



Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) at Hertford College

Welcome to Hertford College! We hope you enjoy your 2017 Open Day visit, and we look forward to speaking with you and answering your questions about the PPE degree, the admissions process, and life as an undergraduate in an Oxford College. This handout gives an overview of some of these things, including advice on how to prepare in each of the three subjects, but *we hope that you will be able to attend our PPE Meeting at the Open Day:*

12:30-1:15 pm, Drawing Room, Principal's Lodgings, Hertford College

Some of us tutors – and some current PPE students – will also be available at other times during the day (in the main quad). And if you have further queries, please feel free to email us personally.

Hertford College makes nine offers per year in PPE (including one reserve “open offer”), and each year-group of PPEists will get to know each other, and us tutors, very well over the three years of the PPE degree. Some of the current PPEists are likely to be attending the Open Days, so you can get a feel for the place from them. Hertford has a relaxed and unstuffy character, socially very mixed, but is high performing academically (e.g. in PPE and other Philosophy-related subjects, anything less than a 2:1 is very rare, and over the last eight years our students have won ten University prizes, including two “Gibbs Prizes” for best performance in PPE across the University). Hertford is especially active in PPE, thanks in part to our Principal, Will Hutton, who is strongly supportive of student activities, and who regularly invites major political and economic figures for “Hertford Conversations” – jointly organised with students – that include debate, discussion, and dinner/socialising.

Details about the application process, including school qualifications, the PPE Test, and interviews are given at the University PPE site: <http://www.ppe.ox.ac.uk/index.php/applying-for-ppe>. You may apply for PPE having done any combination of subjects at school; *it is not necessary to have studied Philosophy, Politics or Economics previously*. A strong background in Mathematics, while not a prerequisite, is very useful and *we strongly urge applicants without A-level Mathematics (or equivalent) to consider taking AS Mathematics* (e.g. in your final year at school).

All candidates are required to register for (strict deadline 15th October), and to take (normally at your school or college), a Thinking Skills Assessment test, which this year will be on 2nd November 2017. Section 1 of this test lasts 90 minutes, and involves 50 multiple choice questions designed to assess your ability in critical thinking and problem solving. Section 2, which lasts 30 minutes, requires you to write a short essay on one of three specified topics. More details, including specimen papers and preparation advice, can be found on the “TSA Oxford” website which is linked from the site above.

Each candidate who comes to interview at Hertford will have three interviews, one in each subject, each lasting approximately 20 minutes, and normally preceded by some form of “pre-interview exercise” that provides material to discuss so as to make the most of the limited time. Your interviewers will want to find out if you can think clearly and analytically (and, in the case of Economics, mathematically). They are less concerned with what you know than with your academic potential, your level of interest, and the way in which you think about issues and are able to discuss them critically.

The following pages of this handout aim to give you more detailed guidance on PPE at Hertford, and on preparation for application and interview, including reading suggestions that we hope you will find enjoyable as well as useful. Some further general advice is available on our old website “PPE at Hertford”: <http://ppe.hertford.ox.ac.uk> (but bear in mind that some of the material there is out of date).

Philosophy at Hertford College

Philosophy plays a role in no fewer than eight degree programmes at Oxford, which is probably the world's most important centre for the subject.¹ Hertford College welcomes applications in five of these programmes, with *PPE* being by far the largest (typically nine offers aiming for eight places per year), followed by *Computer Science & Philosophy* (five offers aiming for four places), *Mathematics & Philosophy*, *Physics & Philosophy*, and *Philosophy & Modern Languages* (each of which has up to two places per year, depending on the competition for places with corresponding single-subject applicants).

Philosophy Teaching

Most teaching in Philosophy at Oxford takes the form of lectures (which are organised centrally by the Philosophy Faculty) or tutorials (which are organised within the College, but often involve specialist tutors from other colleges). The tutorials and lectures are complementary, but their scheduling may depend on your choice of courses (so you might study a course through lectures in one term and tutorials the next). In the first year these are more coordinated, and indeed in the very first term, both your General Philosophy tutorials and many of your lectures will be with Professor Peter Millican, the Hertford College Philosophy Tutor, who gives the core University lectures (older recordings of which are on the web – see <http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/general-philosophy>).

