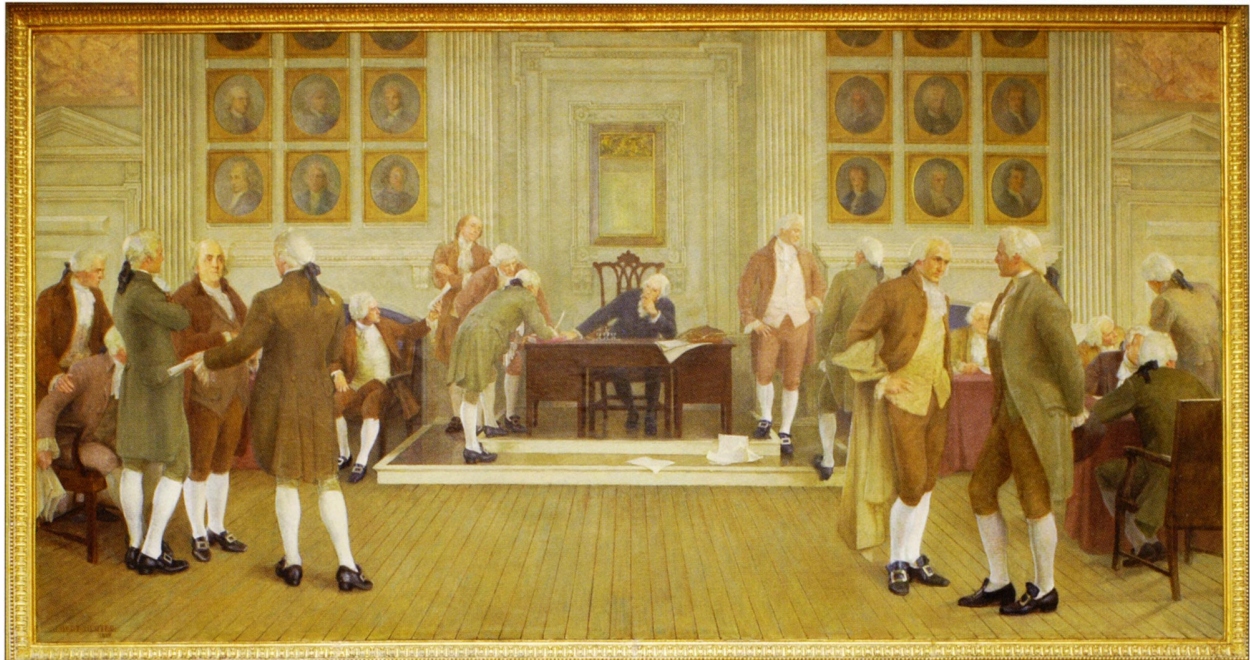


PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

PHIL 175.001

Summer II 2026

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



COURSE INFORMATION

Credit Hours: 3

Target Audience: undergraduates

Prerequisites: none

Meeting Pattern: n/a

Instructional Format: mostly asynchronous online

Classroom or Location: [Zoom Link](#)

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Name: Myraeka d'Leeuwen (please call me Myraeka! pronounced Muh-rae-kuh)

Email: myraeka@unc.edu

Office Location: n/a — [Zoom Link](#)

Office Hours: Wednesdays 9 am - 11 am, or by appointment

COURSE CONTENT

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class is both a brief introduction to political philosophy and an exploration of how various political philosophies shaped the founding and governing of the United States. The class will begin by reading historical documents which were central in the founding of the United States (e.g., the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Federalist Papers) along with some of the most influential political philosophy texts from that time period. We will then briefly move to contemporary topics, discussing how the political philosophies which originally shaped the United States continue to play a political and legislative role today.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

READING RESPONSES (30%)

There will be three reading responses, each worth **10%** of your final grade.

Reading responses are roughly 1-2 pages of double spaced writing (approximately 400-600 words, for a total of 3-6 pages throughout the summer semester). On Monday of each week a reading response is due, I will release two prompts and you may pick either. Each prompt will ask you (roughly) to summarize a particular argument from the reading and provide a critical response or opinionated take to the argument.

Reading responses are due at midnight on the Sunday following the week of readings from which they are pulled (e.g., reading response #1 will be due at midnight on June 28th).

Please Note: please see, further on in the syllabus, the AI policy for this course. In keeping with this policy, you may use generative AI to provide feedback or proofread, but all *drafting* of the responses must be your own work. You also must disclose all use of AI.

ANNOTATIONS (15%)

Each week, you've been assigned between two and three readings. You are required to provide reading annotations on two of these. Each annotation consists of at least 5 comments, which must be a) not merely summaries of the reading or comments along the lines of "this is so interesting!", b) evenly distributed throughout the reading, and c) roughly 50-100 words. Annotations are graded pass/fail.

Reading annotations are due at midnight on the Friday of the relevant week (e.g., annotations for the first week of class are due at midnight on June 26th).

