

Philosophy and Humanism: Place for external PhDs

The research group researches the foundations and principles as well as the history of humanism. We understand humanism as a combination of intellectual, artistic and political traditions in western and global cultures that take a critical stance concerning religious, philosophical and political ideas, scientific and economic practices, and social structures or hierarchies. Our research investigates the concepts, traditions and values on which humanism is based and will influence our future. They are critically examined, reconstructed and brought up to date where necessary.

Chair	Humanism & Philosophy
Supervisors	Prof. dr. Christoph Henning Second supervision team member
Field of Research	Title: Critical Humanisms
UvH Research Theme	Humanism in the 21 st Century
Description (max 150 words)	Currently, humanism is viewed by some with the dubious reputation of being the foundation of many questionable achievements of modernity: environmental destruction, colonialism, misogyny, and racism are sometimes attributed to Enlightenment humanism. This is historically and conceptually inaccurate and leads to disorientation. Hence, this field of study aims to show through selected case studies, that in the majority of cases, humanism was a critical voice and specifically opposed the problematic tendencies of modernity. This ranges from the anti-colonialism of Alexander von Humboldt, to socialist humanism, and extends to postcolonial thinkers like Fanon, Said and Wynter.
Examples of research questions (max 100 words)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How can we reconstruct critical traditions in philosophical humanism today, in times of ecological and political crisis?2. Why exactly did the critique of humanism become such an important topic for thinkers like Heidegger, Althusser, Foucault and others? What were they arguing against, and why did this line of argument become so popular?
Place for	1 external PhD student
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Chair	Humanism & Philosophy
Supervisors	Prof. dr. Christoph Henning dr. Marieke van den Doel
Field of Research	Title: What is humanistic art?
UvH Research Theme	Humanism in the 21 st Century
Description (max 150 words)	Humanism as a worldview focuses on values and activities that enable individuals to lead a fulfilling, meaningful and happy life. It criticizes institutions & practices that are detrimental to human flourishing. However, as human rational capabilities are limited, there are other ways to enrich a human life and to reflect on the goals of life. One of them is art. Art is a human practice, and often investigated by the humanities. But does that mean that art <i>per se</i> is “humanistic”? What makes a work of art relevant for humanism? What role can art play or has art played within the frameworks and goals of humanism? Which styles, topics, or practices are particularly relevant for humanism? And what, vice versa, is the impact humanism had (and still has) on artistic practices?
Examples of research questions (max 100 words)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can we make sense of the judgement that certain works of art are considered ‘humanist’? Which concepts of humanism are implied, do they relate to artistic practices? 2. How is humanism, or being human, visualized in certain periods of art history, or appropriated in works of art, and what is considered the “other” (nonhuman) in these cases? 3. Which artistic practices are particularly important for humanism today (e.g., art in prisons or humanistic chaplaincy)? How do they affect our understanding of humanism? 4. Projects about specific works of art or artists in relation to (contemporary or historical) forms of humanism are also welcome, for instance early modern humanism and art or ecohumanism and art.
Place for	1 external PhD student
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Chair	Humanism & Philosophy
Supervisors	Prof. dr. Christoph Henning dr. Jan Overwijk
Field of Research	Title: Critical Theory, Eco-Marxism, and/or Posthumanism
UvH Research Theme	Humanism in the 21 st Century
Description (max 150 words)	We welcome interdisciplinary PhD projects on the relation between economy and ecology in the field of critical theory and/or social philosophy. The PhD project should have a focus in critical theory and social philosophy, but we encourage interdisciplinary research, for instance by bringing in insights and objects from sociology, political economy, cultural studies, science and technology studies, gender studies, and other relevant fields. Our precarious situation within the Capitalocene raises many questions, in particular about how economic value relates to non-economic or ecological forms of wealth, or whether the Anthropocene demand a humanist or posthumanist perspective. See possible research questions below.
Examples of research questions (max 100 words)	Does human waged labor represent a special institution in the logic of capitalist value-creation, or should this logic be theoretically expanded in order to make room for more-than-human actants (such as animals and natural processes) and non-waged labor (such as gendered and racialized free reproductive work)? Does capitalist production undermine its conditions of reproduction? If so, what does this mean for the future of capitalism, its crisis-tendencies, and its socio-political fault lines? What may be learnt from social movements and real environmental politics in studying these questions in political philosophy and related disciplines? What resources does critical theory and eco-Marxism offer in thinking about the questions posed above? What can be learnt from staging encounters between critical theory and other approaches, such as ecological economics, environmental economics, environmental sociology, and so on?