Lectures provide a general understanding of an area, and the chance to hear a personal perspective from someone at Oxford who is likely to be a world expert and author of books and research papers on the subject. Tutorials get you thinking *for yourself* at a much deeper level, in response to your own reading (for which recommendations are provided, though you are welcome to seek out more for yourself). Usually you will be expected to write an essay which is submitted in advance and then discussed – often together with another student's work – at the tutorial (usually 1 or 1½ hours). Most tutorials are paired, and most students seem to prefer this, but we are always happy to give individual tutorials to students who want to work more intensively, or to explore in different directions. In practice, Hertford students who really get the Philosophy “bug” have tended to choose individual tutorials in their upper years, often leading to keen and extended discussions!

For PPE, the Philosophy courses available are extremely flexible, starting with a first year which gives a broad background through introductions to “General Philosophy” (theory of knowledge and metaphysics, and giving historical background to current debates), “Moral Philosophy” (taught largely by reference to critical study of John Stuart Mill's famous book *Utilitarianism*), and “Logic” (covering some essential terminology and methods). In the upper years, students can either continue with all three of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, or (more commonly) specialise in two of them. Those who specialise in Philosophy have a very wide choice, thanks to the breadth of the Philosophy Faculty. They can choose between three and five Philosophy courses (out of the eight they take in PPE as a whole) from a list of around 25 which ranges over the entire discipline.

What Makes Oxford Special

The workload at Oxford is demanding, both for students and tutors. In PPE you will typically be expected to do the equivalent of 36 essays a year (three every two weeks of term), and the tutorials will give you swift detailed feedback on every one of them. This is far more work, and vastly more feedback, than you would get at almost any other university. So if you love learning and thinking, then Oxford is a wonderful place to be. Oxford is also very unusual (perhaps unique) in the extent to which teaching is done by *senior academics*: most Philosophy tutorials are given by established Faculty members, who will generally be world-leading researchers. (By contrast, at most top British universities, staffing and incentives to focus on research mean that senior academics do little undergraduate teaching, while “tutorials” can involve a dozen students or more, with little chance to have their own ideas heard, let alone discussed.) At Oxford a small proportion of your teaching may be done by Philosophy postgraduate students, but these are all extremely good – likely professors of the future – and are allowed to take on undergraduate tutoring only after they are well on the way to achieving their doctorate.

¹ According to the influential *Philosophical Gourmet* report, and we're much bigger than our main US rival, NYU. Next best in the UK are Cambridge, who rank joint 19th-22nd in the world, then St Andrews/Stirling at joint 27th-28th.

The Hertford College Experience

Being at Hertford combines a friendly and relaxed environment (for which the College is well known) with all the opportunities of Oxford University. Here you will quickly get to know most of the other students in your year through our Fresher's events, but also, you will soon meet those studying Philosophy in the upper years (and as postgraduates) through the Hertford College Philosophical Society. This provides excellent dinners, typically once a term, with a speaker afterwards and intense discussion that can extend well beyond midnight with the wine still flowing! We also plan, once a year, to extend an invitation to old members, giving a great opportunity for you to tell them about what's happening in the College, and in return to get useful career tips. Also once a year, just before the summer term starts, we have a Philosophical Society Retreat in the Cotswolds, staying out in the lovely countryside near Stow-in-the-Wold for three nights, eating, drinking, walking, chatting, discussing and playing lots of games. Again, the size of the Hertford Philosophy community – around 40 undergraduates, plus a few more senior members – makes it easy to get to know everyone, across all degree programmes and years, and forms a very friendly and mutually supportive group. In recent years, the students have organised a number of philosophical societies and discussion groups, including weekly "Hertford Philosophy Lunches".

