**PPE Interviews at Oxford**

* Interview is not formal, it’s a mini tutorial – dress code is smart casual.
* They are looking for enthusiasm not knowledge!
* Engagement. An application of core knowledge to new principles.
* Show can think in the moment and respond to guidance – think aloud but leave a second before speaking.
* Be prepared to ask questions yourself!
* You must listen, and listen **carefully**.
* Be prepared to work problems out on a whiteboard.
* Introducing unfamiliar material to you; it reveals your thought process. Shows if you will be suited to a tutorial system.
* Be prepared to ask for clarification, to admit you don’t know, that you’re stuck. It’s not a bad thing.
* Show you commitment to your subject(s)…and your willingness to work hard – do an **EPQ** in a field new to you, make that area your speciality (finish it before the interviews)
* Focus on the arguments from your personal statement and be prepared to talk about any aspect of it/anticipate questions on it – be prepared for it not to be mentioned.
* Break questions down! What is the question really asking?
* Research your interviewers! Know their work and their specialist fields.
* Being interviewed at another college is a good thing – not being interviewed by another is neither good nor bad.
* Read lots prior to the interview: for Philosophy read *The Basics of Philosophy* by Nigel Warburton and the ‘Introduction to Philosophy’ MOOC on Coursera by Edinburgh University is a great place to start, for Politics read anything work of political theory, for Economics read *50 Economic Fallacies* by Geoffrey Wood.
* Know the members and roles of the Cabinet ministers and of the Shadow Cabinet.
* Structure of the interviews: at Lincoln I had two interviews; one politics/economics and one philosophy/politics. At Oriel I had a separate philosophy, politics and economics.  
  Interviews can be in either format or a slightly different composition.
* Stay calm. Have fun. Good luck.

**Philosophy**

‘Accustom yourself to believing that death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply the capacity for sensation, and death is the privation of all sentience; therefore a correct understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by adding to life a limitless time, but by taking away the yearning after immortality. For life has no terrors for him who has thoroughly understood that there are no terrors for him in ceasing to live. Foolish, therefore, is the man who says that he fears death, not because it will pain when it comes, but because it pains in the prospect. Whatever causes no annoyance when it is present, causes only a groundless pain in the expectation. Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not. It is nothing, then, either to the living or to the dead, for with the living it is not and the dead exist no longer.’ (Epicurus)

What is the conclusion of the argument?

Is this argument valid?

Is this argument sound?

If not sound, what premise do you not agree with?

(This was my philosophy interview at Lincoln. I had 15 minutes to read it and answer the questions prior then a 15 minute discussion on the passage with the interviewer.)

Example syllogisms for practice…

* All babies are illogical;
* Nobody is despised who can manage a crocodile;
* Illogical persons are despised;
* **Therefore…**
* God is that which nothing greater can be received;
* Something can exist in the mind and/or in reality;
* God exists in the mind;
* That which exists in reality and in the mind is greater than that which exists in the mind alone
* **Therefore God exists in reality.**

- Work out the conclusion first and see it the argument is valid, then question its soundness.  
- Use algebra to work out the argument.  
- Think logically and be prepared for material to be handed to you in the interview.  
- Know Pascal’s Wager, the Basic Logic Problem, the Teleporter argument and Utilitarianism.

**Example Philosophy Interview Questions**Why do you believe what your teachers tell you?  
One grain of wheat does not constitute a heap. If one grain doesn’t make a heap neither will two. If two don’t make a heap neither will three….. If 9,999 grains of wheat don’t make a heap 10,000 don’t make a heap….  
How do you know the moon isn’t made of cheese?  
What makes you think I’m having thoughts?  
Can you imagine a world without Laws?  
What does it mean to be happy?  
Is it a matter of fact or knowledge that time travels in only one direction?  
If you’re not in California, how do you know it exists?  
Do you believe in free will? How far does it extend to – an oyster, for example?  
Are you cool?  
Do animals think?  
If you entered a tele-transporter and your body was destroyed and instantly recreated on mars in exactly the same way with all your memories intact etc. would you be the same person?  
Is being hungry the same thing as wanting to eat?  
What do you think of teleport machines?  
Is the chair really there?  
What colour is that notice board?  
What makes you think that I am having thoughts?  
Convince me you are real and not just in my dreams?  
How would you describe an apple?  
Are you your body?  
Is the chair really there?  
Is it moral to hook up a psychopath (whose only pleasure is killing) to a reality-simulating machine so that he can believe he is in the real world and kill as much as he likes?  
Would a blind scientist who knew every scientific thing about colour actually know colour?  
What is an emotion?  
Two trains are about to crash. One contains pensioners going to Blackpool. The other contains commuters going to London. Which do you save?  
Is society greater than the individual?  
How can you prove that anything exists outside your own mind?  
Give an example of an argument with false premises but a true conclusion.

**Politics**

Interview 1 (15minutes):   
given the equation, **R = (B ⋅ P) – C + D**, which is from Rational Choice and Voter Turnout theory by Henry S. Farber of Princeton University.  
• B is the utility gain from getting the preferred outcome,   
• P is the probability that the individual’s vote will yield the preferred outcome, viz. be pivotal,   
• C is the (non-negative) cost of voting,   
• D is the positive benefit of the act of voting.  
An individual will vote if R > 0.

