicts a civilization where every dimension of social learning has been systematically deployed to

eliminate individual consciousness and replace it with collective identity. The society portrayed in the novel operates through relentless behavioral modeling and comprehensive punishment of deviation. However, the narrative simultaneously validates that even under conditions of total environmental control, certain individuals develop cognitive autonomy and ultimately reject their conditioning.

Ayn Rand's *Anthem* accentuates these Bandurian concerns through the contrasting psychological development of Equality 7-2521 and International 4-8818. Both characters experience identical environmental conditioning from childhood, observe the same models of submission throughout their society, and witness identical patterns of reinforcement for conformity and punishment for deviation. Equality 7-2521, however, progressively questions the ideological foundations of his civilization, pursues forbidden knowledge despite severe consequences, and ultimately achieves complete psychological liberation through self-directed inquiry. International 4-8818, in contrast, experiences moments of doubt, yet consistently suppresses these impulses in favor of conformity. The divergence between the two characters provides a clear depiction of how cognitive processes particularly selective attention to certain aspects of their environment over others, differential retention of observed behaviors, and fundamentally different motivational orientations manifests in the form of distinct developmental trajectories even under conditions of comprehensive social control. It specifically shows both the power and the limitations of environmental determinism in shaping human consciousness. The society achieves this environmental control through the systematic exploitation of how behavior is maintained. As in the social learning system, new patterns of behavior can be acquired through direct experience or by observing the behavior of others. The regime systematically exploits observational learning from childhood, training individuals to model their behavior on those around them regardless of the model's cognitive capacity. Equality 7-2521 describes this conditioning process when recalling his early education:

“We looked upon Union 5-3992, who were a pale boy with only half a brain, and we tried to say and do as they did, that we might be like them, like Union 5-3992.” (Pg. -17)

The deliberate presentation of intellectually impaired individuals as behavioral templates serves to suppress any impulse towards distinction. This shows how imitation functions as the primary mechanism of social control, the society depends upon citizens modeling themselves after deliberately degraded examples, ensuring that learned behavior never exceeds prescribed

limits. This strategy directly reinforces the society's foundational mandate; which Equality has internalized so thoroughly that he articulates it as self-evident truth:

“We strive to be like all our brother men, for all men must be alike” (Pg. 13).

Such observational conditioning, however, represents only one dimension of the society's behavioral control system. **The more rudimentary form of learning, rooted in direct experience, is largely governed by the rewarding and punishing consequences that follow any given action. (Bandura, 1977, Pg.3)**

As Equality 7-2521 recalls when he witnessed the public execution of a transgressor, an event that left an indelible psychological imprint:

“We have seen one of such men burned alive in the square of the City. And it was a sight which has stayed with us through the years, and it haunts us, and follows us” (Pg. 51)

This witnessed punishment denotes that People are repeatedly confronted with situations with which they must deal in one way or another. Social learning theory assumes that modeling influences psychology of learning principally through their informative functions and that observers acquire mainly symbolic representations of modeled activities rather than specific stimulus-response associations (Bandura 1969a, 1971a]. In this formulation, modeling phenomena are governed by four interrelated sub processes.

- **Attentional processes**

A person cannot learn much by observation if he does not attend to, or recognize, the essential features of the model's behavior. One of the component functions in learning by example is therefore concerned with attentional processes.

“Simply exposing persons to models does not in itself ensure that they will attend closely to them, that they will necessarily select from the model's numerous characteristics the most relevant ones, or that they will even perceive accurately the aspects they happen to notice.” (Bandura, 1977, Pg.6)

This principle of attentional learning becomes particularly significant when examining societies that actively suppress individual observation. As in Anthem, the society is built on collectivism and enforced sameness. Many citizens like International 48818 live through imitation without ever developing genuine attention. International recalls that;

“We are one in all and all in one. There are no men but only the great WE, One, indivisible and forever.” (Pg.14)

But Equality 7-2521 possesses a unique ability to focus on the essential features of the world around him, which sets him apart from the other citizens of his collectivist society. He also reflects on his uniqueness:

“It Is only we, Equality 7-2521, we alone who were born with a curse. For we are not like our brothers.” (Pg. 15)

