

Jesus College, Oxford



Subject Notes: PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS AND ECONOMICS (PPE)

Academic Staff

Fellows

Dr Stuart White is a Fellow and Tutor in Politics. He teaches the political theory side of Politics Prelims, Theories of the State, Theory of Politics, Political Thought: Plato to Rousseau, Political Thought: Bentham to Weber, and Marx and Marxism. His research focuses on democratic citizenship and the economy and integrates political philosophy, public policy and the history of political thought.

Professor James Tilley, also a Fellow and Tutor in Politics, teaches the empirical side of Politics Prelims, *Comparative Government* and *Political Sociology*. His research interests lie in the fields of political sociology, political psychology and public opinion, with a focus on British politics.

Professor Péter Esö is the Fellow and Tutor in Economics who teaches Core Microeconomics and Game Theory. His research interests include microeconomic theory, game theory, and the economics of information.

Dr Joe Cunningham is a Lecturer in Philosophy who teaches General Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Ethics, Knowledge & Reality, and Philosophy of Mind. His research interests are in the theories of reasons, rationality, and moral psychology.

About the Course

PPE is an unusual course, and the three subjects, philosophy, politics and economics, offer highly contrasting intellectual styles and challenges. There is great variety and scope for specialization within the course, and you should have little difficulty in selecting papers that meet your intellectual needs and interests. At one extreme you can keep all three subjects going for the full three years and by the end of this particular programme you will have a clear grasp of the major institutions, thinkers and ideas that have shaped modern society. At the other extreme you can concentrate primarily on one subject, dropping another altogether after the first year, and doing only a few papers in the third. You could thus, for example, 'major' in economics treating politics or philosophy as a subsidiary. In this way you could reach a high standard in economics, but backed up by the intellectual variety of papers in another, contrasting discipline.

Philosophy

The study of philosophy develops analytical rigour and the ability to criticise and reason logically. It seeks to apply these skills to many contemporary and historical schools of thought, individual thinkers and questions on such subjects as the fundamental nature of reality, the nature, possibility and limits of knowledge, the nature and grounds of moral judgements, the nature of the mind and its relation to the body, and the fundamental principles of language, science, religion, art and literature. The main branches of contemporary philosophy include:

- Epistemology: What distinguishes knowing a certain fact from having a mere true belief in it? Is it possible to know anything, given the possibility of perfect hallucination? Are we justified in valuing knowledge more highly than true belief?

- Metaphysics: Under what conditions do you cease to exist? Is the possibility of freewill compatible with a world of determinate cause and effect? Is backwards time travel possible? What is it for something to be *possible*, anyway?
- Philosophy of Mind: Is the mind capable of existing independently of the body? Is it possible in principle to reduce consciousness to a brain process? What distinguishes a *mental* state from other things?
- Ethics: Is the rightness of an action solely a function of how much good it does? Under what conditions can someone be counted morally responsible for what they do? What are we doing when we say an act is 'right' or 'wrong' in the first place? Is there any objective truth to these matters?

The Philosophy Faculty at Oxford is the largest philosophy department in the UK, and one of the largest in the world, with more than 70 full-time members, admitting more than 500 undergraduates annually to read the various degrees involving philosophy. Many Faculty members have a worldwide reputation, and the library and other facilities are acknowledged as among the best in the country. The large number of undergraduates and graduates reading philosophy with a variety of other disciplines affords the opportunity to participate in a diverse and lively philosophical community. The tutorial system at Oxford, which provides students with an opportunity to receive detailed feedback on their written work and engage in protracted, in-depth philosophical debate with their tutor and peers, is highly conducive to the development of philosophical skills.

Politics

Politics as an academic discipline differs from the popular conception of what the subject is about. While there is room for commitment and controversy in the academic study of politics, the primary emphasis is analytical. The aim is to promote a clear view of political ideas, movements and institutions, and to achieve insight into the nature of authority and the distribution of power in society. In achieving this end, the method followed is that of a critical scrutiny of both political ideas and also hypotheses regarding the political behaviour of institutions and voters, rather than that of attack or defence of the standpoint of any political party or group.

