M. A. Khalidi
makhalidi@gc.cuny.edu

CUNY GC – Spring 2023
Mon 11:45-1:45

PHIL 77000: Natural Kinds

Course Description

"Natural kind" is one of those terms of art that is ubiquitous in philosophical discussions but barely mentioned outside the discipline. Yet, the topic is of broad relevance to many scientific discussions regarding validating categories, assessing taxonomies, and operationalizing constructs, and is pertinent to many debates in other fields, as well as in public discourse. (e.g. Is a pandemic a real type of phenomenon or an arbitrary designation? Is ADHD a valid psychiatric diagnosis or a profit-making scheme devised by pharmaceutical companies?) In recent decades, discussion of this topic in philosophy has been driven by a consideration of the semantic features of the terms that denote natural kinds (e.g. 'water,' 'tiger'), but there is an increasing realization that the topic should be pursued from the point of view of metaphysics and philosophy of science rather than the philosophy of language. Consequently, there has been an abundance of work on specific scientific categories and taxonomies, and discussions of these issues has become increasingly naturalistic and empirically grounded. In this course, we will look mainly at recent work on natural kinds, primarily in empirically informed metaphysics and in philosophy of science, with some attention to specific case studies. We will also be concerned to understand the relevance of these discussions for biological taxonomy, psychiatric nosology, and social ontology, among other domains. In so doing, we will question many common assumptions about natural kinds among philosophers, such as that they are associated with essences, are restricted to the domains of the natural sciences, and are mind-independent in various ways. We will also be querying the expression "natural kind" itself, partly because it seems to exclude social and artifactual phenomena from its purview.

Course Requirements

Presentations (20%): You will be asked to give one presentation on one of the course readings. I'll ask you to choose a few articles that you're especially interested in after the first session and I'll make an effort to see that everyone gets one of their top choices, with presentations starting in the second or third week of the semester. These presentations will be short (10-minute) overviews of the reading, which will launch us into a discussion, rather than attempts to give a comprehensive account of the reading in question. In the final two sessions of the course, we will have a condensed mini-conference based on your term papers. You will be asked to give a short presentation on your term paper, and it will be followed by a Q&A.

Short response papers (20%): You will be asked to submit 10 reading responses (200-300 words) on 10 of the readings covered in class, either before or after the reading has been discussed in class. These responses will be due two days after class (by 11 pm on Wednesday) on Blackboard. Your reading response should develop a point in one of the readings, or raise an objection, or otherwise meaningfully engage with the reading in question. Your response can be based on issues discussed in class but should go beyond class discussion in some way. These response papers cannot be submitted late unless there are documented extenuating circumstances.

Draft term paper (20%): Around halfway into the semester, I'll propose some paper topics and will also invite you to come up with topics of your own. Once we've mutually agreed on a topic, you'll have

around two weeks to submit a short paper (roughly 2500 words) on that topic. This will be a first draft of your term paper for the course.

Revised term paper (40%): At least two weeks before the end of the semester, I'll return your draft paper with comments and suggestions for development. You will then revise it and expand it into a term paper for the course (roughly 5000 words), which will be due at the end of the semester.

Course Schedule

All readings for the course will be made available via the course's Blackboard site. If you have trouble accessing Blackboard, please tell me and I can arrange a Dropbox or other online folder.

Week 1 (Jan 30): Background and Preliminaries
Khalidi, M. A. (2016). Natural kinds. In P. Humphreys (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Science.* Oxford University Press.
Week 2 (Feb 6): Origins of the Contemporary Debate
Hempel, C. G. (1965). Fundamentals of taxonomy. In *Aspects of scientific explanation and other essays in the philosophy of science* (137-154). Free Press.
Quine, W. V. (1969). Natural kinds. In *Ontological relativity and other essays* (114-138). Columbia University Press.
Holiday: No Class (Feb 13)
Week 3 (Tues*, Feb 21): Essentialism and Its Critics (1)
Putnam, H. (1973). Meaning and reference. *Journal of Philosophy* 70, 699-711.
Wilkerson, T. E. (1988). Natural kinds. *Philosophy* 63, 29-42.
** NB: This class will meet on Tuesday (11:45-1:45) on Zoom (the substitution of Tuesday for Monday is a CUNY-wide thing).*
Week 4 (Feb 27): Essentialism and Its Critics (2)
Mellor, D. H. (1977). Natural kinds. *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 28(4), 299-312.
Donnellan, K. S. (1983). Kripke and Putnam on natural kind terms. In C. Ginet & S. Shoemaker (eds), *Knowledge and Mind* (pp. 84-104). Oxford University Press.
Week 5 (Mar 6): Homeostatic Property Clusters and Historical Kinds
Boyd, R. (1989). What realism implies and what it does not. *Dialectica* 43(1-2), 5-29.
Millikan, R. (1999). Historical kinds and the 'special sciences.' *Philosophical Studies* 95, 45-65.
Week 6 (Mar 13): Pluralistic Realisms
Dupré, J. (2002). Is 'natural kind' a natural kind term? *Monist* 85(1), 29-49.
Khalidi, M. A. (2018). Natural kinds as nodes in causal networks. *Synthese* 195(4), 1379-1396.
Week 7 (Mar 20): Epistemic Approaches and Their Critics (1)
Slater, M. H. (2015). Natural kindness. *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 66(2), 375-411.
Franklin-Hall, L. (2015). Natural kinds as categorical bottlenecks. *Philosophical Studies* 172(4), 925-948.

Week 8 (Mar 27): Epistemic Approaches and Their Critics (2)
Magnus, P. D. (2018). Taxonomy, ontology, and natural kinds. *Synthese* 195(4), 1427-1439.
Lemeire, O. (2021). No purely epistemic theory can account for the naturalness of kinds. *Synthese* 198 (Suppl 12), 2907–2925.
Week 9 (Apr 3): Scale and Complexity
Bursten, J. R. (2018). Smaller than a breadbox: Scale and natural kinds. *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 69, 1-23.
Havstad, J. C. (2021). Complexity begets crosscutting, dooms hierarchy (another paper on natural kinds). *Synthese* 198(8), 7665-7696.
Spring Recess: April 10-14
Week 10 (April 17): Real Kinds in the Human Realm
Hacking, I. (1995). The looping effects of human kinds. In Sperber, D., Premack, D., & Premack, A. J. (eds). *Causal cognition: A multidisciplinary debate*. Oxford University Press.
Cooper, R. (2004). Why Hacking is wrong about human kinds. *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 55, 73-85.
Week 11 (Apr 24): Human and Social Kinds (1)
Thomasson, A. (2003). Realism and human kinds. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*
67(3), 580-609.
Haslanger, S. (2005). What are we talking about? The semantics and politics of social kinds. *Hypatia* 20(4), 10-26.
Week 12 (May 1): Human and Social Kinds (2)
Àsta (2011). The metaphysics of sex and gender. In Witt, C. (ed.), *Feminist Metaphysics* (pp. 47-65). Springer, Dordrecht.
Mills, C. W. (2014). Notes from the resistance: Some comments on Sally Haslanger's "Resisting Reality." *Philosophical Studies* 171(1), 85-97.
Burman, Å. (2020). Categories we do not know we live by. *Journal of Social Ontology* 5(2), 235–243.
Week 13 (May 8): Metaphysical Coda
Hawley, K. & Bird, A. (2011). What are natural kinds? *Philosophical Perspectives* 25(1), 205-221.
Kendig, C. & Grey, J. (2019). Can the epistemic value of natural kinds be explained independently of their metaphysics? *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 72(2), 359-376.
Week 14 (May 15): Presentations