

## *FIL4100*

### Natural Kinds and Other Kinds

Instructor: Sebastian Watzl

#### Course Description

In this course we will discuss the metaphysics of so-called natural kinds. We often – in everyday life as well as in science – classify objects and people into kinds: kinds of objects and kinds of people. Some classifications sound natural. What makes some of these classifications better than others? Are some of them natural? Do natural kinds have essences? Does it all depend on our interests? What is the ideology of ‘naturalness’? We will discuss the issues that arise with respect to the kinds discussed in physics, biology, and the social sciences. ‘Molecules’, ‘Species’, ‘Races’ and ‘Genders’ will be among our topics.

#### Assessment

Students will be assessed on the basis of a “Portfolio Exam” which comprises the following graded requirements:

- **Two 1-2 page summaries of a reading**
  - To be completed in two of the first five weeks of class. The summaries of the text are to be submitted on the day that text is discussed (i.e. not the week after the text is discussed). The last possible submission date for the second summary thus is on the day of session 5 (22/09).
  - Summaries should provide a clear summary of the relevant text: what is the author’s main goal? How does (s)he aim to achieve that goal? What are her/his main argumentative steps? Etc. An ideal summary would be able to be used as an introduction to the relevant session and as the basis for critical discussion.
- **Two 2-3 page critical responses to a reading**
  - To be completed in two of sessions 6 to 10. The critical responses are to be submitted on the day that text is discussed (i.e. not the week after the text is discussed). The last possible submission date for the second critical response thus is on the day of session 10 (03/11).
  - Critical responses should not focus on providing a summary of the relevant text. Instead, they should focus on critical engagement: how might an opponent of the author’s position respond to her/his argumentation? How could the author’s argumentation be extended or improved? What are important considerations the author fails to take into account? An ideal critical response focuses on one important point in the essay that it discusses, and provides a detailed critical analysis or response to that point.
- **One 5-6 page essay**
  - The essay should be on a topic of one of the sessions (students may also focus on one of the supplementary readings). The topic must be different from the topics students wrote their summaries or critical responses for (students who wish to write on a particular topic thus

should choose the topics for their summaries critical responses wisely). Essays cannot just be summaries of texts. They must show critical engagement and self-standing philosophical argumentation. To be submitted 24/11 (the last day of class).

- The essay should have a shape that is similar to the critical responses. Yet it should be longer, more detailed, and more self-standing. It should be a self-standing piece of philosophical argumentation. An ideal essay would be one that could be presented in a short presentation at a professional conference on the relevant topic.