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Sommario/riassunto

The notion of 'natural kinds' has been central to contemporary discussions of metaphysics and philosophy of science. Although explicitly articulated by nineteenth-century philosophers like Mill, Whewell and Venn, it has a much older history dating back to Plato and Aristotle. In recent years, essentialism has been the dominant account of natural kinds among philosophers, but the essentialist view has encountered resistance, especially among naturalist metaphysicians and philosophers of science. Informed by detailed examination of classification in the natural and social sciences, this book argues against essentialism and for a naturalist account of natural kinds. By looking at case studies drawn from diverse scientific disciplines, from fluid mechanics to virology and polymer science to psychiatry, the author argues that natural kinds are nodes in causal networks. On the basis of this account, he maintains that there can be natural kinds in the social sciences as well as the natural sciences.