No less importantly, politics comprehends a much wider and more diverse range of studies than is usually imagined. On the one hand, it includes political theory. Here we attempt to critically analyse such key concepts as liberty, democracy, equality and social justice, including classic texts and thinkers of continuing relevance in contemporary life. On the other hand, it mainly includes the empirical study of politics, and political systems, which can be divided into four main areas:

- Political sociology: we are normally interested in trying to explain individuals' behaviour and attitudes.
- Comparative government: we are interested in political institutions (such as legislatures or electoral systems) and want to explain the dynamics and development of those institutions.
- International relations: we want to understand the relationships between states, as opposed to individuals or institutions.
- Political history: we examine in detail the nature and background of important political events and social changes in individual countries (or groups of countries) using a more historical methodology.

As this brief survey suggests, politics as an academic subject is concerned with almost every aspect of man in society, and the fact that it differs from popular conceptions of 'politics' doesn't make it less exciting or challenging. Indeed, few students will find their political opinions unchanged at the end of their course in politics, and most will agree that they have benefited from subjecting their political ideas to a disciplined critical inquiry.

Economics

The problems of Economics are familiar to us from the newspapers and television. The economics of unemployment, inflation and taxation, the role of the government in the provision of education, health and

other public services, intervention in the private sector and regulation, problems of world trade and growth and international justice, are all inescapable issues for an intelligent observer of the contemporary scene. It is towards the understanding of these issues that Economics is directed, and it is that challenge which makes Economics such an important discipline.

The method of study is to start with the fundamental economic actors in an economy. Households, differentiated according to size, income and other endowments, offer labour services, purchase consumer goods and save. Firms, differentiated by size and industry, undertake production and investment. Trade unions, banks and other institutions operate in their respective sectors. Governments form a major part of all advanced economies, and are involved in regulation and production themselves. For each type of economic actors we propose theoretical models to explain their behaviour and performance.

The next stage is to put all the models together, and examine the workings of the system as a whole. At this point we are mostly interested in the aggregate performance of the economy; direct and indirect effects of shocks and policy interventions. If the system is subjected to a shock from the outside (a sudden rise in the price of oil, for example), how does it adjust? And how might the government respond to the problems created? Alternatively, we may look at more fundamental issues, like the efficiency of the price system in regulating production in the economy, or the wider issues of capitalism versus socialist planning.

The development and testing of theoretical models has become much more logically rigorous in recent years, with a considerable emphasis on Mathematics in exposition. So a logical mind and willingness to acquire some mathematical skills are essential to success in the subject. However, the best economists are still those who can see into the essential features of an economic problem, and can distinguish fruitful approaches to understanding it. That requires an intelligent understanding of institutions (and here the links with Politics and Sociology are vital), and an awareness that solutions to economic problems raise thorny ethical issues (and here there are important links with Moral Philosophy).

Economics as a discipline is intellectually very demanding: but the satisfaction and insight that it gives makes the effort well worthwhile.

The first year (Preliminary Examination)

The first year course is designed to lay the foundation for more advanced work to be done in the second and third years on the course. The Preliminary Examination consists of three papers.

The PHILOSOPHY paper has three sections, with students required to answer at least one question from each. The three sections are: General Philosophy (an introduction to key issues in metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of mind), Moral Philosophy (based on the study of JS Mill's *Utilitarianism*), and Logic (an introduction to the study of argumentative structure and valid inference).

The INTRODUCTION TO POLITICS paper is split into two parts. Part A is the *theory of politics*. Students study a selection of major theorists in political thought, including Rousseau, Mill and Marx. Part B is the *practice of politics*. Students study a variety of comparative topics including: regime types and causes of democracy; the state and its institutions (executives, legislatures, electoral systems and courts); parties and party systems; elections and voters.

The INTRODUCTORY ECONOMICS paper covers elementary Economic Theory and the application of Mathematics to simple problems in Economic Theory. The mathematical level is not beyond that of A-level although some new material of special interest to economists is introduced.

