Honours Programme in Philosophy
Honours Programme in Philosophy

The Honours Programme in Philosophy is a special track of the Honours Bachelor’s programme. It 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 **4 ECTS** from the skills modules provided by the Honours College, and you will take part in the Honours College Talent Development Programme (Pick Your Own-talent, **1 ECTS**). The Honours Programme in Philosophy comprises a total of **45 ECTS**.

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

**Group size:**
Each cohort of the Honours Programme in Philosophy comprises a maximum amount of students (25).

**Teaching & Examination:**
Examination takes place mainly by writing assignments and presentations. Students are expected to be interested in improving their writing skills.

**Schedule:**
Classes are normally scheduled on Tuesday evenings (19.00-21.00 hours). Please check the schedule generator for up to date information.

**Attendance:**
Honours College students are expected to attend all classes.

**Selection & Duration:**
You can find all information about the selection procedure on the Honours College website. Selection takes place after the first semester of year 1 of your Bachelor programme. The first Honours course starts in the 4th quarter of year 1. The Honours programme is completed with the Honours Festival in June of your third year.

**Student profile:**
Previous experience with philosophy is not a prerequisite but a good motivation is indispensable. Potential candidates often have a broad interest and like theoretical questions.
## Course units in the Honours Programme in Philosophy

| Year 1 Q4 | Philosophy. The Very Beginnings | 5 ECTS |
| Year 2 Q1 | History of Philosophy I | 5 ECTS |
| Year 2 Q2 | History of Philosophy II | 5 ECTS |
| Year 2 Q3 | Philosophy of Science | 5 ECTS |
| Year 2 Q4 | Good and Evil: Introduction to Ethics | 5 ECTS |
| Year 3 Q1 | Social and Political Philosophy | 5 ECTS |
| Year 3 Q2 | Specialization: Philosophy of Humanities or Life, Social, Cognitive and Natural Sciences | 10 ECTS |

| Year 1 & 2 | Two skills modules (2 x 2 ECTS) from the broadening part of the Bachelor’s Honours Programme | 4 ECTS |
| Year 1, 2 & 3 | Pick Your Own-talent (PYO-t) | 1 ECTS |

### Philosophy. The Very Beginnings

The course starts with an introduction to philosophy. We will examine some central questions in philosophy such as: What is knowledge? How is our mind related to our brain? How is language possible? Do we have free will? Which inequalities are unjust? The course continues with an introduction to formal logic. We will discuss issues such as: What is a valid argument? How are we to evaluate whether an argument in natural language is valid? What is a proof? You will write and discuss short essays on the central problems of philosophy and practice analysing and evaluating reasoning.

### History of Philosophy I

This course unit serves as an introduction to a few of the philosophical giants on whose shoulders we stand. You will read some central texts, focusing primarily upon Descartes. Students are required to develop knowledge of the texts and a critical understanding of the views and arguments of the relevant philosophers. At the same time, you will exercise your own judgement on the interpretation of the texts and the arguments they contain.

### History of Philosophy II

This course is divided into two parts. The first part of the course focuses on the dramatic transformation in the philosophical landscape between the eighteenth and mid-twentieth century. The first part of the course will discuss the fundamental milestones of this process by examining four fundamental figures: Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Arendt. In this way, the course will provide an introduction to the philosophical approach usually labelled “continental philosophy”, which is characterized by the importance attributed to the historically and socially embedded nature of philosophical reflection.

The second part of the course examines the origins and development of analytic philosophy: a philosophical school which highlights the importance of studying
language, logic and scientific methodology. The emphasis on scientific rationality of this school of thought (Frege, Russel, Wittgenstein) also gave rise to philosophical counter movements which asked itself, for example, how can we attribute meaning to a world dominated by science and technology?

**Philosophy of Science**

Philosophy of science is a relatively young discipline, but the questions it addresses are as old as philosophy itself. During the lectures, we will focus on some central questions, such as: What is science? What is the scientific method? How do we justify scientific knowledge? 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 on physics. However, in this course, relations to other fields of study (including social sciences, medicine, law, and politics) will be made explicit.

**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 you 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 which 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 specialization course 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 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 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.

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 like hermeneutics, structuralism, psychoanalysis, Neo-Marxism and 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.

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 do we need a special methodology with a major focus on interpretation? Do functionalist explanations still have a place in social sciences? Did social groups and social structures acquire a kind of autonomous status or are they simply a sum of their constituent parts?
The PYO-t programme and the Honours Festival are integral parts for all Honours students.

1 You have to pick 2 skills modules in total.
2 Attend either PYO-t Academia or PYO-t Entrepreneurship or both.
3 Philosophy of humanities and life, social, cognitive and natural sciences; you have to pick the course most suited to your own academic field.
4 The PYO-t 3 workshop can be done in either semester 1 or in semester 2.