The Philosophy team at Hertford is led by Professor Peter Millican, who is Gilbert Ryle Fellow and Professor of Philosophy and also PPE Coordinator. He has wide interests and has published in Artificial Intelligence, Epistemology, Ethics, Philosophy of Language, and Philosophy of Religion, but most of his research has been on David Hume – generally reckoned the English-speaking world's greatest philosopher – and related topics (see <http://www.davidhume.org/papers/millican.html> for some of these publications, and <http://www.millican.org/research.htm> for a selection in other areas). On the teaching side, Peter was the main designer of the current General Philosophy course, and has been recognised by the University for "Teaching Excellence", and by students as one of the "most acclaimed lecturers" across the Humanities. Peter teaches General Philosophy to first-years, and for upper-year students, he tutors Early Modern Philosophy, Knowledge and Reality, Philosophy of Logic and Language, and Philosophy of Religion. However a fair amount of his teaching is done for students of other colleges, as a "swap" arrangement so that Hertford students are able in return to study their preferred papers with many of the world's top experts.

Dr Cressida Gaukroger, Lecturer in Philosophy, teaches the first-year Moral Philosophy paper at Hertford, and tutors upper-year students in Ethics and Early Modern Philosophy. Her research interests include empathy and other moral emotions in Ethics, and the question of whether how we feel is part of what it is to be a good person, regardless of how we act. She also works on topics in Philosophy of Mind relating to how the mind represents the world, looking at questions like: What are concepts? Can we think about things that we know nothing about? Do our words have meaning if we don't know what they refer to?

Dr Patrick Butlin, Lecturer in Philosophy, teaches Logic in the first year, and tutors upper-year students in Knowledge and Reality, Philosophy of Mind, and Philosophy of Cognitive Science. In his research, Patrick is interested in using psychology and neuroscience to inform theories of what motivates us and determines how we act, and in turn applying these theories to foundational questions in Ethics. He also has a keen interest in the problem of mental representation – that is, of understanding how our beliefs and desires come to be *about* anything.

Although College teaching teams are small (giving a friendly environment in which your tutors will know you well through the years, and you them), there is plenty of access to tutors in other colleges, through college "swaps" which ensure that you are taught by experts on every single course. All of the first year PPE Philosophy teaching is done within College, as are the core second-year courses in Early Modern Philosophy and Ethics. Once you get to the upper years, however, it's likely that most of your other Philosophy courses will be taught by tutors in different colleges, and you are encouraged to express your own preferences (if, for example, you find a set of lectures particularly inspiring, we can try to arrange for you to be tutored by that lecturer). The College is firmly committed to placing our students with the best people, and generally very successful in doing so (exploiting our own reputation as committed teachers and desirable "swaps").

Discovering Philosophy

Many students come to PPE without a very clear idea of what Philosophy is, and this page will accordingly be addressed to them! So if you are thinking that you might want to study Philosophy, it would be wise to read some background material to give you an idea of what it involves.

Philosophy attracts a fair share of fanatics and nutters, so you can't take for granted that every book or website that describes itself as "philosophical" is worth reading. Many of these will be putting forward moral or spiritual views in a way akin to political or religious preaching: "Here is my philosophy of life – follow me!". But Philosophy as an intellectual discipline is quite different from this sort of thing: its hallmark is rigour and objectivity, with careful argument for its conclusions rather than persuasive rhetoric. This doesn't mean *at all* that Philosophy can't be *fun*. On the contrary, those of us who love Philosophy do so precisely because we find it such fun to exercise our minds thinking through fascinating puzzles in this way. If you enjoy maths, or strategy games like chess or Othello, or puzzles such as crosswords or Sudoku, or pondering abstract questions about political and economic systems, then you may get a lot of similar enjoyment from philosophy too. But in any case, you're likely to find philosophical problems interesting and even compelling, because they often arise from trying to address the key questions of "life, the universe, and everything", so the answers really matter.

