

Karl Popper

Ayn Rand University 2025

Quarter 1 (October - December)

INSTRUCTOR

Mike Mazza (mmazza@aynrand.org)

COURSE WEBSITE

Logistical details about the course are available at the course website, including:

- Live class schedule and Zoom link for attending live classes
- Recordings of past classes
- Office hour details
- Teaching assistant information
- How to join the ARU Discord server

The course website is accessible through your dashboard after logging into the ARU website. The direct link to the site is [Karl Popper | 2025](#).

Please contact university@aynrand.org if you have any issues accessing the site.

GENERAL POLICIES

Familiarize yourself with the [ARU Handbook](#) if you have not already done so. Unless specified otherwise in this syllabus, all policies in the Handbook are in effect for this course.

COMMUNICATION

- Course announcements are posted in the Announcements tab of the course website and automatically emailed to all participants. Please make sure you are receiving these emails and that they are not going to your spam folder. If you join after the start of class, be sure to check the Announcements tab 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 ARU Discord server (see the Discord tab of the course website).
- Questions about your assignments and grades should be directed to the teaching assistant.
- For personal administrative issues (e.g., website problems), email university@aynrand.org.
- If you have a technical issue preventing submission of an assignment, email your assignment to the TA and cc university@aynrand.org to troubleshoot the matter.

LIVE CLASSES AND RECORDINGS

See the course website for the schedule of live classes and the Zoom link to attend. Participants are strongly encouraged to attend classes live for the best experience. However, we are aware this is not always possible and recordings of live classes are posted on the course website and on the ARU App/ARI Campus website, usually within an hour or two after the conclusion of each live class. Contact university@aynrand.org if you have any issue accessing a recording.

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

COURSE OVERVIEW

Karl Popper's philosophy has shaped how generations of scientists think about their methods. His defense of a free society is influential across the American political spectrum. This course surveys Karl Popper's philosophy, paying special attention to how his view of knowledge and rationality shapes his philosophy of science and political philosophy.

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

The course begins with Popper's epistemology, with a focus on his view of certainty and of objectivity. Students are expected to be familiar with the Objectivist view of those topics, especially as presented by Leonard Peikoff in Chapters 4 and 5 of *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*. After spending time on Popper's epistemology, we will turn to his philosophy of science, "falsificationism." The course will conclude with Popper's political philosophy.

READINGS

Students must own a copy of Popper's book, [*The Open Society and Its Enemies*](#) and Deborah Mayo's [*Error and the Growth of Experimental Knowledge*](#).

Other readings will be provided electronically, but you are encouraged to own a copy of [*Conjectures and Refutations*](#) (CR). [*The Logic of Scientific Discovery*](#) (LSD) and [*Objective Knowledge*](#) (OK) may be relevant to your final papers.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADES

***Precís* (1-5 pts; 25 pts max)**

For 5 of the assigned readings from Popper, students must submit a one-page (double-spaced, 12pt, Times New Roman) *precís* of the reading. *Precís* will, in ordinary English prose, essentialize the reading's central claims, including the essential steps of the argument Popper gives in their defense.

You may do only one *precís* per week but may do more than one from the same reading, if each covers a different portion of the text. You may also submit an assignment on the readings from Hume or Mayo. *Do not submit precís for any other readings.* Keep in mind that these assignments may be shared and discussed during class. *Precís are due 48 hours prior to the start of class.*

Pose a question (1-5 pts; 40 pts max)

Each week, submit a question on the assigned material, and explain how answering the question would help you better understand Popper's philosophy, or Objectivism. If you ask a question concerning the material assigned from Objectivist sources, you must pose your question so that it relates to the week's Popper reading. Questions are due 48 hours prior to the start of class.

