



Fourth 2021/2022 Groningen PPE Colloquium

Wednesday, May 25, 2022, 15.15-16.45
Faculty of Philosophy, Room Omega*

Anna Alexandrova (Cambridge): How can thick concepts be legitimate in science?

Abstract: Thick concepts, namely those concepts that describe and evaluate simultaneously, present a challenge to science. Since science does not have a monopoly on value judgments, what is responsible research involving such concepts? Using measurement of wellbeing as an example, we first present the options open to researchers wishing to study phenomena denoted by such concepts. We argue that while it is possible to treat these concepts as technical terms, or to make the relevant value judgment in-house, the responsible thing to do, especially in the context of public policy, is to make this value judgment through a legitimate political process that includes all the stakeholders of this research. We then develop a participatory model of measurement based on the ideal of co-production. To show that this model is feasible and realistic, we illustrate it with a case study of co-production of a concept of thriving conducted by the authors in collaboration with a UK anti-poverty charity Turn2us.

Bio: Anna Alexandrova is a Professor in Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge and a fellow of King's College Cambridge. She researches ways in which scientists deploy formal tools such as models and indicators to navigate complex epistemic problems tinged with ethical and political dimensions. Her book *A Philosophy for the Science of Wellbeing* came out with Oxford University Press in 2017 and is the winner of the 2021 Joseph B. Gittler Award from the American Philosophical Association.

*For personal reasons, the speaker cannot travel and will join us online.