How Did We Get Here? — The Idea of Species
David Nowakowski
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.
- “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?