

## Executive summary

The Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Groningen is one of the last two independent philosophy faculties in the Netherlands. It includes three departments: Theoretical Philosophy; Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy; and History of Philosophy. The Faculty is home to the Groningen Research Institute for Philosophy (GRIPh), which oversees the research carried out by the academic staff of the Faculty.

GRIPh's mission focuses on producing high-quality, impactful research across various philosophical fields. The strategy includes attracting top talent, securing external funding, and engaging with society through the Kenniscentrum Filosofie (KCF), which connects academic philosophy with real-world issues.

This approach has led to strong international recognition, with faculty members regularly publishing in leading academic journals, securing competitive research grants, and being awarded highly prestigious prizes. The Committee is impressed by the strong international reputation of faculty members, whose books and articles have significantly influenced their respective fields.

GRIPh's societal relevance is a key strength, as the faculty is committed to addressing social challenges through philosophy. Its outreach includes publications in international media, public lectures, and collaborations with external partners. The KCF plays a key role in facilitating these connections, bridging academic research and broader societal conversations.

The Committee recognizes GRIPh as a viable and very well-regarded research institute despite external challenges, including changes in the previous provisions by the Dutch government concerning PhD funding, as well as anticipated budget constraints under the new Dutch government. GRIPh's success is largely attributed to its embeddedness within an independent Faculty of Philosophy, which provides the agility and autonomy crucial to its success. The Committee encourages GRIPh to explore further opportunities to develop partnerships outside of academia, with continuing care to preserve academic freedom, care that GRIPh has already displayed in current strategies for societal relevance.

The Faculty of Philosophy is characterized by a strong internal culture, stable staffing, and a proactive approach to securing external funding. The Committee therefore stresses the importance of preserving the autonomy and independent structure of the Faculty of Philosophy, which are vital for maintaining the collaborative and flexible research environment that has contributed to the success of GRIPh.

GRIPh is also committed to Open Science, demonstrating leadership in open-access publishing and public engagement. The faculty has made significant progress in increasing its share of open-access publications and has contributed to the development of open-access journals.

The academic culture at GRIPh is characterized by inclusivity, openness, and a non-hierarchical approach, with a strong focus on staff wellbeing. The faculty is committed to diversity, making efforts to increase the representation of female scholars, and to enhance ethnic diversity.

PhD training at GRIPh is well-structured, offering robust supervision and development opportunities. In response to challenges with PhD completion rates, the faculty has implemented several measures to support timely graduations, including improved policies and increased communication within the PhD community.

In conclusion, GRIPh remains a leading institution in philosophy, renowned for its academic independence, interdisciplinary focus, and societal engagement. However, it must address the potential financial challenges posed by decreasing government support so as to ensure the continued success of its research and academic mission.



## SEP evaluation GRIPh: Case studies of social impact

### ***Covid and philosophy***

When the Covid pandemic shook the world and many in-person outreach activities had to be stopped, the *Kenniscentrum* started a series of videos "Philosophy and Corona in 90 seconds."<sup>14</sup> In 11 episodes (some of which were accompanied by newspaper articles or blogposts), members of staff reflected on how philosophical concepts could be applied to the Corona situation, or how the Corona situation changed their thinking on certain concepts. These include, for example, the notion of a prisoner's dilemma and its ethical challenges, the relation between science and policy, or the notion of existential risks. In addition, Herzog was part of an high-profile international ethics working group, under the leadership of Ezekiel Emanuel, that worked on a paper on justice in global vaccine distribution. They developed the "Fair Priority Model" that appeared in an open-access article in *Science* (together with several follow-up publications); Herzog took on the news communication about it for several Dutch and German outlets.

### ***#DemocratizingWork***

During the Corona pandemic, Herzog became one of the first signatories of, and a driving force behind the manifest: WORK: DEMOCRATIZE, DECOMMODIFY, REMEDIATE (see <https://democratizingwork.org>). It was signed by thousands of academics, activists and citizens worldwide and was published in over 30 countries. Herzog helped organize signatures, translations, and publications. This was the beginning of a global network of concerned academics, run by a steering committee of 12 female scholars from around the world, that aimed at raising awareness about the need to ensure fair working conditions for all (formal and informal) workers worldwide.

Since 2020, they have published an edited volume (in French) that was translated into several languages (English, Brazilian Portuguese; Turkish and German are forthcoming). In 2022, the group organized the digital *Global Forum on Democratizing Work*, which had over 3000 participants. Herzog was also a co-leader of the Dutch chapter, which organized a series of webinars for the Netherlands, helped organize the Dutch translation of the book, and held a book launch at *Pakhuis De Zwijger* in Amsterdam, moderated by Herzog. In 2023-24, Herzog helped organize a Global webinar series in collaboration with Wage Indicator Foundation. This work has also been influential on the political level: Herzog was invited to speak at an expert hearing at the Social and Economic Council, and the manifesto was mentioned in a report by the European Parliament.

