



**Dr Joanna Burch-Brown**  
**BA, PHIL, PHD**

Lecturer

Office 1.14  
Cotham House,  
Cotham Hill, Bristol BS6 6JL  
([See a map](#))

[j.burch-brown@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:j.burch-brown@bristol.ac.uk)

### Summary

Joanna Burch-Brown is a Lecturer in Philosophy at University of Bristol. She is currently working on issues of contested heritage and public memory of slavery and colonialism. She teaches practical ethics, including race and justice, environmental ethics, sustainable development, and Kantian ethics. She is a founding member of the University of Bristol Centre for Black Humanities, and academic coordinator for the University of Bristol Fulbright Summer Institute on 'Arts, Activism and Social Justice'. She has active research collaborations with the Countering Colston campaign in Bristol, and with the International Network of Scholars and Activists for Afrikan Reparations. Before coming to Bristol, she did a postdoctoral research fellowship at Oxford, and a PhD in Cambridge in the History and Philosophy of Science Department. She did her undergraduate degree at Oberlin College, and in 2003 as a Compton Fellow she founded a therapeutic horticultural project in East London, which this year is celebrating its 15th anniversary.

### Biography

Joanna Burch-Brown is a Lecturer in Philosophy at University of Bristol. She is currently working on issues of contested heritage and public memory of slavery and colonialism. She teaches practical ethics, including race and justice, environmental ethics, sustainable development, and Kantian ethics. She is a founding member of the University of Bristol Centre for Black Humanities, and academic coordinator for the University of Bristol Fulbright Summer Institute on 'Arts, Activism and Social Justice'. She is interested in the idea of 'philosophy from the grassroots' and has active research collaborations with Countering Colston in Bristol, and with the International Network of Scholars and Activists for Afrikan Reparations. Before coming to Bristol, she did a postdoctoral research fellowship at Oxford, and a PhD in Cambridge in the History and Philosophy of Science Department. She did her undergraduate degree at Oberlin College, and in 2003 as a Compton Fellow she founded a therapeutic horticultural project in East London, which this year is celebrating its 15th anniversary.

### Teaching

I teach two 3rd year units at University of Bristol: 'Ethics and Literature: 20th Century black philosophical thought and the arts' and 'Environmental Philosophy', both of which I run with my colleague Dr. Anthony Everett. Dr. Megan Blomfield and I co-teach 'Race and Justice', as a required component of the Bristol's Liberal Arts degree, and I teach the first-year introduction to ethics and political philosophy. I have taught 'Value Theory' at master's level, as well as 2nd year 'Ethics'. I contribute to Bristol's 'Sustainability' open unit, and to the Bristol Fulbright Institute study-away programme on Slavery and the Atlantic Heritage. I serve as Widening Participation Officer for the School of Arts, and I am currently working to help develop a Black Studies programme at Bristol.

#### **20th century Black philosophical thought and the arts** (3rd year philosophy)

This advanced unit explores key concepts, texts and thinkers from the canon of black philosophical thought and literature. We give particular attention to the intersection between philosophy and the arts, exploring links between major developments in black social and political thought, and developments in black expressive cultures and black aesthetics. Black intellectuals from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries used a rich combination of philosophical analysis and artistic expression to critique received social ideas about race, gender and class; to analyse experiences of injustice; to develop alternative ideals of personal identity, justice, equality and community; and build movements for social change. This is therefore a highly interdisciplinary unit. In approaching our topic we draw on a variety of sources, including academic philosophy, philosophical essays, arts, and literature. We study works from across the African Diaspora, including Black British, African American and Caribbean thinkers.

## **Race and Justice** (1st and 2nd-year Liberal Arts)

In this unit, we explore the themes of 'race and justice' in both historical and contemporary perspectives. We examine legacies of racism and colonialism, and the impact of these legacies on the lives of people today. We will also explore philosophical questions such as why slavery is wrong; whether we should think of race as real or as socially constructed, or even whether we should do away with the concept altogether; what racism is, and what makes it morally objectionable; and what responsibilities we might have today as a result of historical legacies of racial injustice. Along the way we will discover how major black intellectuals, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, James Baldwin and Martin Luther King, Jr., have used a combination of public philosophy and the arts as vehicles for challenging racial injustice. Given current events unfolding in the US, we give some particular attention to understanding the African American context. The history of racial injustice in America is unique, but has many lessons of wider relevance that we will draw on in order to examine issues of race and justice in the UK and the global arena; including topics such as colonialism and its legacies, multiculturalism, and immigration.

