

Chapter 1

The Theory of Biophilia

ABSTRACT

This first chapter introduces the Theory of Biophilia, which argues that a crucial relationship exists among all species, both human and non-human. This theory is unique in that it emphasizes an almost reverent collaboration of all life on the planet Earth toward a common need to survive, rather than their apparent hostility and competitiveness. The Theory of Biophilia expands the human definition of sentient life and examines how important this love of life is to the essential need for regard within both the observer and the observed.

INTRODUCTION

What is *biophilia*? A little background on a big deal like biophilia seems like a good place to start this book. The first occurrence of the term still used today surfaces around 1857, but strangely lumped together with mental disorders like hypochondria, melancholia, and the like (Jahr, 1857). What? Apparently, biophilia was first likened to an illness in which the patient seemed too mindful of his or her body states, rather than being more mindful of his or her mental states. That does sound like an illness—but moreso for the definition than for the disease. Biophilia suggests fondness for biological things (like the body), whereas fondness for Life and living things is hard to do if you are busy loving stuff in your head instead. The original source goes on to state that the chronic condition (biophilia) was thought to result in “unwanted” thoughts about primarily somatic worries, such as the possibility of physical sickness or death (Jahr, 1857). Really? Curiously, this scorn for annoying

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physical issues back in the past was not so very different from “unwanted” thoughts about the impending death of the planet, which many write off as an annoying group delusion.

By 1892, biophilia had become a more specific disorder in a manual of medical and mental disorders, which manual defined biophilia this way: “The instinct of self-preservation common to man and the *lower animals*” (italics added; Tuke, 1892, p. 135). Well, this is an improvement—now persons hampered by the condition known as biophilia were at least as intelligent as the lower animals, if they were not otherwise sick. This does align, however, with an ongoing view of Nature as *endearing yet inferior*, especially its animals. Interestingly, this same view (which by the by, was held by the same gender that wrote all the books) was also held toward women and children—and just about anything that wasn’t old and gray and of the male persuasion (Hodson, Kteily, & Hoffarth, 2014; Meinecke, 2017). After 35 years, concern for living things had only improved from an inconvenient human hypochondria to a vestigial animal instinct.

It was Fromm (1964) who must have drawn from these earlier works (the wording is very similar), by elevating the erstwhile vestigial drive to a well-known Freudian concept known as the *life (or love) instinct* (Gerber, 2019; Maizels, in press). Again—curiously—comparing the love of living things to the life instinct and global war to the *death (or hate) instinct*¹, was very like the current environmental ethics debate, in which some wish only to protect life (the love of life instinct), and others to simply profit from it (a sort of hateful jealousy of life instinct; Nordstrom, 2004). One can readily see the term (biophilia) lifted up from its prior disease model, much like psychology itself has gone from an illness model to a wellness model (even if the focus is still on profit). By 1964, biophilia had begun to refer to a genetically natural impulse overshadowed by recent (and more dominant) drives—which, at times, surfaced as a recessive gene more similar to a pathological impulse than a forgotten empathic gene (Fromm, 1964).

By 2006, biophilia was neither a disease nor a positive attribute of the human species. Like synesthesia, biophilia had become a juvenile trait or “green gene” that survived childhood in women but not in men (Ramachandran & Hubbard, 2001; Weir, 2006). This might be teleologically explainable by the onset of spermarchy and the fierce competition for mates, if viewed through an *evo-devo*² lens. Then, around age 45, secure in the survival of his heredity, the male might let slip the dogs of pacificism in his green genes once again, given the arrival of middle age and the inexorable waning of his previously hot and waxing libido (Buss & Barnes, 1986). Meanwhile, under the radar

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