Fortunately, there are now quite a few good books available, giving tasters of various areas of Philosophy in a way that brings out this fascination and fun, being accessible but at the same time sufficiently rigorous to be genuinely educational. Here are some personal choices: I suggest you browse these in a good bookshop such as Blackwell's in Oxford, and see which you like best.

Stephen Law, *The Philosophy Gym* (Headline Book Publishing Ltd, 2003)

Simon Blackburn, *Think* (Oxford University Press, 1999)

Peter Singer, *How Are We to Live?* (Oxford University Press, 1997)

Earl Conee and Theodore Sider, *Riddles of Existence* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

Edward Craig, *Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

The classic of the genre is also excellent, if understandably a bit dated:

Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1912)

It's also well worth looking at books by authors such as Julian Baggini and Nigel Warburton, who have produced several good introductions to aspects of the subject. The ideal is a book that really grabs you, and is able to make you feel the fascination and significance of the sorts of problems that Philosophy presents. If you have specific philosophical interests and would like more suggestions, please feel free to email me: peter.millican@hertford.ox.ac.uk.

I hope you decide to apply to Hertford College, and look forward to meeting you in December.

Professor Peter Millican, peter.millican@hertford.ox.ac.uk, Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy

Politics at Hertford College

Politics is a tremendously rewarding subject to study: on past experience, once PPEists start studying Politics, they tend not to stop! It is offered not only as part of PPE, but also History and Politics – the college welcomes applications in both subjects, and typically admits nine PPE applicants (including one “open offer”), and also a handful of History joint honours applicants, which can include Politics.

The Politics team at Hertford consists of Dr Radek Zubek, who specialises on the “institutions” side, and Blake Ewing on the “theory side”. Radek is Fellow in Politics, having previously been Research Fellow in the European Institute at the London School of Economics. His main research interest is the comparative study of executives and parliaments in Central Europe. He is author of *Core Executive and Europeanization in Central Europe* (published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2008) and has published in the *Journal of European Public Policy*, *West European Politics*, *Journal of Legislative Studies*, and in various edited volumes. He has also worked as a consultant to private and public organizations including Ernst & Young, OECD-SIGMA and the Office of the Polish Human Rights Commissioner. Radek teaches Analysis of Democratic Institutions to PPE first years, and upper-year courses with a focus on Europe and institutions.

Blake Ewing, our Lecturer in Political Theory, teaches the Introduction to Political Theory paper for first years, and for upper years is available to teach the Theory of Politics paper, as well both papers in history of political thought (Plato to Rousseau and Bentham to Weber). Blake’s doctorate is on political ideologies and their use of different conceptions of time, on which he has also published numerous articles. His other interests include historiography, continental philosophy, the study of political language and the history of political thought. Before returning to academia, Blake worked as a journalist (mostly writing for *The Economist*) and as a consultant at the World Bank.

Radek and Blake between them teach the first year Politics course to Hertford students, but upper-year teaching – as remarked in the Philosophy section – will be taught by specialists who might be in any college (and we are very willing to do our best to meet student requests if they are keen to have specific tutors). One component of the first year course is Comparative Government, focusing mainly on the operation of democratic institutions within a comparative perspective. Typically the course might start with a discussion of various theoretical claims, for example “Emerging democracies are more likely to succeed if they are parliamentary rather than presidential”, or “Majoritarian voting systems tend to lead to two dominant parties”. Then we consider how well these apply to, and explain, the politics of a wide range of democracies.

The other component of the first year Politics course is Political Theory. Students look at some key texts by Locke, Rousseau, and Mill, as well as studying some contemporary topics, such as obligation (“Should one always obey the law simply because it is the law?”) and liberty (“If you are autonomous, does that necessarily mean that you are free?”). Blake also holds an informal reading group on political theory, which is lively and popular (last year’s readings included selections from Plato, Thucydides, Constant, Havel).