The second and third years (Final Honours School)

You will have the option of studying all three subjects (the tripartite option) or just two. The core papers are:

PHILOSOPHY

Ethics, plus **ONE** of the following **FOUR** papers:

- Early Modern Philosophy
- Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics
- Plato's Republic
- Knowledge and Reality

POLITICS

TWO of the following **FIVE** papers:

- Comparative Government
- British Politics and Government in the 20th Century
- Theory of International Relations
- Theory of Politics
- Political Sociology

ECONOMICS

- Microeconomics
- Macroeconomics
- Quantitative Economics

The further papers include:

PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy of Mind; Philosophy of Cognitive Science; Philosophy of Religion; Philosophy of Logic and Language; Philosophical Logic; Medieval Philosophy; Philosophy of Kant; Post-Kantian Philosophy; Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein; The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein; Philosophy of Mathematics; Philosophy of Science and Social Science; Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Criticism; Theory of Politics; Practical Ethics.

POLITICS

Modern British Government and Politics; Government and Politics of the United States; Politics in Europe; Russian Government and Politics; Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa; Politics in Latin America; Politics in South Asia; Politics in the Middle East; International Relations in the Era of Two World Wars; International Relations in the Era of the Cold War; Classical Political Thought up to 1800; Foundations of Modern Social and Political Thought; Marxism; Sociological Theory; Labour Economics and Industrial Relations; The Government and Politics of Japan; Social Policy; Comparative Demographic Systems; Quantitative Methods in Politics and Sociology; The Government and Politics of China.

ECONOMICS

British Economic History since 1870; Behavioural and Experimental Economics; Econometrics; Economics of Developing Countries; Economics of Industry; Finance; Game Theory; International Economics; Labour Economics; Microeconomic Analysis; Money and Banking; Public Economics.

It is also possible to write a short dissertation, not more than 15,000 words, in place of one of the further papers. The topic can be any subject that falls within the scope of PPE.

Teaching Method and Work Load

As is usual in Oxford, the teaching is partly University-based and partly College-based. Lectures are provided by the University. Your tutor will advise you each term on the lectures you should attend from the very large number offered. Tutorials are provided by the College and writing essays for tutorials is a major focus of your work. You will typically have one or two tutorials in a week, and the preliminary reading and writing for each tutorial will constitute a large proportion of your working week.

There will also be some classes organised by the College; Maths and Logic classes at the beginning and revision classes at the end of the course. For most of your first two years you will be taught in College, but in your final year you will be taught by specialists from other colleges if you have chosen further subjects (such as International Relations) that are not the specialities of the Jesus Tutors.

Library Facilities

The College has an undergraduate library with books and some of the main periodicals covering the various aspects of the PPE course. It has reading rooms, but is also a lending library. The main University library (the Bodleian) has a very large collection, for reference only. In addition there are University departmental Libraries with borrowing facilities at the Social Sciences Library (Manor Road), and at the Philosophy and Theology Faculties Library (Woodstock Road).

Joint Schools

None of the three PPE subjects may be studied on their own at Oxford. The following combinations are available at Jesus College:

- Computer Science and Philosophy
- Economics and Management
- History and Economics
- History and Politics
- Mathematics and Philosophy
- Philosophy and Modern Languages
- Philosophy and Theology
- Philosophy and Psychology and/or Linguistics (PPL)

Admissions

In a total College entry of about 100 undergraduates, 8 are offered places in a typical year to read PPE or History and Politics. Candidates are selected on the basis of academic record (e.g. GCSEs) and potential, as shown by their UCAS reference, performance in the written test and in interviews if shortlisted.

Academic requirements: Offers made to candidates will be conditional upon A-level results (AAA excluding General Studies) or equivalent qualifications.

There is no need to have studied any of the three subjects at AS/A2 level before starting PPE. Some people have done extremely well at PPE having studied, for example, French, German and Latin, others having studied Maths, Physics and Chemistry. Although a background in Mathematics is not formally required for admission, PPE applicants should have sufficient interest in, and aptitude for, mathematics to cope with the mathematical elements of the course. Mathematics is a particular advantage for the Economics component of the course, as well as for the first year logic course in philosophy, and for understanding theories and data in politics.