While other characters like international move through life passively, equality observes everything with unusual depth and curiosity. His attention patterns diverge fundamentally from mere imitation of approved focus. He notices the injustice, irrationality, and contradictions built into the rules of his world, and he pays attention to details that others are trained to ignore. His attention creates an insatiable need to understand;

“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.” (Pg. 20)

This questioning leads Equality to observe what others deliberately avoid. He gazes at the forbidden Uncharted Forest and contemplates the past his society has erased;

“And as we look upon the Uncharted Forest far in the night, we think of the secrets of the Unmentionable Times. And we wonder how it came to pass that these secrets were lost to the world” (pg. 50)

Where others accept the boundaries set by authority, Equality probes deeper, even daring to ask the most dangerous question of all:

“What is the Unspeakable Word?” (pg. 53)

Each question represents a psychology of learning that refuses to replicate without understanding and this heightened attention aligns with the concept of attentional processes, which suggests that true learning only occurs when a person actively selects and concentrates on the important aspects of what they observe. Because Equality consistently attends to and analyzes these significant details, he becomes a natural scientist, even though his society forbids such independent thought and discovery.

• Retention processes

“A person cannot be much influenced by observation of a model’s behavior if he has no memory of it. A second major function involved in observational learning concerns long-term retention of activities that have been modeled at one time or another.” (Bandura, 1977, Pg.7)

In a highly controlled society such as that of Anthem, the State shapes retention by conditioning citizens to store only sanctioned ideas such as obedience, fear of transgression, and loyalty to the collective. Memory becomes another site where imitation either succeeds or fails. Thus, the function of memory becomes a political tool: the things one remembers determine the things one is capable of becoming. This principle manifests clearly in how the state conditions its citizens to selectively retain certain information while suppressing other memories. On the one hand, International 48818 shows state-controlled retention, as his memory has been disciplined to store only what aligns with the Council’s authority. When he encounters the tunnel, he immediately recalls the legal prohibition against such discoveries;

“Since the Council does not know of this hole, there can be no law permitting to enter it. And every-thing which is not permitted by law is for-bidden.”

This serves as evidence that he has internalized the Council’s doctrine so thoroughly that rules and restrictions dominate his cognitive landscape. Eventually he suppresses the significance of what he has seen. His retention perpetuates imitation at the level of memory itself. His mind automatically retrieves the approved behavioral patterns of fear, obedience, and conformity. When Equality proposes exploring the discovered tunnel, International’s immediate response reveals his conditioned thinking:

“We shall go down,” we said to International 4-8818.”

“It is forbidden,” they answered. (Pg. 28)

International’s retention therefore reproduces the State’s model: he remembers rules instead of discoveries, danger instead of curiosity. His ability to recall only the “right” memories keeps him aligned with collective norms and prevents him from acting on forbidden observations. So, the psychology of learning, for him, operates exclusively within approved channels. In Bandurian terms, International’s retention reinforces model loyalty, ensuring that past learning always leads back to the same obedient response. In contrast, Equality 7-2521 although he outwardly appears to obey, inwardly he stores and protects memories of the tunnel, the

scientific experiments, and the remnants of past knowledge. This inward retention becomes a private archive of meanings that contradict collective ideology.

“We know that we are evil, but there is no will in us and no power to resist it. This is our wonder and our secret fear, that we know and do not resist.” (Pg.13)

In Bandura’s terms, Equality symbolically represents his experiences in a way that strengthens his autonomy rather than conformity; his memory becomes a tool for intellectual growth. Where International’s retention serves only imitation, Equality’s becomes something entirely different. By repeatedly returning to the tunnel and acting on the knowledge he has preserved, Equality shows that retention can serve as the foundation for personal agency and rebellion, rather than mere imitation of the dominant model.

• **Motoric reproduction processes.**

“The third component of modeling is concerned with processes whereby symbolic representations guide overt actions. To achieve behavioral reproduction, a learner must put together a given set of responses according to the modeled patterns.” (Bandura, 1977, Pg.7)

The psychology of learning at this stage determines whether observed behaviors translate into conformity or something more autonomous. The amount of observational learning that a person can exhibit behaviorally depends on whether or not he has acquired the component skills. If he possesses the constituent elements, he can easily integrate them to produce new patterns of behavior, but if the response components are lacking, behavioral reproduction will be faulty. Given extensive deficits, the subskills required for complex performances must first be developed by modeling and practice.

