

There is longstanding disagreement among systematists about how to divide biodiversity into species. Over twenty different species concepts are used to group organisms, according to criteria as diverse as morphological or molecular similarity, interbreeding, and genealogical relationships. This, combined with the implications of evolutionary biology, raises the worry either that there is no single kind of species, or that species are not real.

This book surveys the history of thinking about species from Aristotle to modern systematics in order to understand the origin of the problem, and advocates a solution based on the idea of the division of conceptual labor, whereby species concepts function in different ways – theoretically and operationally. It also considers related topics such as individuality and the metaphysics of evolution, and how scientific terms get their meaning. This important addition to the current debate will be essential for philosophers and historians of science, and for biologists.

“Richard A. Richards has developed a compelling argument for understanding the flawed history and misleading characterizations that have long influenced the discussion of the Species Problem. His willingness to deal with this issue with an eye both to accurate history and to philosophical analysis has enabled him to avoid stylized oppositions between ‘essentialism’ and ‘population thinking’ that have long dominated the literature. His book is an important contribution to the discussion of this complex issue.”

Phillip Sloan *University of Notre Dame*

Cover designed by Hart Mcleod

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS
www.cambridge.org

ISBN 978-0-521-19683-3



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