

Knowledge and Reality

HNRS 2030: Humanities Colloquium

Spring 2019

TTh: 3:00-4:20

Prof. Roland (Philosophy)

Course Objective

The goal of this course is to familiarize students with some of the content and methods of inquiry common in contemporary philosophy through consideration of a representative sample of debates in metaphysics and epistemology, broadly construed.

Course Description

This course will be an introduction to contemporary metaphysics and epistemology, broadly construed. It will consist of three modules, one each in epistemology proper, philosophy of language, and metaphysics proper. The epistemology module will be concerned with skepticism about the external world as it comes to us in Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy* and, in updated form, in Hilary Putnam's "Brains in a Vat." We will consider Putnam's proposed semantic externalist (roughly, that linguistic content is determined in part by factors external to speakers and independent of their linguistic intentions) solution to external world skepticism, which will lead us naturally into a discussion of causal theories of reference and meaning (which hold, roughly, that what we pick out by uses of singular terms such as proper names and ultimately what we say with our uses of language generally depends robustly on causal relations between speakers and the world). This discussion will be the focus of our philosophy of language module. Here the work of Putnam and Saul Kripke will figure prominently. This discussion will raise the issue of causation, which will occupy us during the metaphysics module. We will examine the so-called *counterfactual analysis of causation* (roughly, that C caused E just in case had C not occurred, E wouldn't have occurred) found in Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* and later developed by David Lewis.

This course is expected to be certified as a communication-intensive (C-I) course.