Please Note: given the AI policy in this class and the nature of this assignment, the use of AI would generally not be appropriate on this assignment. But if you really do just want Claude or ChatGPT to proofread your reading annotations, that is technically allowed (as long as you disclose it!).

VOICE THREADS (15%)

Every week, there will be a VoiceThread available starting on Monday for students to discuss the readings amongst themselves. VoiceThread is an app embedded in Canvas which allows you to make audio or video recordings. You will be expected to make three substantive VoiceThread comments per week (one of your own, two responding to someone else). While VoiceThread permits video recordings and you're welcome to do those if you'd like, you are only required to do audio recordings. VoiceThreads are graded pass/fail.

I won't be providing discussion prompts or questions for the VoiceThread, but here are a few suggestions of things you could say about the readings if you are struggling to come up with something:

- Was something just genuinely confusing? Especially when reading historical texts, you might find yourself struggling to follow a point.
- When reading a more historical text, did you find yourself thinking that a certain assumption or description wouldn't hold today?
- Did you disagree with something the author said? This is a philosophy class—part of the aim is thinking critically about the extent to which you agree with the authors!

These are not meant to be polished, speech-like performances—please **don't** write a script for them. They are meant to, as much as possible, mirror the in-class discussions we would be having during a typical semester.

VoiceThreads are due at midnight on the Friday of the relevant week (e.g., VoiceThreads for the first week of class are due at midnight on June 26th).

LECTURE QUIZZES (15%)

Each of the six lectures has three embedded quiz questions, each worth 1% of your final grade. They are open note, but completing them successfully will typically require that you watch the video in question. Your worst score on one of the lectures (your score on the lecture as a *whole*, not your score on each individual quiz question) will be dropped, for a total of 15% of your final grade.

Lecture quiz questions are due at midnight on the Friday of the relevant week (e.g., quizzes for the first week of class are due at midnight on June 26th).

FINAL PAPER (25%)

Rather than a traditional final exam, this course will have a final paper. Final papers are 4-6 double spaced pages (e.g., around 1200-1500 words).

Final papers should develop an original philosophical thesis, consider an objection to this thesis, and respond to it. You will be asked to connect a philosophical view (e.g., an author's view on liberty, property, the virtues of democracy, etc.) to a contemporary political debate and use this debate to either bolster or critique the author's original view. For example, you might use some contemporary debate on government overreach (should the government be permitted to limit soda consumption?) to either bolster or critique John Stuart Mill's view on freedom.

The final paper is due on July 27th at 6 pm. In lieu of the final exam which would traditionally be held on the 27th from 3-6 pm, I will be available on Zoom during this time period to answer any last minute questions regarding the papers.

LATE WORK & MAKEUPS

Reading responses will incur a 5% late penalty per 24 hours they are late. The final paper will also incur this penalty, but please *also* note that given tight turnaround times for final grades, failure to turn in the final paper in a timely manner may result in receiving a 0. Please reach out to me ASAP if you expect to miss a paper deadline so we can work something out.

Late annotations and VoiceThreads will generally not be accepted, barring extenuating circumstances.

GRADING SCALE

I round grades within 1/10th of a percent (e.g., an 86.9 -> 87). I do not otherwise round grades.

Numeric Grade (%)	Letter Grade
93.5 and above	A
89.5 – 93.5	A-
86.5 – 89.5	B+
82.5 – 86.5	B
79.5 – 82.5	B-
76.5 – 79.5	C+
72.5 – 76.5	C
69.5 – 72.5	C-
66.5 – 69.5	D+
59.5 – 66.5	D
Below 59.5	F

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week Of	Reading Materials	Lectures	Assignments Due
The Enlightenment			
June 22	• Locke, Second Treatise • Hobbes, Leviathan • Voltaire, Treatise on Tolerance	• Introduction to the Course • Lecture 1: Social Contract Theory • Lecture 2: Secular Governance	• Two Reading Annotations • Reading Response 1 • VoiceThread • Lecture Quiz 1 • Lecture Quiz 2

Republicanism			
June 29	• Aristotle, Politics • Mill, On Liberty • Paine, Common Sense	• Lecture 3: Liberty • Lecture 4: Popular Sovereignty	• Two Reading Annotations • VoiceThread • Lecture Quiz 3 • Lecture Quiz 4
Constitutionalism			
July 6	• Constitution + Bill of Rights • Selections from Federalist Papers • Federalist Critiques	• Lecture 5: Federalism	• Two Reading Annotations • Reading Response 2 • VoiceThread • Lecture Quiz 5
Application: American Democracy & Inclusion			
July 13	• Douglass, What is The Fourth of July? • MLK, Letter from a Birmingham Jail • Hannah-Jones, The 1619 Project	• Lecture 6: Who is the Constitution For?	• Two Reading Annotations • Reading Response 3 • VoiceThread • Lecture Quiz 6
American Democracy Today			
July 20	• Lepore, We The People • The Atlantic, Elections Distorted	N/A	• Two Reading Annotations • VoiceThread
July 27	Final Paper Due July 27 @ 6 pm		