



Concepts, Kinds, and Cognitive Development

Frank C. Keil

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In *Concepts, Kinds, and Cognitive Development*, Frank C. Keil provides a coherent account of how concepts and word meanings develop in children, adding to our understanding of the representational nature of concepts and word meanings at all ages.


Keil argues that it is impossible to adequately understand the nature of conceptual representation without also considering the issue of learning. Weaving together issues in cognitive development, philosophy, and cognitive psychology, he reconciles numerous theories, backed by empirical evidence from nominal kinds studies, natural-kinds studies, and studies of fundamental categorical distinctions. He shows that all this evidence, when put together, leads to a better understanding of semantic and conceptual development.

The book opens with an analysis of the problems of modeling qualitative changes in conceptual development, investigating how concepts of natural kinds, nominal kinds, and artifacts evolve.

The studies on nominal kinds document a powerful and unambiguous developmental pattern indicating a shift from a reliance on global tabulations of characteristic features to what appears to be a small set of defining ones. The studies on natural kinds document an analogous shift toward a core theory instead of simple definition. Both sets of studies are strongly supported by cross cultural data.

While these patterns seem to suggest that the young child organizes concepts according to characteristic features, Keil argues that there is a framework of conceptual categories and causal beliefs that enables even very young children to understand kinds at a deeper, theoretically guided, level. This account suggests a new way of understanding qualitative change and carries strong implications for how concepts are represented at any point in development.

A Bradford Book

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