

Freshman Seminars Program  
Spring 2012

Prof. David Armitage  
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### ADVICE TO YOUNG LEADERS

A surprising number of the classic works of political and ethical theory in the western tradition were written for young people around the age of our own students, and particularly for those likely to enter public service or positions of authority, as many of our students will. This Freshman Seminar takes a selection of these major texts of advice and encouragement which we will read with an eye both to the past and to the present. First and foremost, the class will introduce students to some major thinkers and ideas through a selection of texts that were designed to speak to those at a similar stage in their lives and careers. It will also show them how to treat such works historically, in their own terms and their own contexts, while also applying them to current concerns and dilemmas. The overarching aim is to urge students to think rigorously about their own imminent responsibilities as citizens and leaders by reflecting on arguments addressed to rising generations like their own in the past, in classical Greece, ancient Rome, early modern Europe, the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century, and the early twentieth century.

One meeting of the class will take place in the seminar-room in the Houghton Library, where we will be able to see original editions of the works we have studied, as well as other historical texts relevant to the class and its readings.

### REQUIREMENTS

The main requirements will be attendance at all meetings of the class, keeping up with the reading and participating fully in each discussion. Participation will also include a brief presentation during one class. Absences will be approved for religious holidays, illness or family emergency only.

The writing requirements will comprise three response-papers (2 pages each), one medium-length paper (4-6 pages), and one longer paper (6-8 pages). For each of the response papers, you should compose a concise 2-page summary of the argument of one text in your own words. For the medium-sized paper, you should contrast two of the pairs of authors we have read (e.g., Plato and Aristotle, Machiavelli and Erasmus, James and Rilke). The final paper will be on a theme of your own choosing. You should begin consulting with me before Spring Break about possible topics for this final paper. We will have an informal meeting, with dinner and possibly a movie, during Reading Period and I will also meet with each of you individually at the end of Reading Period to discuss your final papers and your work in the class.

Participation and presentation:	40%
Response papers:	20%
Medium paper:	15%
Longer paper:	25%

Final grades for the course will be Pass/Fail, though I will give you letter-grades for your written work to help you assess your progress during the semester.

### SET BOOKS

Plato, *Republic*, ed. G. M. A. Grube and C. T. C. Reeve (Hackett)  
Aristotle, *Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Hackett)  
Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge)  
Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays*, ed. John M. Cooper and J. F. Procopé (Cambridge)  
Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Quentin Skinner (Cambridge)  
Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, ed. Lisa Jardine (Cambridge)  
Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge)  
Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Hackett)  
*The Heart of William James*, ed. Robert Richardson (Harvard)  
Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. M. D. Herter Norton (Norton)  
Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Hackett)  
Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Harvest)

### CLASS SCHEDULE

24 January: INTRODUCTION

31 January: Plato, *Republic* (380s BCE) [selections].

7 February: Aristotle, *Ethics* [selections]. **Response paper due**

14 February: Cicero, *On Duties* (44 BCE).<sup>1</sup>

21 February: Seneca, *On Mercy* (55-56 CE).<sup>2</sup> **Response paper due**

28 February: Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1513).<sup>3</sup>

6 March: Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516).<sup>4</sup> **Response paper due**

10-18 March: SPRING BREAK

20 March: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651) [selections].<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Addressed to *Marcus Tullius Cicero Minor* (65-? BCE), *aet.* 19.

<sup>2</sup> Addressed to emperor Nero (37-68), *aet.* 18.

<sup>3</sup> Dedicated to Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici (1492-1519), *aet.* 21.

<sup>4</sup> Addressed to Prince Charles, later emperor Charles V (1500-58), *aet.* 16.

<sup>5</sup> Dedication copy presented to Prince Charles, later Charles II (1630-85), *aet.* 21; "I think it may be ... profitably taught in the Universities" (*Leviathan*, "Review and Conclusion").

27 March: Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* [selections] (1790).<sup>6</sup>

3 April: William James, *Talks to Students* (1895-98): “The Gospel of Relaxation”; “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings”; “What Makes a Life Significant”.

10 April: Rainer Maria von Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* (1902-08).<sup>7</sup> **Medium paper due**

17 April: Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation” (1917); “Politics as a Vocation” (1919).<sup>8</sup>

24 April: Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929).<sup>9</sup>

26 April-3 May: READING PERIOD **Long paper due**

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<sup>6</sup> Addressed to Charles-Jean-François Depont (1767-96), *aet.* 22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Addressed to Frank Xaver Kappus (1883-1966), *aet.* 20-25.

<sup>8</sup> Delivered to Freistudentische Bund, University of Munich, 7 November 1917 and 28 January 1919.

<sup>9</sup> Delivered to student audiences at Girton and Newnham Colleges, Cambridge, November 1928.