In the second and third years, Politics students take two core papers out of five (International Relations, Political Sociology, Comparative Government, Political Theory, and 20th Century British Politics), and there is a vast array of around 30 subjects, ranging from the Politics of Sub-Saharan Africa, through Statistical Methods, to Marxism, to International Relations during the Cold War. Amongst the most popular choices at Hertford have been Latin American Politics, West European Politics and Classical Political Thought, but students are encouraged to follow their own interests.

Teaching is delivered in tutorials, usually in pairs though sometimes individually. Students are encouraged to collaborate outside tutorials, and lectures organised by the Faculty are also an important part of the course. There are numerous political societies in Oxford: political parties have their own student organisations, there is the Oxford Union society, which hosts debates and speaker meetings, and

the European Affairs Society – to name but a few! Hertford College also has its own Politics Society. Taking advantage of these sorts of talks and discussions can greatly enrich your study of the subject.

So what are tutors looking for in potential Politics students? First, a keen interest in the subject! We would expect students to be interested in current affairs – not just political trivia, but also some of the big questions underlying contemporary politics. Secondly, strong analytical skills are important: successful Politics students often enjoy a good argument, getting to the heart of issues, unpacking the case advanced by others and the assumptions on which it rests. Although quite a few students have done History A-level (and a handful have studied Politics before), for the Politics course this is by no means essential, and there are no compulsory subjects.

We will be looking, above all, for interest and potential at interview – an ability to think seriously about problems in understanding the world. There is no compulsory reading for the interview, although it would help to think about contemporary political debates. To get a flavour of the subject, you might find it handy to dip into books like:

Jonathan Wolff: *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (OUP, 2006)

William Roberts Clark, Matthew R. Golder, and Sona N. Golder: *Principles of Comparative Politics* (CQ Press, 2nd edition, 2012)

Dr Radek Zubek, radoslaw.zubek@hertford.ox.ac.uk, Fellow and Tutor in Politics
Please do get in touch if you have any queries – we're happy to help!

Economics at Hertford College

Hertford College welcomes applications in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE), Economics and Management (E&M), and Engineering, Economics and Management (EEM). We typically admit nine PPE applicants (including one “open offer”), eight Economics and Management applicants, and one or two in Engineering, Economics and Management.

Economics is a subject that gives students the tools with which to analyse a broad set of issues, ranging from the decisions of the UK’s Monetary Policy Committee, the high growth rates of China and India, financial crises, environmental policies, and the London congestion charge, to illegal downloading of music from the Internet. An appreciation of Economics and the general workings of the economy have become increasingly necessary to make sense of governmental policy-making, the conduct of businesses and the enormous changes in economic systems occurring throughout the world. Besides being highly valued by potential employers, our PPE students find Economics very rewarding, especially when they are able to analyse issues, interpret articles and examine human behaviour through the lens of economic theory.

Economics at Hertford standardly involves a core teaching team of four. From 2017, that team is led by our new Fellow in Economics, Elizabeth Baldwin, who will be teaching first year Microeconomics. Second year core material is taught by our Economics Lecturers Richard Povey (Microeconomics) and Zac Gross (Macroeconomics). Richard also teaches first year Macroeconomics, while Quantitative Economics is taught by Ben Kett. In 2018, we expect to be appointing a second new Fellow in Economics, who will join Elizabeth, Richard, and Ben.

Regarding the research interests of our two current main economists, Elizabeth’s work on consumer preferences for indivisible goods introduces “tropical geometry” to economics. This has exciting applications, for example in the design of auctions in which multiple different goods are sold simultaneously. She also works in environmental economics: in recent work, she considers the importance of irreversibility of investment and endogenous technical change in determining the timing of policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Meanwhile Richard’s primary research is on the consequences of altruistic motivation in economic theory. He uses game theoretic modelling techniques and social welfare analysis to show that altruism can have negative as well as positive effects, and hence that there may exist a “socially optimal level of altruism” for society as a whole. He is also interested in evolutionary game theory and optimal taxation theory.

