

Ayn Rand's Morality of Selfishness:
Syllabus

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Course Meeting Time: Monday 7:30-9:00pm

In a Wall Street Journal article titled “Atlas Shrugged: 50 years later,” columnist Mark Skousan claimed that Ayn Rand successfully predicted the United States’ current economic crisis. He declared that Rand “set off an intellectual shock wave that is still felt today.”

In this house course, students will have the unique opportunity to focus exclusively on Ayn Rand and her famous texts, including both *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*—the Modern Library’s #1 and #2 ranking novels of the 20th century. In an investigation of whether or not these claims about Rand are reasonable, we will explore a variety of sources including books, movies, YouTube videos, and excerpts from philosophers such as Adam Smith and Rousseau. Ultimately, the goal of this course will not be to advocate Rand’s philosophy—Objectivism—but to understand its philosophical motives in the framework of our current political and economic environment.

Grading:

Grades in this course will be Pass/Fail. However, your passing of the course will be determined by the following:

Participation/Attendance: 10%

Students are expected to participate in every class period, for the success of this class relies on adequate discussion. Students need to attend 11 out of 12 classes in order to receive credit for the course.

1-page Response Papers: 30%

Students will be assigned 3 response papers, outlining their reactions to particular films and weekly readings. These response papers should consist of both discussion questions for the next class, as well as a short analysis of the assigned document.

Final Paper: 60%

Students need to write a 5+ page paper on a topic of their choice. While students will not be required to reference literary critics, the contents of the paper should be scholarly in nature. Thus, students need to conduct research on their topic, and ultimately articulate unique position which reflects their understanding of the subject in the greater context of Ayn Rand and Objectivist philosophy. Individual topics will be discussed in class and should have approval from the instructor or faculty adviser. This paper can be handed in as early as week 5 and no later than week 12.

Course Schedule:

August 31:

Discussion: Introduction to Ayn Rand and Objectivism

Homework: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 3-43, *Philosophy, Who Needs It?*

****September 7:**

Discussion: Introduction to *Atlas Shrugged*- Characters, Themes, Plot

Homework: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 44-126

Optional readings: Excerpts from *It Usually Begins with Ayn Rand*

****September 14:**

*YouTube Videos: Ayn Rand Interviews and early Objectivist Criticisms

Homework: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 127-216

Optional readings: Find an article that critiques Rand's ethics to present in class

September 21:

Discussion: The Meaning of Sex and Love

Homework: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 217-335

September 28:

Discussion: The Meaning of Money and Francisco's Speech

Homework: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 339-460

October 12:

*Video: *The Fountainhead*

Homework: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 461-531

October 19:

Discussion: Objectivist Art and Aesthetics

Homework: Roark's Speech from *The Fountainhead*

Optional readings: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 532-632

October 26:

Discussion: The Individual Versus the State

Homework: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 633-699

Optional Readings: Excerpts from *Anthem*, Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*

November 2:

Discussion: Romanticism

Homework: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 701-815

November 9:

Discussion: The Looters—James Taggart, Dr. Ferris, Dr. Stadler, & Dr. Pritchett

Homework: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 816-908

Optional Readings: Excerpts from the *Return to Primitive*

November 16:

Video*: The Passion of Ayn Rand

Homework: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 909-999

****November 30:**

Discussion: John Galt's Speech

Homework: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 1000-1070

Optional Readings: Excerpts from Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*

December 7:

Discussion: *Atlas Shrugged* Past and Present

Homework: *Atlas Shrugged* pages 1070-1168

Optional Readings: "Atlas Shrugged: 50 years later"

FINAL PAPERS DUE BY MIDNIGHT

**Faculty Sponsor will be present