Place for	1 external PhD student
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Chair	Christoph Henning
Supervisors	Prof. dr. Timothy Stacey Second supervision team member
Field of Research	Title: Restoring faith in freedom and democracy (religious studies, sociology, anthropology, political science)
UvH Research Theme	Humanism in the 21 st Century
Description (max 150 words)	<p>Exploring the symbols, rituals, and performative styles through which faith in freedom and democracy are cultivated, bolstered, and secured. I have a special interest in the following themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a quantitative method for identifying the dominant societal symbols (understood generally as the symbols that, when convincingly interpreted, facilitate social and political persuasion. For example, the crucifix, the national flag, or the idea of freedom). • Ethnographic studies of the symbols, rituals, and performances through which people convincingly interpret dominant symbols. • Participant observation of the spaces in which people can experiment with political persuasion. For example, churches, stand-up comedy, activist actions. <p>For a definition of dominant symbols, see here: Dramaturgies of change: Staging political transformation - Timothy Stacey, Jeroen Oomen, Jesse Hoffman, Maarten Allard Hajer, 2025</p>
Examples of research questions (max 100 words)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the symbols, rituals, and performative styles through which faith in freedom and democracy are cultivated, bolstered, and secured? • What is the most rigorous means of identifying dominant symbols? • What techniques do people employ to convincingly interpret dominant symbols?
Place for	2 external PhD students
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Chair	Christoph Henning
Supervisors	Prof. dr. Timothy Stacey dr. Daan F. Oostveen
Field of Research	Posthuman Religion
UvH Research Theme	Justice and Inclusion
Description (max 150 words)	The study of religion has historically alternated between a focus on the transcendent and ultimate truths and the human realm. Environmental and technological revolutions are changing the world we inhabit. Religion is imagination; it is the imaginative practice in the universe. Rather than study religion either with a focus on the projection of transcendence, or as a social phenomenon about human relations, by studying religion by looking at the planetary entanglements religion engenders and the rhizomatic structures are commonly understood as "religion" we can arrive at new ways to imagine the meaning of spirituality. How does religion as imaginative practice produce life worlds on earth in a more-than-human environment? How can indigenous perspectives on spirituality, such as cosmovisions, enhance the imaginative potential of religion towards sustainable futures? This project would deliver a critical theory of imagination, which shows how posthuman relations are shaping religious and spiritual constellations.
Examples of research questions (max 100 words)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent is a posthuman religion emerging? - What impact does religion have in the time of the convergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Sixth Mass Extinction (Braidotti 2019)? - What role does imagination play in our future imaginations? - How do environmental challenges and religion converge? - How can methodologies such critical posthumanism, new materialism and interdisciplinarity be adjusted to be applied to the discipline of the study of religion and spirituality?
Place for	1 external PhD students
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Chair	Christoph Henning
Supervisors	Prof. dr. Manuela Kalskty dr. Daan F. Oostveen
Field of Research	Rhizomatic Belonging
UvH Research Theme	Humanism in the 21st Century
Description (max 150 words)	"Belonging" is fast becoming a hot topic in social sciences and philosophy. Rather than identity, belonging indicates a desire to feel at home, which is something that many people are increasingly lacking in an unstable world. However, our sense of belonging is not as clearly defined as it used to be. Our belongings are multiple, layered, and decentralized. The metaphor of the rhizome, a horizontal root structure, has been used to express these new metamodern forms of belongingness. This project aims at working through the concept of rhizomatic belonging and see how it can provide tools for understand the social transformations were living through and define a humanism for the 21st century.
Examples of research questions (max 100 words)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What social dimensions can we deduce from the concept of belonging? - How does belonging add up compared to discourses on identity, inclusivity, and intersectionality? What is gained? What is lost? - How can we employ the concept of rhizomatic belonging for a humanism in the 21st century?
Place for	1 external PhD students
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