In Anthem, this concept becomes visible in the contrast between Equality and International. Although Equality 7-2521 invents the light entirely on his own but he had already acquired the sub-skills necessary for innovation through partial and indirect modeling. The society never teaches true science, but it does provide Equality with fragmented learning experiences that function as Bandura’s “constituent elements.” From the age of five, he is sent to the Home of the Students, where the children are told,

“Dare not choose in your minds the work you would like to do when you leave the Home of the Students. You shall do that which the Council of Vocations shall prescribe for you. For the Council of Vocations knows in its great wisdom where you are needed by your brother men, better than you can know it in your unworthy little minds” (pg.18)

This authoritarian structure suppresses autonomy but still exposes him to basic academic routines and observational cues. The society intends these fragments to serve only imitation, yet they become tools for something unforeseen. Equality learns simplified and often incorrect information.

“We learned that the earth is flat and that the sun revolves around it, which causes the day and the night. We learned the names of all the winds. We learned how to bleed men to cure them of all ailments.” (pg.19)

Even though the lessons are simplistic and often incorrect, they still cultivate basic cognitive routines such as memorizing information, adhering to step-by-step instructions, handling tools, and interacting with the material environment. The mention of “great modern inventions” such as candles and glass, supposedly created by the Home of the Scholars, provides symbolic models of invention and craftsmanship.

“All the great modern inventions come from the Home of the Scholars, such as the newest one, which was found only a hundred years ago, of how to make candles; also, how to make glass.” pg.19

According to Bandura, these fragmented observations count as sub-skills that the learner can later integrate into new behaviors. Thus, Equality’s scientific breakthrough does not emerge in isolation; it results from the small, indirect, and symbolic models he absorbed during his state-controlled education, allowing him to assemble these elements into an innovative act that the society never intended to teach. Even though symbolic representations of modeled activities are acquired and retained, and the sub-skills exist, an individual may be unable to coordinate various actions because of his own limitations. Like, When Equality discovered the hidden tunnel, he fearlessly ventured inside, driven by curiosity and determination. International 4-8818, however, had no critical thinking or courage to follow; he stepped back, frightened, and merely watched Equality go. As equality observes,

“International 4-8818 stepped back. They were frightened, but they stood by and watched us go.” Pg.29

This elucidates Bandura’s argument that when essential sub-skills are absent, the reproduction of complex behavior becomes impossible. The society has successfully suppressed these foundational competencies in International. His capacity for action never extends beyond imitation of sanctioned behaviors. Now he is capable only of obedience and passive admiration. When Equality wants him to stand by his side and keep the tunnel a secret, International responds,

“The will of the Council is above all things, for it is the will of our brothers, which is holy.” Pg.32.

This presents how deeply he has internalized obedience and fear.

• Reinforcement and motivational processes:

“A person can acquire, retain, and possess the capabilities for skillful execution of modeled behavior, but the learning may rarely be activated into overt performance if it is negatively sanctioned or otherwise unfavorably received.” (Bandura, 1977, Pg.20).

At this final stage, the consequences of action determine whether learning manifests as continued imitation or transforms into open rebellion. When positive incentives are provided, observational learning, which previously remained unexpressed, is promptly translated into action. Reinforcement influences not only regulate the overt expression of matching behavior, but they can affect the level of observational learning by controlling what people attend to and how actively they code and rehearse what they have seen.” This means that merely observing a behavior is not enough for someone to reproduce it; whether the behavior is performed depends on both external reinforcement and internal motivation. Negative consequences or social disapproval can suppress action, while rewards or encouragement can prompt immediate execution. The idea that individuals may acquire and retain the capacity for skillful behavior but refrain from performing it due to negative social consequences directly reflects the lived experience of Equality 7-2521 in Anthem. Although he learns by observing the world around him whether through the structured lessons of the Home of the Students or through his later experiments in the tunnel, his society’s strict sanctions suppress the overt expression of this learning. Even after discovering the power of light and mastering the technical skills needed to recreate it, Equality initially hides his invention because acting alone is considered a

transgression. This is evident when he states,

“We must guard our tunnel as we had never guarded it before. For should any men save the Scholars learn of our secret, they would not understand it... They would see nothing, save our crime of working alone, and they would destroy us and our light.” (Pg.66)