In their first year, PPE students take the Introduction to Economics course. The first year Economics tutorials take place in Michaelmas Term (October to December) and Hilary Term (January to March). The terms have a length of 8 weeks, so there are 16 Economics tutorials altogether in the first year. These are split roughly into 10 weeks of Microeconomics (incorporating the Mathematics content) and 6 weeks of Macroeconomics.

Hertford College is committed to offering in-house tutorials for all core courses, as well as for certain options courses, with students taught in small groups of 2 to 6. Tutorials in Introduction to Economics are taught alongside weekly lectures, which form an important part of the introductory course and inform tutorial teaching. The lectures are for all students across Oxford University taking the Introduction to Economics course, and so they are held in large lecture theatres.

University-level Economics makes use of mathematical techniques (e.g. optimisation involving differentiation; use of partial derivatives etc.) that are taught alongside Microeconomics. While A-level Mathematics is not a prerequisite for application, it will certainly make your first year much easier if you have this qualification. For those without A-level Mathematics, we urge you to consider taking the AS at least.

Some applicants voice concerns over not having done A-level Economics. But Economics is taught rather differently at University, so while those with A-level Economics may have a small initial advantage (through a familiarity with some Economics concepts and terminology), this is only short-

lived. Typically, all students are at a similar level within a month or so, and those without an A-level will almost certainly have caught up by the end of the first term.

In the second year, Economics students take three core papers (Microeconomics, Macroeconomics, and Quantitative Methods), taught over all three terms. Students wishing to take further options in Economics are spoilt for choice with around 20 courses typically on offer, including International Economics, Economics of Industry, Money and Banking, Public Economics, Economics of OECD Countries, and British Economic History, to list just a few.

Applicants are naturally anxious to prepare as well as possible for their Oxford interviews. The Economics interview will typically revolve around discussion of Economics issues – perhaps recent events in the popular press or discussion of general ideas in Economics – as well as some mathematics.

Your interviewers will be aware of the fact that you may not have A-level Mathematics or A-level Economics, and the sorts of questions you will be asked will take this on board. We are not so much interested in the Economics you have been taught at school, but your powers of reasoning and your ability to think critically and discuss issues.

Showing a keen interest in Economics is important! We would expect students to be interested in the subject and to have taken the time to read about it, whether by reading *The Economist* regularly, newspapers more generally, or recently published books on the subject.

While interviews vary, it is reasonable to expect to be asked whether there is anything you have read that has interested you in particular. Moreover, if your personal statement indicates that you have read a particular book, you may be asked to discuss some aspect of this book during the course of the interview.

There is no compulsory reading for the interview, but thinking about economic issues and their implications, for example, rising food prices, high oil prices, the prospect of an economic downturn, or anything else that interests you, is useful.

Some popular books that can give you a flavour for Economics are indicated below. These are readily available in bookshops and on websites such as Amazon:

Levitt, S. and Dubner, S. (2009), *Superfreakonomics: Global Cooling, Patriotic Prostitutes and Why Suicide Bombers Should Buy Life Insurance*, Penguin

Levitt, S. and Dubner, S. (2007), *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*, Penguin

Ariely, D (2009), *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces that Shape Our Decisions*, HarperCollins

Harford, T. (2007), *The Undercover Economist*, Little Brown

Collier, P. (2008), *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It?*, Oxford University Press

Sachs, J. (2005), *The End of Poverty: How We Can Make it Happen in Our Lifetime*, Penguin

Kay, J. (2004), *The Everlasting Lightbulb: How Economics Illuminates the World*, Erasmus Press

Krugman, P. (1999), *The Accidental Theorist*, Penguin

Landsburg, S. (1995), *The Armchair Economist*, Free Press

Dixit, A. and Nalebuff, B. (1993), *Thinking Strategically*, Norton

We look forward to receiving your application. Enjoy the Open Day and do ask us any questions you may have. Should you have any additional queries, please do not hesitate to contact us by email.

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