### ***In the Court Room***

This is a project of Jan-Willem Romeijn, professor of Philosophy of Science, which contributes to the application of philosophical insights from epistemology and philosophy of science to real-life contexts. The normative study of reasoning and decision making is a core component of philosophical inquiry, and it is obviously of practical importance: it helps scientists determine what they may conclude from their data, and it helps groups of decision makers to arrive at adequate group opinions and coordinated actions. Legal contexts offer an important and prominent application domain for this line of research. What exactly should judges conclude from the evidence provided in a case? What are the typical pitfalls and biases that need to be avoided, especially when the reasoning and decision making is a joint effort?

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.rug.nl/filosofie/outreach/filosofie-en-corona/>.

Romeijn has developed several courses for the professional development of judges and other people working at the courts, mostly through the national Foundation for the Study of Jurisprudence (Stichting Studiecentrum Rechtspleging, SSR). Currently he offers a two-day course on “Decision making”, focused on senior judges and managers in the legal profession, in collaboration with a social psychologist and a senior appeal courts judge, who approach the course theme from their respective vantage points. The course can be accessed via the national training site for judges; it is capped at some 15 attendants yearly and always fully booked.

Besides these courses Romeijn offers presentations and day-long workshops for select groups, varying in size between 20 to 100 participants, e.g., for the national association of public prosecutors or for a study day of a specific team at the courts. Much of this work is based on a national guideline for improving collective decision making in civil appeal courts that Romeijn helped develop. This guideline has received attention far beyond its initially intended audience and continues to generate response and requests for lectures.

### ***Teaching argumentation with software***

Dr. Van Laar, expert in argumentation theory, has developed an educational method called "Middle Ground" ("Tussenweg"). Targeting students at high schools, colleges and universities, it takes its inspiration from the theories of Jane Mansbridge on so-called 'deliberative negotiation'. It offers a way to systematically deliberate with peers about a moral or political issue, in particular an issue about which there exist widely divergent opinions, such as gender quota in companies or the apportioning of a tight budget in times of shortage. The goal of the method is to reach a compromise which each participant in the deliberation can subscribe to as a fair and defensible outcome. By help of several "fellowships for innovative teaching", van Laar rolled out this method in various programs at the University of Groningen, among which the teacher training in social studies, and also tested versions of it at high schools.

In 2019, the open source educational software package "Middle Ground" was released, which enables small groups of students to engage online in reasoned compromise formation on political issues, and to use these experiences to reflect both on the negotiation process and the quality of the outcome. In 2022, the open source software package "Deliberative Debate" was released, enabling teachers and advanced students to themselves design a variety of discussion procedures, such as a negotiation dialogue, a competitive debate, a collaborative critical discussion or a policy-oriented deliberation. Once a discussion procedure has been designed, participants can be invited to engage in a discussion along these lines, in order to gather user experiences and thoughtful reflections on design choices that are helpful for high-quality argumentative exchanges.

The two applications have been presented at an international conference for Italian debate trainers and an accompanying publication in a volume addressing that audience, and at a Turkish research group on Islam-based forms of debate (“Munazara”) and in a publication in a Canadian volume for teachers in Critical Thinking. In the Netherlands, the software has been discussed and applied in teacher training in social studies (Groningen), in the master’s programme Ethics of Education: Philosophy, History and Law (Groningen), and in a group of teachers in civic skills (“burgerschapsvaardigheden”) at the ROC Midden Nederland (Utrecht). Since 2022, Deliberative Debate is also being used in the faculty’s philosophy programs, and plans are being developed for further uses of the software in philosophical research, and in civic settings.

### ***The Night of Philosophy***

Even though it be understood as falling more under “outreach” than “impact,” we want to briefly mention the annual *Night of Philosophy*, an event which, in the last years, took place in the public *Forum* in the center of town. It is co-organized by the *Forum, Studium Generale*, and our faculty. With a program running from 19.30 to midnight, in up to nine parallel rooms (some smaller, more interactive settings, others large cinema halls for lectures), it has sold 800 tickets in the last editions. Every year, the faculty, via the *Kenniscentrum*, is directly involved in planning sessions and inviting external speakers.

In addition, the *Night of Philosophy* is an opportunity for all faculty members, from PhD students upwards, to get involved in the public presentation of philosophical research and public discussions, in Dutch or in English. The activities involve classical lectures, but also philosophical theatre plays, philosophical meditation sessions, and other performances (including a pair of philosophers dressed up as Plato and Aristotle engaging in discussions with audience members between sessions). It also creates connections to alumni, who are regularly invited, and to the broader public interested in philosophy in the city of Groningen and beyond. As such, it stands out as an event that brings philosophy into the public space, reaching an audience that would be hard to draw to more academic settings.