Honours programme in Philosophy
Honours Programme in Philosophy

The Honours Programme in Philosophy offers students a broad and in-depth introduction to the main areas of Western philosophy and the philosophy of their own field. The programme comprises an introductory overview of historical and systematic elements of philosophy for a total of 30 ECTS, and a specialization in the philosophy of your own field for a further 10 ECTS. In addition, you can choose another 5 ECTS from the range provided in the Honours College, and you will take part in the Honours College Talent Development Programme (Pick your own talent). The Honours Programme in Philosophy comprises a total of 45 ECTS.

This honours programme is an interesting option for all University of Groningen students interested in learning about philosophy and the philosophy of their field from a broad academic and social perspective.

Course units in the Honours Programme in Philosophy

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<th>Philosophy of Science</th>
<th>5 ECTS</th>
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<td>History of Philosophy I</td>
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<td>Q1</td>
<td>Social and Political Philosophy</td>
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<td>Q2 or Q3</td>
<td>Philosophy of humanities and life, social, cognitive and natural sciences</td>
<td>10 ECTS</td>
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<td>Either two skills (2 x 2 ECTS) courses or one broadening module (5 ECTS) from Honours College Petrus Camper Track (in the latter case the total amount is 46 ECTS)</td>
<td>4/5 ECTS</td>
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<td>Pick Your Own-talent (PYO-t)</td>
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For more information, please make an appointment with Sanne Raap by sending an e-mail to: e.raap@rug.nl.

Philosophy of Science

Philosophy of science is a relatively young discipline, but the questions it addresses are as old as philosophy itself.

There will be four thematic lectures, each focusing on two central questions:

- What is science?
- What is the scientific method?
- How do we justify scientific knowledge?
- What is the role of probability in science?
- How does scientific explanation work?
- Does science provide a reliable view of the world?
- Which role is played by observations, experiments, and models in various scientific disciplines?
- How does the scientific world view depend on the social and historical context?

Traditionally, philosophy of science focuses on the philosophy of the natural sciences, in particular physics. However, this course is of interest to students of all faculties: relations to other fields of study (including social sciences, medicine, law, and politics) will be made explicit during the course.
History of Philosophy I
This course unit serves as an introduction to a few of the philosophical giants on whose shoulders we stand. We start with Classical Antiquity, when the Presocratics, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle first systematically questioned knowledge, language and science, the good life, politics and many other subjects. Their thinking became a basis for medieval masters such as Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham, who created or questioned the synthesis between the Christian faith and classical philosophy. At the start of the modern era, Descartes took charge of the philosophical agenda with his ‘I think, therefore I am’ supposition, after which a long list of thinkers helped to shape modern philosophy and today’s scientific view of the world: Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, Hume. We finish with Kant, whose work shook the foundations of the philosophical landscape by claiming that man alone is responsible for creating order in the natural world.

History of Philosophy II
This course focuses on core issues in the history of philosophy from Kant (1724-1804) to Sartre (1905-1980). We build on History of Philosophy I and start with the works of Kant and Hegel. Kant and Hegel articulated influential views on the nature of philosophy, science, history, and historiographical method. For Hegel, philosophy is essentially a historical process and history is characterized by progress. The idea of historical progress was criticized by Nietzsche, who adopted historical methods to relativize enlightenment ideals such as truth and morality. In England, Hegel's philosophy was criticized by Russel, one of the founders of analytic philosophy: a philosophical school which highlighted the importance of studying language, logic and scientific methodology. Within this school, Frege and Russell attempted to reduce mathematics to logic, Wittgenstein analyzed the relation between language and reality, and the logical positivists investigated the status of scientific languages and theories. This emphasis on scientific rationality gave rise to philosophical countermovements. How can we attribute meaning to a world dominated by science and technology? Is there still place for human autonomy and free will? These questions are central to the works of continental philosophers such as Sartre.

Reasoning and Arguing
This course unit is made up of an introduction to the theory of argumentation, an initial encounter with formal logic and a guest lecture about what is known as practical reasoning. During the theory of argumentation, we will discuss the following subjects using modern examples from current public debate:

- In which ways can people disagree with each other?
- What does a critical discussion involve?
- Can you hold a discussion partner to something he or she has not actually said?
- What are fallacies and what is wrong with them?

In formal logic (syllogism and proposition logic), the following questions will be among the subjects we explore:

- What is the meaning of ‘meaning’?
- What do we mean when we say someone is inconsistent?
- What is formal logic?
- When exactly is a line of reasoning valid or invalid?
Good and Evil: Introduction to Ethics

Why is it wrong to lie? Why do we hate arrogance? What makes someone’s life ‘successful’? And if it is good to donate money to charity, is it bad not to? These are just a few examples of questions thrown up by ethics, which we study during this course unit. First of all, we try to define what makes a question a moral question. What do we understand by ‘good’ and ‘evil’? And is there even a purpose to contemplating moral questions? We then study the work of philosophers such as Aristotle, Hobbes, Kant and Mill, whom we touched upon during History of Philosophy I and II, examining the foremost ethical theories: virtue ethics, contract theory, deontology and utilitarianism. These theories, and the problems they bring to light, are discussed on the basis of concrete, up-to-date examples (the environment, euthanasia, financial services, etc.).

Social and Political Philosophy

Social and political philosophy is concerned with asking philosophical questions about the different ways in human beings live together. In particular, it focuses on the role which political institutions play in our societies. Political philosophers ask questions such as: What is the ultimate end of politics? How should we decide between different forms of government? Is there one single end that all governments should pursue - such as justice or equality - or should governments be only concerned with protecting the freedom of everyone to live as they please? To what extent may society limit the freedom of individuals? Is it ever justified to resist the state?

In the course, we will focus on the different answers these questions have received throughout the history of philosophy and on how they inform contemporary debates about political issues.

Philosophy of humanities and life, social, cognitive and natural sciences

For this course unit you choose the track most suited to your own field. The course unit then looks into the basis, the methods and the specific philosophical issues involved in the field concerned. In addition, we examine the conceptual assumptions and theoretical viability of various subjects and strategies within that particular academic field. The course unit on Philosophy of Natural Sciences, for example, focuses on the philosophical aspects of a number of important presuppositions in natural sciences, such as causality, space, time and space-time, the direction of time, etc.

Philosophy of Humanities revolves around the question: what is interpretation? Everything that we do or produce is subject to interpretation: texts, buildings, works of art, historical actions, etc. In this course unit, we discuss several theories and strategies commonly used to interpret these matters within the various areas of humanities: hermeneutics, structuralism, psychoanalysis, Neo-Marxism, deconstruction.

In Philosophy of Life Sciences, we study the conceptual and theoretical viability of many subjects, including evolution, genes, units of selection, adaptation and fitness, development, nature-nurture, functional explanations, biological categories and human nature. The course unit provides an introduction to this philosophical reflection on life sciences.

Philosophy of Cognitive Sciences goes into the theoretical principles of cognitive sciences. What do cognitive sciences teach us about human cognition? Are our brains simply organic computers, and thinking and feeling nothing more than computation? A historical overview guides us through the main ideas and concepts in cognitive science.
Every approach is governed by its own theoretical presuppositions, which encompass both possibilities and restrictions.
The course unit in Philosophy of Social Sciences focuses on philosophical questions relating to the study of social aspects of human behaviour. What is human behaviour? What makes it social? Is human behaviour rational? Can human behaviour be explained along the same lines as natural phenomena? Or is do we need special methodology with a major focus on interpretation? Do functionalist explanations still have a place in social sciences? Have social groups and social structures acquired a kind of autonomous status or are they simply a sum of their constituent parts?