Answer a question (1-5pts; 5 pts max)

Each class will end with a challenging question to prime you for the next week's discussion. For one of these questions, think about it, attempt to answer it, and come to the following class ready to offer your answer for discussion. For those of you unable to attend live, you must schedule a time to discuss it with me before class. (For example, if you wish to answer the question posed for October 21, you must meet with me before October 21). You are welcome to do as many questions as you want but will only be graded on one. (Answering several questions is a sure way to max out your participation grade).

Participation (1-10 pts; 10 pts max)

Classes will be a combination of lectures and seminar-style discussions. Students are expected to be *active* participants in class. This means asking questions and volunteering to answer questions posed by the instructor or other students. Students unable to attend live classes can earn their participation grade by scheduling office hours.

Term Paper (1-20 pts; 20 pts max)

Select one of the following options and write a 1500-to-2500-word paper answering the prompt.

- (1) Give an essentialized account of Rand's theory of certainty. How would Popper criticize it? Respond to the criticism on Rand's behalf. [Recommended that you consult *CR*]
- (2) Give an essentialized account of Popper's theory of objectivity. How would Rand criticize it? Respond to the criticism on Popper's behalf. [Recommended that you consult *OK*]
- (3) What does Popper get right in his defense of a free society? How do his epistemological views influence his defense? If you think his defense is compatible with or complementary to Rand's, construct and answer an argument that they are incompatible. If you think his defense is incompatible with Rand's, construct and answer an argument that they are complimentary.
- (4) **Assuming you've taken Keith Lockitch's "Foundations of Physical Science" course:** Take an important discovery from the history of science covered FPS and essentialize it (no more than 750 words). Is a falsificationist analysis of the

discovery plausible? Why or why not? An inductivist account? [Recommended that you consult *LSD*]

(5) How would an inductivist account for the Eddington Experiment? Give a Popperian critique of your account and answer it.

Curriculum Outline

Oct 21: Popper on the Sources of Knowledge and Ignorance

- Course overview & expectations
- Popper, “On The Sources of Knowledge and Ignorance” from *CR*
- Peikoff, *OPAR* chapters 4 & 5 (suggested background reading)

Oct 28: Popper on the Sources of Knowledge and Ignorance, cont.

- Popper, “On The Sources of Knowledge and Ignorance”
- Popper, “Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject”
- Peikoff, *OPAR* chapters 4 & 5 (suggested background reading)

Nov 4: NO CLASS

Nov 11: Popper on Objectivity

- Popper, “Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject”
- Peikoff, *OPAR* chapters 4 & 5 (suggested background reading)

Nov 18: Popper (and Hume) on Induction

- The circularity of induction
 - Hume, [Treatise 1.3.6](#)
 - Popper, “The Problem of Induction” from *LSD*
 - Recommended: SEP, “[The Problem of Induction, Sections 1 & 2](#)”
- Peikoff, *Logical Leap* Chapter 1 OR “[Induction in Physics and Philosophy](#)” Lectures 1 & 2
- Peikoff, *OPAR* Chapter 5 section 1

Nov 25: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Dec 2: Falsificationism

- [The Eddington Experiment](#)
- Falsification and Demarcation
 - Popper, “Science: Conjectures and Refutations” from *CR*
 - Recommended: IEP, “[Karl Popper: Philosophy of Science](#)”

Dec 9: Popper’s Influence; Political Philosophy (maybe)

- David Deutsche, "[A New Way to Explain Explanation](#)"
- Mayo, *Error and the Growth of Experimental Knowledge* chapters 1 (recommended) & 2 (required)
- Popper, *The Open Society* TBD

Dec 16: Popper on Totalitarianism

- Popper, *The Open Society* TBD
- Rand, "For the New Intellectual"
- Peikoff, *OPAR*: "Epilogue: The Duel Between Plato and Aristotle"

Dec 23: Popper's Defense of a Free Society

- Popper, *The Open Society* TBD
- Rand, "For the New Intellectual"
- Peikoff, *OPAR*: "Epilogue: The Duel Between Plato and Aristotle"