This moment shows how negative reinforcement suppresses observable behavior even when internal learning is complete. He possesses the full skill set to transform society, yet the threat of punishment forces him into secrecy. However, as his intrinsic motivation strengthens, the balance between internal desire and external consequences begins to shift. Equality eventually reaches a point where the value he assigns to his discovery outweighs the fear of social condemnation. This becomes clear when he proclaims,

“Our discovery is too great for us to waste our time in sweeping the streets. We must not keep our secret to ourselves, nor buried under the ground. We must bring it into the sight of all men. (Pg.65)

Marks the point at which his previously suppressed learning becomes active behavior. What was learned through imitation now serves rebellion instead of conformity. Equality’s intrinsic motivation like pride in his achievement, curiosity, and the desire for recognition overcomes the fear of punishment that had long silenced his abilities. This shift illustrates how positive internal incentives can activate behaviors that fear once kept dormant. However, when he presents the light to the World Council of Scholars, the reaction he anticipates, appreciation, praise, or acceptance does not occur. Instead of rewarding his innovation, the Council condemns him, labels his creation a transgression, and threatens to destroy both the invention and Equality himself. As collective says:

“we have much to say to a wretch who have broken all the laws and who boast of their infamy! how dared you think that your mind held greater wisdom than the minds of your brothers.” (Pg.80)

They further add;

“You shall be burned at the stake, and this thing must be destroyed” (Pg.83)

This harsh response represents a moment where expected positive reinforcement is replaced by severe punishment. This intensifies the negative sanctions that had previously suppressed his abilities. It is this unexpected and overwhelming punishment that becomes the turning point in his behavioral activation. The reinforcement shift becomes even more evident when Equality

decides to flee to the Uncharted Forest. He already possesses the physical strength and survival capabilities needed to live outside the city, but these behaviors were never enacted earlier because the oppressive social system discouraged all forms of independence. Only when punishment becomes imminent when he realizes the Scholars will not accept his discovery and intend to destroy him, do these latent skills become active. His despair is reflected in the line, **“We are doomed. Whatever days are left to us; we shall spend them alone. We do not care. We care for nothing on earth. We are tired” (p. 85)**

which shows that the collapse of external support and the escalation of threat push him into decisive action. Thus, Equality’s escape presents the theoretical claim that behavior is performed only when reinforcement aligns with internal motivation. Once the external system offers nothing but punishment and his internal desire for freedom becomes dominant, the abilities he had long possessed finally manifest as open, self-determined action. What began as imitation of scientific method transforms into genuine rebellion when consequences cease to matter. In contrast, International 4-8818 exemplifies how external reinforcement shapes behavioral expression within the collectivist system. Like Equality, International also learns through observation and participates in the discovery of the tunnel, but his response reveals how deeply societal conditioning governs his actions. Upon finding the hidden place, he immediately insists on informing the authorities, saying

“We shall report our find to the City Council and both of us will be rewarded.” (Pg.31)

His reaction is not driven by curiosity or independent judgment but by the internalized belief that obedience guarantees safety and approval. International’s response reveals how deeply imitation governs even his discovery of novel situations. Although he understands that the tunnel is forbidden, International’s first instinct is to seek validation from the Council, proving how the promise of reward and the fear of punishment regulate not only behavior but also cognitive processes such as attention, interpretation, and decision making. Even when he cares for Equality and senses the significance of the discovery, his internal motivation is overridden by the dominant reinforcement structure that prioritizes conformity over individuality. The psychology of learning, in his case, never progresses beyond replication of approved responses and this very submission becomes the psychological boundary that separates him from Equality 7-2521, and it is here that the contrast between the two characters becomes most apparent. While International’s adherence to collective norms reflects the successful internalization of

external controls, Equality's cognitive path moves in the opposite direction, shaped by selective attention and differential retention function as the decisive psychological filters through which identical environments produce radically different selves. Bandura's framework clarifies that while both characters are exposed to the same models of obedience, only Equality attends to discrepant cues contradictions, gaps in knowledge, and the material traces of a lost civilization while International focuses solely on the socially endorsed aspects of experience. Because attention determines what enters memory, Equality's retention extends beyond state-sanctioned ideas and incorporates fragments of forbidden knowledge, whereas International's memory consolidates only rules, fears, and collective dogmas. Their divergence thus arises not from the environment's content but from the cognitive selection each character performs, shaping what becomes psychologically meaningful and what is discarded.

