

How Did We Get Here? — The Idea of Species

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Merlin CCC, December 2022

I. Etymology.

- Latin *species*.
- Greek *eidos*, *idea*.
- In both cases: “that which appears, that which is seen.”

II. Stability and knowledge. Framing the problem, for the Hellenic tradition:

- Heraclitus: flux and the river.
- Parmenides:
 - Being vs. becoming (what *is*, vs. what comes-to-be).
 - The “way of truth,” and the “opinions of mortals.”
 - “Thinking and being are one.”

III. Where can we find stability? Three (attempted) solutions from the Hellenic tradition:

- Plato and his tradition:
 - “Ideas” that are at once eternal (outside of time), and present here-and-now.
 - *Genesis*, coming-to-be, becoming.
 - When we perceive, what do we see? What appears?
 - Wholes vs. “sense-data.”
 - Compare *darśan* in Indian traditions.
- Aristotle:
 - Natural kinds.
 - Key question (ambiguity):
 - Is the “idea” (species) the common form itself?
 - Or is it the group of individuals that manifest that form?
- Stoics:
 - Recurrence of individuals, within a repeating cosmic cycle.

IV. (Mis)readings of Aristotle.

- Late Antiquity: Aristotle as a Platonist.
- Medieval Scholasticism (the Latin reception of Aristotle):
 - Form and matter.
 - Creeping dualism.
 - Thomas Aquinas: Every angel is its own “species.”
- Nominalist movements (William of Ockham, etc.).
 - Abstraction as an imagined imposition.

V. An origin for species? Charles Darwin, in light of the tradition.

- “Species” in whose sense?
- What is it that has an origin?
- Stability of natural forces/processes.
- Where is the good (or the end, *telos*) located?

VI. Contemporary movements and developments.

- Ray Kurzweil (et al.):
 - “The Singularity” and other transhumanisms.
 - Material rhetoric, immaterial substance: The pattern, or the matter?
- “Touch grass.”
 - The abstraction of the technosphere.
 - Upstream, downstream?