## **Environmental Philosophy** (3rd year philosophy)

This unit explores topics in environmental ethics, environmental aesthetics, and green political theory. Our aim is to build our understanding of issues arising in these three areas of philosophy and the environment.

### *Environmental ethics*

What kinds of values, attitudes or principles should guide human beings in relating to the natural world? Do we have reason to respect, love and appreciate things like fellow animals, plants, and ecological communities, for their own sakes? What about other features of the natural world, such as distinctive geologies or species? Are all such reasons fundamentally grounded in our own nature and capacities for appreciation, or do we have non-anthropocentric moral duties in relation to living things and the world around us? What, if anything, grounds our distinctive duties towards fellow animals, and to which animals do any of these particular duties extend?

### *Environmental aesthetics*

One reason that we might value nature is for the aesthetic experiences that we can have in relation to it – such as experiences of beauty, the sublime, curiosity and wonder. On the other hand, we can also have aesthetically negative or neutral experiences of the natural world, such as fear, boredom, indifference, anger and disgust. Are some aesthetic responses to particular features of the natural world more warranted than others? Is it plausible to claim, as some have, that all of nature has positive aesthetic value? In what way, if any, does aesthetic appreciation of nature depend upon background knowledge, such as sensory familiarity, or understanding of natural history or geology? What is the relationship between environmental ethics and environmental aesthetics?

### *Green political theory and environmental justice*

In the final weeks of the course we focus on social justice and the environment (environmental justice). Environmental problems often play out in ways closely linked with social justice. For instance, the poor are disproportionately affected by harm from air and water pollution, flooding, environment-related natural disasters, and often have much more limited access to high-quality green space. By contrast, the well-off have disproportionate access to positive environmental goods, like clear air and water, and access to green space. These facts can have profound implications for patterns of health and wellbeing. We will practice disentangling some of the diverse factors important for understanding the justice implications of environmental degradation.

## **Keywords**

- Ethics
- Normative ethics
- Practical ethics
- Environment and sustainability
- Political philosophy
- Philosophy of economics
- Philosophy of science
- Philosophy of social science
- Decision-making under uncertainty
- Ethics of peace and conflict.

## **Memberships**

### **Organisations**

[Department of Philosophy](#)

### **Academics by department**

- [Philosophy](#)

### **Recent publications**

- Burch-Brown, J, 2018, "[Here's to history in the making': Celebrating Cleo Lake's inauguration as Lord Mayor of Bristol](#)". Bristol 24/7

- Burch-Brown, J, 2017, '[Speaker's Corner: 'Defenders of Colston are the ones airbrushing the past, says Bristol University academic'](#)'. *Bristol Evening Post*.
- Burch-Brown, J, 2017, '[Is it wrong to topple statues and rename schools?](#)'. *Journal of Political Theory and Philosophy*, vol 1., pp. 59-88
- Burch-Brown, J & Archer, A, 2017, '[In defence of biodiversity](#)'. *Biology and Philosophy*, vol 32., pp. 969-997
- Burch-Brown, JM & Baker, W, 2016, '[Religion and reducing prejudice](#)'. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, vol 19., pp. 784-807
- Burch-Brown, JM, 2014, '[Martin Peterson, The Dimensions of Consequentialism: Ethics, Equality and Risk. \(Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013\), pp. vii + 217.: Review](#)'. *Utilitas*, vol 26.
- Burch-Brown, JM, 2014, '[Clues for consequentialists](#)'. *Utilitas*, vol 26.
- Burch-Brown, JM, 2010, '[Compensation and Climate Change: Three Exploratory Games](#)'. in: *Managing Environmental Justice*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, pp. 51-70

[View complete publications list](#) in the University of Bristol publications system