Within this context, Equality's transformation from a covert learner to an autonomous actor is contingent not merely on the knowledge he acquires but on the alignment of his cognitive capabilities with an internal motivational structure that eventually outweighs the threat of punishment. Rebellion emerges when the psychology of learning reconfigures itself around internal rather than external values. His observational learning remains dormant so long as the external system is capable of intimidating him into compliance. However, once his accumulated insights collide with the realization that no institutional reinforcement, neither recognition nor usefulness will ever accompany his discoveries, the motivational calculus shifts. Bandura's model explains this moment as the threshold at which internal incentives pride, curiosity, and the drive for self-efficacy override deterrents. Thus, Equality's autonomy emerges not from the acquisition of new skills but from the moment his motivational orientation reconfigures what those skills are permitted to become in action.

Ultimately, the trajectory of Equality 7-2521 affirms that even under totalitarian control, the activation of autonomous behavior requires a specific convergence: cognitive skills that have been silently developed through observation, a memory system that preserves alternatives to official doctrine, and a motivational break from the reinforcement structures that previously dictated conduct. When imitation no longer serves survival, and internal values become self-legitimizing, observational learning transcends compliance. External sanctions lose their persuasive force and internal values become self-legitimizing, observational learning transcends compliance and becomes a catalyst for self-determination. In Anthem, this shift

signals the limits of environmental determinism, revealing that authoritarian systems may shape behavior extensively, but they cannot fully govern how individuals interpret, store, and ultimately mobilize their learning. Equality's psychological evolution thus demonstrates how the very mechanisms used to enforce conformity can, under altered motivational conditions, generate the foundations of resistance and individuality.

Conclusion

The analysis of Ayn Rand's enduring novel *Anthem* through Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory mirrors the intricate, diverse relationship between imitation and rebellion under the domain of totalitarian control and behavioral psychology. This thorough textual analysis dissects the psychological landscapes where these two trajectories—imitation and rebellion intersect and, at times, align with each other while often challenging the foundations of environmental determinism. Through the in-depth and meticulous exploration of the contrasting developments of Equality 7-2521 and International 4-8818, the characters reflect the dual capacity of the psychology of learning as both an instrument of authoritarian control through systematic imitation and as an unexpected foundation for cognitive autonomy and rebellion. This analysis explores the interplay of observational learning and individual consciousness, making evident how *Anthem* reflects Bandura's framework that behavior is acquired through attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation, while simultaneously delineating that these same mechanisms contain inherent vulnerabilities that enable resistance to emerge even under comprehensive social control. International 4-8818's trajectory provides evidence that observational learning achieves widespread conformity when attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation operate exclusively within approved channels, with vicarious reinforcement and systematic punishment successfully eliminating individual thought and perpetuating behavioral replication. Similarly, Equality 7-2521's journey elucidates that selective attention to environmental contradictions, differential retention of forbidden knowledge, innovative reproduction of fragmented sub-skills, and motivational reconfiguration toward internal values transform the same learning processes into foundations for rebellion rather than conformity.

However, particular narrative developments provide a new perspective to the conventional understanding of behavioral determinism. Equality 7-2521's development introduces a new discourse on the psychology of learning and its limitations in totalitarian contexts that cognitive

processes possess inherent selectivity and autonomy that environmental conditioning cannot fully suppress. Rebellion has cognitive foundations that imitation cannot eliminate, depicting that human consciousness retains certain irreducible capacities for selective attention and motivational autonomy. The poignant scene of Equality's escape to the Uncharted Forest juxtaposes the limitations of totalitarian behavioral control with the persistence of cognitive autonomy despite systematic conditioning. Within this discourse examining the psychology of learning and its relationship with human agency, Anthem challenges purely deterministic interpretations by bringing light to the cognitive autonomy embedded within learning itself. The divergence between the unconquered and the obedient remains a subject of psychological contemplation and encompasses the reality that identical conditioning can yield fundamentally different outcomes based on cognitive selectivity, a phenomenon that continues to shape our understanding of human agency under oppression.

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