Last year around 90% of the applicants who were offered places for PPE had studied Maths to at least AS-Level, or equivalent. You may like to consider taking Maths to AS-level, or an equivalent qualification such as IB Standard Level, even if you do not pursue it further. It is useful to have learnt the basics of differentiation before starting your university course in PPE.

Written test: All candidates must take the **Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA)** in schools on **4 November 2020**. This test is administered by Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing and the deadline for registering is **15 October 2020**. For more information about the TSA and how to register, please see the following link: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/tests/tsa>

Written work: Candidates are **not** required to submit written work as part of the admissions process.

Interviews: During the interview, discussion is focused on a short text or texts which are distributed to candidates beforehand. In the interview we are looking for the ability to understand the arguments in the texts, to express the arguments clearly, to criticise and develop them, and to apply them in areas outside the text. Every candidate is confronted with the same text and the same questions to ensure that performances can be compared between candidates.

Deferred Entry: Applications for deferred entry to Jesus College are accepted. You must apply for deferred entry at the time of application to Oxford: you cannot change your mind after an offer has been made. Please refer to departmental web sites for subject-specific advice. You should be aware that applicants who are offered places for deferred entry will generally be among the strongest of the cohort for their subject. We would not usually offer more than one deferred place per subject in order not to disadvantage the following year's candidates. In some cases, an applicant for deferred entry may be offered a place for non-deferred entry instead. If you require any further advice, please contact the Admissions Officer via admissions.officer@jesus.ox.ac.uk

Postgraduate Studies and Careers

Philosophy graduate students will find themselves members of a large graduate community, together with others with shared interests who are at an equivalent stage in their intellectual development. The following degrees are offered at postgraduate level:

- MSt in Ancient Philosophy
- MSt in Philosophy of Physics
- BPhil or DPhil in Philosophy

The Department of Economics has around 200 graduate students. As a research based community, the Department puts great weight on developing its graduate students. The following degrees are offered at postgraduate level:

- DPhil in Economics
- MPhil Economics
- MSc Economics for Development (joint with Development Studies)
- MSc in Financial Economics (joint with Saïd Business School)

The Department of Politics and International Relations is internationally renowned as a centre for excellence in teaching and research. Its reputation attracts students and senior academics from across the world. The following degrees are offered at postgraduate level:

- DPhil in Politics
- MPhil, DPhil in International Relations

- MPhil: Comparative Government; Political Theory; European Politics and Society
- MSc: Politics Research; Political Theory Research

PPE students go on to a wide range of careers, although in many cases you must expect to undertake a further period of professional training. If you want to become a professional economist (either in government or academic life) you must take a post-graduate course like the MPhil. Postgraduate work (whether in Philosophy, Politics, Economics or Sociology) is generally popular. Other common destinations are accountancy, banking, finance, industry (often on the marketing side), management consultancy, the Civil Service, journalism and social work.

Preliminary Reading and Further Information

If you are contemplating a course involving Philosophy, or wondering whether such a course would suit you, you might wish to read some of the following:

Thomas Nagel	<i>What Does It All Mean?</i> (Oxford)
Bertrand Russell	<i>The Problems of Philosophy</i> (Oxford)
M Hollis	<i>Invitation to Philosophy</i> (Blackwell)
Nigel Warburton	<i>Philosophy: The Basics</i> (Routledge)
Julia Driver	<i>Ethics: the Fundamentals</i> (Blackwell)
Simon Blackburn	<i>Think</i> (Oxford)
Roger Scruton	<i>An Intelligent Person's Guide to Philosophy</i> (Duckworth)

Further information about reading PPE at Oxford can be found at the following locations:

- www.ppe.ox.ac.uk
- www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk
- www.politics.ox.ac.uk
- www.economics.ox.ac.uk

Information about Admissions is available at: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses-listing/philosophy-politics-and-economics>

Contact details

If you have any questions about our entrance requirements, or about applying to study at Jesus College, please contact the Admissions Officer:

Tel:	01865 279721
Email:	admissions.officer@jesus.ox.ac.uk
Web:	www.jesus.ox.ac.uk/study-here

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