

NICON



New Intellectuals Conference

Porto

PORTUGAL

**SEPTEMBER
15-18 2026**



NICON 2026

New Intellectuals Conference

PROGRAM & SESSION ABSTRACTS • PORTO, PORTUGAL • 15-18 SEPTEMBER

TUESDAY

Sep 15

17:00–19:00 EVENT REGISTRATION

19:00–23:00
WELCOME

Welcome Reception

WEDNESDAY

Sep 16

07:00–09:00 BREAKFAST

08:30–09:30 EVENT REGISTRATION

09:30–09:45 OPENING REMARKS

09:45–10:45

TALK

Stephen Hicks

The Illiberal Right's New Gurus

We know what we stand for as liberal Objectivists. And now, finally, the illiberal left/pomo/woke are on the defensive. But we face a disquieting rise of illiberal right/conservative movements. Who is influential among its intellectuals, and what are their arguments? I'd like to present essentialized themes from an American (Deneen), an Israeli (Hazony), and a Russian (Dugin) to show the international scope of the movement's reach.

10:45–11:00 BREAK

11:00–12:00

TALK

Robert Tracinski

The Individualist Case for Democracy

The global political divide of the 21st Century is liberal democracy versus authoritarianism. But what is the philosophical foundation for democracy? What ideas keep democracy "liberal" and prevent it from becoming a tyranny of the majority? We will explore a case for democracy based on individualist principles and drawing on lessons from the real-world history we are currently living.

12:00–12:30 COFFEE BREAK

12:30–13:30

TALK

Richard Salsman

The Morality of Capitalist Inequality

The most prominent, least-refuted criticism of capitalism in contemporary times isn't its supposed "exploitation" of the worker, the consumer, the third world, or the planet but rather its inequality. Yet what is meant by this, exactly? Dr. Salsman distinguishes the most popular meanings and applications of the concept – metaphysical equality, equality before the law, equality of opportunity, equality of outcomes – and recounts how they're commonly and improperly conflated. In truth, unequal results are typical of a free system – a natural and moral phenomenon to be celebrated and fostered instead of condemned or curbed. Envy-driven egalitarian policies, to the extent they seek to compel equal results, necessitate unequal legal-political-tax treatment, which invites and rewards cronyism and corruption. An objective understanding and defense of liberty must include an appreciation for the morality of capitalist inequality.

13:30–14:30 LUNCH

14:30–15:30
FIRESIDE CHAT

Raymie Stata & Jennifer Grossman



15:30–15:45 BREAK

15:45–16:45

TALK

Petar Čekerevac*Megapolitics and the Mind:
Objectivism in the Age of AI,
Decentralization, and Space*

This session explores how megapolitical factors, such as technology, shape the world, and how Objectivism can help understand and navigate the world in the time of radical shifts in the context of changes coming with AI, decentralized technology, space race, and geopolitical divergence.

16:45–17:15 COFFEE BREAK

17:15–18:15

COMPETITION

Competition Workshop

20:00–22:00

INVITE ONLY

Speaker Dinner**THURSDAY****Sep 17**

07:00–09:00 BREAKFAST

09:00–09:15 MORNING REMARKS

09:15–10:15

TALK

Leopold Ajami*Give Them a Piece of You*

You want your work to carry your name. Your ideas to influence people. Your judgment to count. You want to be seen for who you actually are, not for who the algorithm thinks you are. But something is happening that few people are willing to name. The world is getting louder, faster, and more automated. Everyone has the same tools. Everyone sounds the same. And talented people who have given their best years to their craft are quietly disappearing inside the noise. Doing excellent work but going unseen. In this session with Leopold Ajami, you will discover why the piece of you that makes you uniquely you — your mind, your taste, your observation, your signature — is the one thing AI cannot replicate, and how to put it back at the center of everything you do. You will leave with practical techniques drawn from the science of influence so you can become unmistakable and irreplaceable in any room you walk into.

10:15–10:30 BREAK

10:30–11:30

TALK

Johan Norberg*How Civilizations Are Lost*

The great golden ages – from ancient Athens to Song China and the Italian Renaissance – were not accidents of geography or fate, but the result of ideas and institutions that liberated human ingenuity. Yet eventually, they all ended, because they turned away from those very principles. The central lesson is that decline is rarely imposed from the outside – it is chosen from within. Yet the same history also points to a different possibility: renewal begins when societies rediscover the principles that made them flourish.

11:30–12:00 COFFEE BREAK

12:00–13:00

TALK

Admir Čavalić*Liberty Under Pressure:
Lessons from Politics*

Politics is rarely a clean contest of ideas. In this talk, Admir Čavalić draws on his experience as a Member of Parliament to offer an insider account of how laws are actually made, what it takes to advance reform in a resistant environment, and where the process tends to break down. His focus is practical as much as philosophical: what does it mean to pursue liberty not from the outside, but from within political institutions, and what does it demand of the people who try? Central to that question is one that doesn't get asked enough: how do you keep your moral integrity intact when the system pushes back?

13:00–14:00 LUNCH



14:00–15:00

SCHOLAR PANEL

Tracinski • Salsman • Hicks*The Unwritten Rules: Free Speech, Cancel Culture, and the Boundaries of Tolerance*

Debates over free speech tend to focus on the relationship between the state and the individual, yet some of the most consequential constraints on expression today come from outside government altogether. Social media platforms, organized boycotts, and the broader phenomenon of cancel culture have reshaped what can be said, by whom, and at what cost. At the same time, the boundaries appear to be shifting in the opposite direction, with a marked coarsening of public discourse and a retreat from the basic civility that once made open debate possible. Drawing on Objectivist principles, our scholars will explore where the line falls between rightful moral judgment and illegitimate coercion, and what a principled defense of free expression requires of us today.

15:00–15:15

BREAK

15:15–16:15

TALK

Martin Hooss*Christian Mercy, Altruistic Service, and Egalitarian Serfdom*

In her final novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, Ayn Rand delivers a staunch defense of what might be termed merit-based justice. In her view, justice demands that the most virtuous, i.e. the most rational and productive, members of society receive a greater share of resources than less rational and productive individuals. In his talk, Martin provides a historico-philosophical account of the most important defenders of both merit-based and 'social' justice: he argues that Rand's idea of justice is strikingly reminiscent of the Aristotelian conception of proportional justice, and identifies St. Augustine, Auguste Comte, and John Rawls as three of the most impactful figures responsible for the contemporary prevalence of 'social' justice.

16:15–16:45

COFFEE BREAK

16:45–18:00

COMPETITION

Competition Finals

18:00–20:00

FREE TIME

20:00–00:00

CELEBRATION

Closing Party**FRIDAY****Sep 18**

07:00–09:00

BREAKFAST

09:00–10:30

HOTEL CHECK-OUT

10:30–12:00

FAREWELL

Closing Remarks, Certificates & Group Photo