



Attitude Toward the Environment as a Special Case of Attitude Toward All Living Things

J. J. RAY

F. H. LOVEJOY

Department of Psychology

University of New South Wales, Australia

ENVIRONMENTALISTS ARE SOMETIMES ACCUSED of ill-informed emotionalism, but to test emotionalism among them is difficult. Surely what is being argued is that they have an emotional commitment of a particular kind. If we try to measure emotionality about things of particular interest to them, how are we to disentangle general strong support from emotional support?

An approach that may have promise comes from a paper, "Emotional attitudes and political choices," by Maccoby,¹ who offers an attitude scale which he claims measures Fromm's concept of "Biophilia." Fromm² proposes that a very basic attribute in all human beings is their emotional response to living and dead things. Some people are oriented to life in all its untidy diversity, while others prefer dead or nonliving things with their potential for being controlled

Requests for reprints should be sent to J. J. Ray, Department of Psychology, University of New South Wales, P.O. Box 1, Kensington, New South Wales, Australia 2033.



and orderly. Perhaps, then, nature lovers have an emotional commitment to life itself. Environmentalism may be merely one aspect of a general "biophilia."

An improved version of Maccoby's scale,³ together with Ray's⁴ Australian Environmentalism scale, was administered to three diverse groups of Ss: 45 students from the University of Sydney, 54 respondents from groups for unemployed youth, and 58 young activist members of Australia's two main conservative political parties.

Over all 157 Ss the reliabilities (alphas) were .78 for the revised Biophilia scale and .71 for the environmentalism scale. The two scales correlated .27 ($p < .01$). The mean scores on the new Biophilia scale for the three subgroups were as follows: 53.12 ($SD = 5.73$) for the conservatives, 54.13 (9.03) for the unemployed, and 53.77 (8.39) for the students. There were no significant differences. On the environmentalism scale the means for the same three groups were 66.08 (9.36), 72.59 (8.19), and 74.26 (9.04), respectively. The conservatives were much less pro-environment ($p < .001$) than the students.

Although the deduction from Fromm's theory was supported at a high level of significance, the correlation was quite small in absolute magnitude. Emotional attitudes to life generally explained only 7.3% of the variance in environmentalism. This suggests that emotionalism plays a perhaps surprisingly small part in environmentalist attitudes. Measuring the emotional component in attitudes cannot, however, be regarded as a solved problem and, although the Maccoby scale as revised offered a plausible approach to measuring the sort of emotionalism that might be involved in environmentalism, it is entirely possible that other measures of emotionalism might have produced higher correlations. A secondary aspect of the present results was the test they provided for Fromm's theory linking biophilia to the political Left. The conservatives should have been much less biophilic, but in fact were not different at all. As all three groups were young and could be expected to be of above average political awareness, this does provide a rather strong rebuff to the Fromm-Maccoby theory. When an indubitably conservative group is compared with similar groups of generally opposite political polarity, all are found to love life equally.

NOTES

1. Maccoby, M. