Objectivism Through Ayn Rand's Fiction - Part I

Fall 2025 - ARI Live Courses Syllabus - DRAFT

Last updated: September 03, 2025

COURSE TITLE: Objectivism Through Ayn Rand's Fiction - Part I

COURSE ABBREVIATION: TBD

COURSE TERM AND YEAR: Fall 2025

PREREQUISITES
Before starting this course, you must have read *Atlas Shrugged*, *The Fountainhead*, *We the Living*, and *Anthem*. Firsthand knowledge of these works is assumed from the outset.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
If you discovered Ayn Rand through her novels, you're not alone. But many readers, in their effort to understand Rand's philosophy, leave her novels behind—focusing solely on her nonfiction essays.

That's a mistake.

Rand developed Objectivism as a means to the end of writing her novels. Her fiction is where her philosophy took form. And she regarded her novels, especially *Atlas Shrugged*, as the fullest expression of that philosophy. Understanding Objectivism therefore requires careful study of the stories, characters, and conflicts through which Rand originated it—stories which contain the richest treatment of many of Objectivism's central principles.

This course is your invitation to do just that—to study Objectivism through the novels in which Rand created it.

In Part 1 of this guided exploration, you'll deepen your understanding of Rand's views on:
- the nature of life and values
- the integration of work and life
- individualism and independence
- Emotions
- physical force
- the Benevolent Universe Premise

—and more.

Join us and see how Rand's "projection of an ideal man" illuminates her "philosophy for living on earth."

COURSE DURATION: 8 weeks

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Most recorded Lectures by:
Onkar Ghate
Dr. Ghate is senior fellow, chief philosophy officer, and a board member of the Ayn Rand Institute. He specializes in Rand's philosophy, Objectivism, and is ARI's senior instructor and editor. He publishes and lectures on Rand's philosophy and fiction, including application of Objectivism to cultural issues. He holds a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Calgary.

Some recorded lectures and all live discussion sessions lead by:
Ben Bayer
Dr. Bayer is a fellow and director of content at the Ayn Rand Institute. He teaches and gives talks and interviews for ARI. He writes and edits for ARI's online publication, *New Ideal*. His writing focuses primarily on the application of philosophy to contemporary cultural and political controversies. He holds a PhD in philosophy from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Lead Teaching Assistant(s):
Nicolas Krusek

Assisting Teaching Assistants:
TBD

RECORDED LECTURES AND LIVE DISCUSSIONS
This course consists of both recorded lectures and live discussions in which we will discuss course material and course assignments. See the course website for a week-by-week *Course Outline and Schedule* of topics, live discussion dates, and assignment due dates.

Important: Each assignment is due before the live discussion, including for the first week's discussion. Be sure to check the relevant deadlines in the *Course Outline and Schedule*.

Once enrolled, you will be provided access to the course on Populi, from where you will be able to attend the live class by clicking the "Join Conference" Zoom link at the time of the class.

Participants are strongly encouraged to attend the live discussions for the best experience. However, we are aware that this is not always possible and recordings of live discussions appear on Populi under the "Concluded" section of the Conferences soon after a live class ends or under the Lesson module for the corresponding week. Please watch these if you are unable to attend live. Contact livecourses@aynrand.org if you have any issue accessing a recording.

If you attend the live discussion, please turn on your camera unless you are in a setting with distracting activity going on or your device is not on a stable surface. It makes for a much better experience for all participants when faces are visible.

TEXTS/NECESSARY BACKGROUND MATERIAL
The main readings for the course are Rand's four novels. We are presupposing that students have already read all four of these novels before the course begins.

Our expectation is that during the course you will re-read scenes and chapters from the novels on your own as you think about the novels' stories, characters, and conflicts. Each week we will highlight certain scenes or chapters that are especially fruitful to reflect upon for the philosophical topics that we plan to discuss that week, but these lists will in no way be exhaustive. **The more you mine the novels for specific passages that convey Rand's thoughts and perspective on that week's topic or topics, the more you will profit from the course**.

In addition to the main readings (the four novels), we will occasionally assign a few of Rand's nonfiction essays that contain discussion and analysis relevant to the topics assigned that week. Accordingly, you should also have copies of Rand's nonfiction books.

Here are the books you will need:
- *We the Living* (WtL)
- *Anthem* (AN)
- *The Fountainhead* (TF)
- *Atlas Shrugged* (AS)
- *For the New Intellectual* (FNI)
- *The Romantic Manifesto* (RM)
- *The New Left / Return of the Primitive* (NL / ROP)

ASSIGNMENTS

You will be asked to complete the following types of assignments.

Two Types of Weekly Assignments

Students need to complete one of two types of assignments that will be given each week. Each student will be placed into one of **two groups, Group A or B**, and each group will be **alternatively assigned one assignment set each week**.