I was asked:   
What factors influence the formula?  
Whether I agree with the formula?  
Why the formula could be wrong?

Interview 2 (15minutes):   
a mini tutorial on ‘Veto Player Theory’ by George Tsebelis.   
The professor said ‘I am going to teach you something and see if you can understand this’.

Veto Player Theory statistically details the likelihood of two or more players coming to a settlement on two issues when all players have veto power in deviating from the status quo.   
Contemporary examples include the Lords vs Commons veto on Tax Credits.

Be prepared to be taught something on the spot that you have never seen before.  
It is to see how you respond to new stimuli.   
To see if you are a suitable person to interact with and teach for the next three years.

Interview 3 (20 minutes + 15 prior reading):   
a discussion on a passage about modern and ancient liberty from *The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns* by Benjamin Constant.

‘First ask yourselves what an Englishman, a Frenchman, and a citizen of the United States of America understand today by the word ‘liberty’. For each of them it is: the right to be subjected only to the laws, and not to be arrested, imprisoned, put to death or maltreated in any way by decision of one or more individuals; the right of each person to express his opinion, choose a profession and practise it, dispose of his own property and even to misuse it; the right to come and go without permission, and without explaining what one is doing or why; the right of each person to associate with other individuals—whether to discuss their interests, or to join in worship, or simply to fill the time in any way that suits his fancy; and each person’s right to have some influence on the administration of the government—by electing all or some of the officials, or through representations, petitions, or demands that the authorities are more or less obliged to take into consideration. Now compare this liberty with that of the ancients. The liberty of the ancients consisted in carrying out collectively but directly many parts of the over-all functions of government, coming together in the public square to: discuss and make decisions about war and peace; form alliances with foreign governments; vote on new laws; pronounce judgments; examine the accounts, acts, and stewardship of the magistrates; call the magistrates to appear in front of the assembled people; accuse the magistrates and then condemn or acquit them. But while the ancients called this liberty, they saw no inconsistency between this, collective freedom and the complete subjection of the individual to the authority of the group. You find among them almost none of the benefits that I have just listed as parts of the liberty of the moderns. All private actions were strictly monitored. No room was allowed for individual independence of opinions, or of choice of work, or—especially—of religion. We moderns regard the right to choose one’s own religious affiliation as one of the most precious, but to the ancients this would have seemed criminal and sacrilegious. In all the matters that seem to us the most important, the authority of the collective interposed itself and obstructed the will of individuals.

Among the ancients, therefore, the individual is nearly always sovereign in public affairs but a slave in all his private relations. As a citizen he decides on peace and war; as a private individual he is constrained, watched and repressed in all his movements; as a member of the collective body he interrogates, dismisses, condemns, impoverishes, exiles or sentences to death his magistrates and superiors; as a subject of the collective body he can himself be deprived of his status, stripped of his privileges, banished, put to death, by the free choice of the whole of which he is a part. Among the moderns, on the other hand, even in the freest states the individual is sovereign only in appearance, though he is independent in his private life. His sovereignty is restricted and nearly always suspended; and if at fixed and rare intervals—surrounded by precautions and obstacles—he exercises this sovereignty, all he ever does with it is to renounce it.’

I was asked questions regarding:   
The differences between modern and ancient liberty.  
Whether the modern world has liberty.  
What the author links about modern liberty in comparison to ancient liberty.

It was testing how well you can comprehend a passage of text and analyse it, to disagree with and create your own arguments and beliefs from reading a small passage of text.   
Important to focus on the text and what the author had said!

**Economics**

You have 100 Christmas trees.  
PN = 30 – QN  
PD = 75 – QD   
How many trees do I sell in November and December.   
(PN is the price for November, PD is the price of trees in December).

This was written on a whiteboard and the interviewer asked me to solve it for him.   
I tried a method and got an answer, then he said ‘Well done but you’ve got it wrong’.  
So I tried another method and got it correct – don’t be worried if you get it wrong just stay calm and take on board anything they say. **Listen carefully/attentively**.

Answer:   
Profit = Price x Quantity.

Therefore, profit in December = QN(30 – QN) which = 30QN– QN2.  
Differentiate to find the marginal profit: = 30 – 2QNSet marginal profit to 0 (as there you have maximised your profit): 30 – 2QN = 0   
Therefore, 2QN = 30   
Therefore the quantity sold in November is 15.   
Repeat for December and they are the correct answers.

**Important** – know the significance of differentiation ad integration in relation to marginals.

Important not to panic – my second economics interview I was given 15 minutes to do a sheet of maths on bank lending and deriving formulae – do not panic if you can’t do much, try and do as much as you can and they will help you to find the answer.  
**They do not expect you to be able to do it first time – it’s how you respond to the challenging stimulus and the drive you have to find the right answer**.

Advice: briefly revise all the principles from AS and A2 economics as it is likely they will take a principle from it and use it as the basis of the questioning.