

PHIL U294: Philosophical Themes in Ayn Rand
Loyola University of New Orleans
Spring 2016, Dr. Ben Bayer

GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION AND POLICIES

Course description

Millions of people have read Ayn Rand’s novels. Her influence is felt decades after her death and continues to provoke debate, especially in politics. While Rand was best known for her defense of laissez-faire capitalism, both her fans and her critics too often neglect the system of ideas she developed about morality and human nature, ideas she saw as fundamental to her other views. This course seeks to examine these ideas through the lens of her major work of fiction, *Atlas Shrugged*.

Though the plot pits various businessmen and women against government oligarchs, the most compelling conflicts it portrays are internal and psychological, usually for the protagonists. Though the novel begins as the portrayal of a political controversy, it gradually unfolds as a drama about morality, the scope of human knowledge, and metaphysics. Ayn Rand described the theme of *Atlas* as “the role of the man’s mind in existence.”

Questions that arise for the protagonists include: What is the moral status of wealth creation, and of human sexuality? What is the nature of evil, and how powerful is it? What basic motives divide good people from evil people? What is the relationship between the mind and the body? Do we have free will, and if so in what choices does it consist? What attitudes toward reality as such are expressed through the choices we make?

We’ll study how Rand’s own views about the answers to these questions can be brought into dialogue with other major historical philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Marx, Dostoevsky, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Kant, among others. We will especially take care to explore the compatibility between Rand’s worldview and the professed Judeo-Christian worldview of many of her admirers.

Course goals and learning objectives:

1. Development of student ability to read and interpret primary texts by examining a major work of philosophical fiction and contrasting works in the history of philosophy.
2. Development of a student’s ability to formulate clearly and explain cogently her or his philosophical inquiry in either oral or written form, through a series of written assignments on the philosophical texts.
3. Development of a student’s capacity to evaluate with insight his or her fundamental beliefs (e.g. about reality, knowledge, and ethics) and to reflect on the relationship between these beliefs and how he or she lives, by examining a work that reflects on the impact of philosophical ideas on life.

Grading

Reading quizzes	15%
Online participation	15%
Midterm exam	15%
Paper #1	15%
Paper #2	20%
Paper #3	20%
In-class participation	Extra credit up to an extra 5%

Required texts

- Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (mass market paperback Centennial edition, ISBN 0451191145). Numerous other editions are available but we’ll work with page numbers from this edition.
- Secondary readings from public domain philosophy sources, on Blackboard

LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE

All Atlas page numbers are from mass market paperback Centennial edition, ISBN 0451191145.

All secondary readings are tentative proposals subject to revision and only optional assignments. When available they will come from public domain documents posted to Blackboard.

Wednesday, January 20th

Introduction

Monday, January 25th

- Part I, Ch 1-2 (11-47)

Wednesday, January 27th

The mind-body dichotomy

- Part I, Ch 3-4 (48-87)
- Secondary readings: (1) Plato, selections from *Phaedo*; (2) Aristotle, selection from *Metaphysics*

Monday, February 1st

Meaning in life and purposefulness

- Part I, Ch 5 (89-121)
- Secondary reading: (3) Aristotle, selections from *Nicomachean Ethics*

Wednesday, February 3rd

Reason and emotion

- Part I, Ch 6 (122-153)
- Secondary readings: (4) David Hume, selections from *Treatise on Human Nature*; (5) Edmund Burke, selections from *Of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*

Thursday, February 4th

FIRST WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE, 11:59pm (just before midnight)

Monday, February 8th–Wednesday, February 10th–MARDI GRAS HOLIDAYS

Monday, February 15th

The mind-body dichotomy: Views of production and exploitation

- Part I, Ch 7 (154-202)
- Secondary reading: (6) Aristotle, from the *Politics*; (7) Immanuel Kant, from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*; (8) Karl Marx, from *The German Ideology*

Wednesday, February 17th

Mind-body unity and idealism about values

- Part I, Ch 8 (203-236)
- Secondary reading; (9) Plato, from *The Republic*, *The Symposium*, and *The Phaedo*

Monday, February 22nd

The mind-body dichotomy: Views of sexuality

- Part I, Ch 9 (237-272)
- Secondary reading: (10) Peter Abelard, *The Story of My Misfortunes*, and the letters of Abelard and Heloise

Wednesday, February 24th

Choice and chance

- Part I, Ch 10 (273-312)

Monday, February 29th

IN-CLASS EXAM

Wednesday, March 2nd

Living in this world vs. another

- Part II, Ch 1 (315-351)
- Secondary reading: (11) Christian Philosophy (The New Testament and the *Confessions* of St. Augustine)

Monday, March 7th

Social relationships and different conceptions of trade

- Part II, Ch 2 (352-391)
- Secondary reading: (11) Christian Philosophy (The New Testament and the *Confessions* of St. Augustine) (continued); (12) Karl Marx, from *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and *Das Kapital*

Wednesday, March 9th

Justice, injustice, and morality

- Part II, Ch 3 (392-426)
- Secondary reading: (13) Marx/Engels, from *The Communist Manifesto*

Monday, March 14th

- Part II, Ch 4 (427-457)
- Secondary reading: (14) Sigmund Freud, from *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*

Wednesday, March 16th

- Part II, Ch 5 (458-490)

Monday, March 21st–Monday, March 28th–EASTER HOLIDAYS

Wednesday, March 30th

Do all people pursue self-interest?

- Part II, Ch 6-7 (491-559)
- Secondary reading: (15) John Dewey, from *Human Nature and Conduct*

Friday, April 1st

SECOND WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE, 11:59pm (just before midnight)

Monday, April 4th

- Part II, Ch 8-9 (560-600)

Wednesday, April 6th

From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs?

- Part II, Ch 10 (601-640)
- Karl Marx, selections from “Critique of the Gotha Program”

Monday, April 11th

Übermensch or normal men?

- Part III, Ch 1 (643-688)
- Secondary reading: selections from Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*: “Zarathustra’s Prologue”

Wednesday, April 13th

Übermensch or normal men?

- Part III, Ch 2 (689-746)
- Secondary reading: selections from Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*: “Zarathustra’s Prologue”

Monday, April 18th

The choice to think or not, part 1

- Part III, Ch 3 (747-790)
- Secondary reading: selections from Chernyshevsky, from “The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy”

Wednesday, April 20th

The choice to think or not, part 2

- Part III, Ch 4 (791-830)
- Secondary reading: selections from Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*

Monday, April 25th

The avoidance of suffering vs. the pursuit of value

- Part III, Ch 5 (831-880)
- Secondary reading: Schopenhauer, selection from “On the Sufferings of the World”

Wednesday, April 27th

Duty vs. the pursuit of value

- Part III, Ch 6 (881-914)
- Secondary reading: Kant, selection from *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Monday, May 2nd

A morality of life

- Part III, Ch 7, part A (915-947, until “The degree of your ability...”)
- Secondary readings: selections from Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, “On the Preachers of Death”

Wednesday, May 4th

Choosing the morality of life

- Part III, Ch 7, part B (947-978, from “The degree of your ability...”)
- Secondary readings: selections from Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, “On the Tree on the Mountainside,” “On Old and New Tablets”

Monday, May 9th

- Part III, Ch 8 (979-1029)

Wednesday, May 11th

- Part III, Ch 9-10 (1030-1069)
- Secondary readings: selections from Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, “The Welcome,” “On the Higher Man”

Friday, May 13th

FINAL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE, 11:59pm (just before midnight)