For example, if Group A is assigned the *Answer a Question* type for Week 1, and Group B is assigned *Ask a Question*, then in Week 2, students in Group A will be assigned *Ask a Question*, and Group B,

Answer a Question. Please check the course documents on Populi to find the group in which you have been placed.

Answer a Question assignments

We will pose questions on the course's readings and topics for the coming week, from which you will select **one and only one to answer**. The questions will be posted every Tuesday at 7 pm UTC with a submission deadline of the following **Sunday at 7 pm UTC**.

- **Why are you being asked to answer a question before the lecture on the topic?** One major goal of the course is to think philosophically about the stories, characters and conflicts that Rand created. This is not how one normally does or should read fiction. But in this case, of course, we are not reading Rand's novels but re-reading them (or parts of them). In order to get the most out of the course material, including the lectures in the course, you need to approach this re-reading of the novels with an active and self-reflective mind, thinking carefully about the characters and their conflicts. This assignment requires you to do that and then to convey in writing what you think you have understood philosophically about aspects of Rand's novels. The issues you are being asked about will then be explored in more depth in the lectures, with further follow-up in the live class discussions. The live course leader will review your submissions and comment on some in the live discussion. TAs will grade and often comment on your submissions as well.

- **Grading standards** for each assigned question will be posted on a weekly basis after the live discussion, along with any exemplary instances from student submissions.

Ask a Question assignments

A recorded lecture will be posted every Sunday at 7 pm UTC. In this assignment you are required to **submit a question** about the recorded lecture and the topics discussed therein. In submitting the question, **you need to explain your current thinking about the question**: e.g., what is generating the question or why are you asking it, whether you have a hypothesis about what the answer to your question is, whether you think your question is important or not and why, or stating it a bit differently, how gaining more clarity on the matter you're raising will advance your understanding of Rand's novels and ideas. The submission deadline for this is the following **Tuesday at 7 pm UTC.**

- **Why are you being asked to ask a question about the lecture on the topic?** Because the first lecture is recorded and you are not able to interact with that instructor, we use your questions about the recording to generate discussion in the live discussion. The live discussion leader will sometimes pose your question to other students and try to answer as many of the submitted questions as possible. Submitting questions is one of the best things you can do to interact with your instructor, even if you are not able to attend the live discussions in person.

- **Why are we asking for such details when you post your question?** Because these details shape what the question really is and means, and often point one to the path to answering it; the more habitual it becomes for you to ask for such details about your own questions, the easier it will become for you to start answering your own questions.

- **In order to receive full points for the question assignment**, your question must: (1) be a single focused and well-defined question; (2) be relevant to the topic of the recorded lecture; (3) include an explanation of why you are asking the question (e.g., what value you seek to gain by clarifying your confusion on this matter, or why you think you are confused about the issue); (4) be submitted on time and remain within the word limit.

Note that both sets of weekly assignments are aimed at encouraging and developing an active, integrating mind in regard to philosophical issues.

Tutorial paper

Tutorial papers give you the chance to demonstrate in greater depth than the short assignments your understanding of a key topic from the course. Because not everyone is able to attend the live discussions, the tutorial meeting to discuss your paper is the only guarantee you will have in the course to interact in person with your instructor. So it is important that you focus your best effort each quarter on choosing from among the assigned options and showing us your best work in writing your answer.

In your paper, you should focus not on rhetorical style, but **on how clearly you can express thoughts and arguments in writing**. The paper will be discussed in a tutorial session of 45 minutes to one hour with an instructor or teaching assistant(s), and will have a maximum word count of 1,200 words. You will receive a **grade** after the session, which **will take into account both the quality of the written paper and your oral discussion of it** (these two parts are equally weighted for determining your grade for the tutorial).

Immediately prior to your tutorial, you should re-read and reflect on the paper you submitted, and come prepared to discuss its contents and arguments, including how your thinking may have evolved since submitting the paper and proceeding through the course material. The feedback you will receive on the paper will be during the oral discussion of it, so please come prepared to discuss the issues as well as any questions you want to raise.

A list of tutorial questions will be posted on Populi. Tutorial paper must be submitted by 7 pm UTC on the Saturday two weeks following the start of the course **(October 25th)**.

A schedule will also be posted on Populi, listing for each student the week in which your tutorial will take place. Someone will reach out to you closer to the week of your tutorial in order to schedule its exact date and time for that week. It is very important to respond to the request to

schedule your tutorial in a timely fashion and be sure you add the scheduled date and time to your personal calendar.

Please note that staying within the maximum word count is an important part of the assignment and will be reflected in the assignment's grade. A word count requires you to consider what is most important and essential, and to state (only) that in your answer.

COURSE PARTICIPATION

As we've said, you are **strongly encouraged to attend live discussions and to actively participate when you do**. We are aware, of course, that this is not always possible. But there are other ways to participate in the course, and course participation will be part of everyone's final grade for the course. The **other ways to participate** in the course that count toward your class participation portion of your grade are to complete optional assignments and to come to office hours held by instructors and TAs.

