

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910779989003321
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Titolo	Natural categories and human kinds : classification in the natural and social sciences // Muhammad Ali Khalidi [[electronic resource]]
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Cambridge : , : Cambridge University Press, , 2013
ISBN	1-139-88846-3 1-107-24122-7 1-107-25083-8 1-107-52172-6 1-107-25000-5 1-107-24834-5 1-107-24751-9 0-511-99855-4 1-107-24917-1
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (xvi, 250 pages) : digital, PDF file(s)
Disciplina	001.01/2
Soggetti	Categories (Philosophy) Classification
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Title from publisher's bibliographic system (viewed on 05 Oct 2015).
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and index.
Nota di contenuto	Contents; Figures; Preface; Chapter 1 Metaphysical Realism and essentialism about kinds; 1.1 Kinds of things; 1.2 Kinds and universals; 1.3 Kinds and essences; 1.4 Definability; 1.5 Modal necessity; 1.6 Intrinsicity; 1.7 Microstructure; 1.8 Conclusion; Chapter 2 The naturalness of kinds; 2.1 Natural kinds and epistemic kinds; 2.2 Discoverability by science; 2.3 Scientific kinds and folk categories; 2.4 Fuzzy kinds; 2.5 Crosscutting kinds; 2.6 HPC kinds and causal kinds; 2.7 Conclusion; Chapter 3 Kinds in the special sciences; 3.1 Which sciences are special? 3.2 Multiple realizability and special-science kinds 3.3 Causation and special-science kinds; 3.4 Natural laws and special-science kinds; 3.5 Real causal patterns; 3.6 Levels of explanation and crosscutting kinds; 3.7 Conclusion; Chapter 4 Kinds in the biological and social sciences; 4.1 Biological and social kinds; 4.2 Selected kinds and designed kinds;

4.3 Etiological kinds; 4.4 Historical kinds or copied kinds; 4.5 Mind-dependent and interactive kinds; 4.6 Institutional and conventional kinds; 4.7 Normative kinds or evaluative kinds; 4.8 Conclusion; Chapter 5 Kinds of natural kinds
5.1 Introduction 5.2 Lithium; 5.3 Polymer; 5.4 Virus; 5.5 Cancer and cancer cell; 5.6 Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); 5.7 Conclusion; Chapter 6 Kinds naturalized; 6.1 Naturalism about kinds; 6.2 Properties and kinds; 6.3 Causality and kinds; 6.4 Realism and pluralism; 6.5 Mind-independence and social constructionism; 6.6 Conclusion; Bibliography; Index

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.
