

Chapter 3

How Taxonomy Steals Reverence

ABSTRACT

Chapter 3 is about classification and the paradox of losing one's positive regard for a thing by being able to describe it well. The philosophy behind the need to recognize what matters constantly versus the curiosity to discover what matters even once has a long and anxious history in many cultures, several predating Western thought. This chapter posits that the human habit of looking at many unique individuals as more similar than different allows them to remember what they cannot bear to forget—at the expense of ignoring the essential differences they will never remember.

INTRODUCTION

“Comparison is the thief of joy” – Theodore Roosevelt

What do the authors mean by *taxonomy*? What does taxonomy have in common with reverence? Reverence is the inability to classify a feeling of wonder. Taxonomy, on the other hand, is the “orderly classification of plants and animals according to their presumed natural relationships” (Taxonomy, 2020). The scientific principles arising from the classification system guide theory and practice. Often, it seems, society would rather preserve its classification system than its planet. Wonder for Nature (and the speechlessness that goes along with that), does not seem in fashion anymore; documenting what is

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about to go extinct has become more popular. Mankind has no intention of changing his ways.

What stands out, however, is how similar this attitude is to a famous line from *A Christmas Carol*:

If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race," returned the Ghost, "will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. (Dickens, 1995, pp. 81-82)

This profound line from an endearing holiday story, summarizes the almost teleological¹ attitudes that human sciences hold toward Nature. Every living being must fit a scientific category, and any being that does not fit one is either feral or ill. This attitude toward living things is tragic enough in the physical sense; in the mental sciences, it is clearly banal in its implications (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2014; Pawlett, 2007). The *will to be* is not constrained by the need to fit a classification system, in much the same way as "the quality of mercy is not strained" by the need for a universal mercy (Shakespeare, 2010, 4.1.189). The individual is burdened with the *will to be* not the fear of fit, such that, if there were a science of wonder, the individuals which could not be fit to any category would dominate the field and its data.

This chapter is about the practice of taxonomy (the classification of just about anything into pigeon holes wherein unique individuals must pretend not to be unique if they hope to find fit in society). This chapter proposes that the ideal of individuality and the categorization of individuals is the myopic pursuit of antithetical goals. This same paradoxical pursuit of opposing goals underpins the current disregard for the living environment's survival, and a similar disregard for the depression and helplessness of human children.

ARE YOU A GOOD ILLNESS OR A BAD ILLNESS?

What is *disease*? What is *health*? The authors ask this because health to one species is quite often a disease to another species. And some diseases are fortuitous, because, since they do not extirpate this financially focused species completely, they can serve as inarguable reasons to wage an economically beneficial war against them. The comparison of similars permits the explosive growth of categorical differences. Similitude is about finiteness; categories are

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