Optional assignment

Each week, there will be a forum where you can post a question that has arisen from the readings, your reflection on them, or issues previously discussed in the course that seem connected to the current week's topics. Similar to the required assignment, you should explain why you are asking the question you are asking. This is one way to participate in the course even if you are unable to attend the live sessions. Please note that it's possible to submit the optional question even if you're assigned the *Answer a question* mandatory assignment.

Office hours

We'll post information on Populi about office hours availability and the links to book an appointment. We encourage all students to make use of office hours to discuss both course material and your own assignments. But for those students unable to attend the live sessions, we especially encourage you to come to some office hours, and this is the other way to participate in the course even if you are unable to attend the live sessions.

OVERALL COURSE GRADE

Your course grade will break down as follows:

- 45% of total = average of your short assignment grades, each graded on a scale of 0 to 5
- 45% of total = grade on your tutorial paper, graded on a scale of 0 to 20
- 10% of total = class participation grade

Your participation grade will be determined by how often you attend and **participate** in the live discussion sessions, by how often you pose questions on the optional question boards, and by the office hours you attend. If you are unable regularly to attend class live, you should each quarter

attend at least one office hour appointment and pose three questions on the optional questions board.

GRADE SCALE (with typical reasons for receiving a given score)

[The following grade scale also included in the **ARI Live Courses Handbook**]

> **0** – no assignment was submitted
>
> **1** – the assignment was submitted, but it either does not answer the question, is too unclear to read, or is too perfunctory to count as taking the assignment seriously (e.g., a one sentence answer).
>
> **2** – the assignment answers the question, but it has significant problems (e.g., major points are missing, significant errors are present in the answer, the writing is unclear in important ways).
>
> **3** – the assignment is basically good; it answers the question and correctly identifies some major points, but either omits a major point, contains some errors, or does not show enough independent thinking about the issue (e.g., too much quoting of Rand and not enough evidence of the student's own thinking). **Please note that this grade is very common. Grades above 3 are much more exceptional.**
>
> **4** – the assignment answers the question well and identifies the major points without any major errors and shows evidence of independent thinking about the issue.
>
> **5** – the assignment answers the question exceptionally well and identifies the major points without any errors and shows evidence of independent thinking, understanding and insight. (The score of 5 is rare.)
>
> If an answer is on the borderline between two grades, factors such as the clarity or originality of the answer can make the difference between a lower and a higher grade.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS
Weekly short assignments that are submitted **within** 24 hours after the deadline will receive one penalty point (i.e., one point will be deducted from the grade), while assignments submitted **more than** 24 hours after the deadline will automatically receive a 0. These rules also apply to new deadlines (i.e., those that are set when we grant extensions).

For tutorial papers, late penalties are assigned according to the scheme in the student handbook:

- Up to 24 hours late = 1 point off
- 1 to 5 days late = additional 2 points off (total 3 points off)
- ≥ 6 to 10 days late = additional 2 points off (total 5 points off)
- ≥11 to 15 days late = additional 5 points off (total 10 points off)
- ≥16 to 24 days late = additional 1 point per day (total between 11-19 points off)

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

It is crucial for this course that **your work must be your own,** i.e. not plagiarized in any way. Plagiarism is implying the false assumption of authorship: the wrongful act of presenting content one did not produce as one's own. Notably in this program, plagiarism includes not only copying the work of others, but the use of generative AI, even for the purpose of translation. See more about our policy in the Code of Conduct **[link forthcoming]**.

OTHER GENERAL POLICIES:
Familiarize yourself with the ARI Live Courses Handbook **[link forthcoming]** if you have not already done so. Unless specified otherwise in this syllabus, all policies in the Handbook are in effect for this course.

COURSE ACCESS:
Upon enrollment, you will be provided access to the course via Populi, from where you will be have access to:

- Live class schedule and the "Join Conference" Zoom link to attend live classes
- Recordings of past classes
- Office hour details, including links to book an appointment
- Teaching assistant information
- How to join the ARI Live Courses Discord server

Populi also has an app that provides limited access to the course on mobile. Contact livecourses@aynrand.org if you have any issues accessing the course on Populi.

COURSE COMMUNICATION:
- Course announcements are posted in the course Bulletin Board on Populi and automatically sent out as email or push notifications to your device if using the Populi mobile app. Please make sure you are receiving these emails and notifications,and that the emails are not going to your spam folder. If you join after the start of class, be sure to check the course Bulletin Board for anything you may have missed.
- For questions about course content, structure or schedule, please ask during the live class or in the course channel on the ARI Live Courses Discord server (see the Discord information placed on Populi). Questions about your assignments and grades should be directed to the teaching assistant.
- For personal administrative issues (e.g., website problems), contact livecourses@aynrand.org.
- If you have a technical issue preventing submission of an assignment, email your assignment to the Instructor or TA and cc: livecourses@aynrand.org to troubleshoot the matter.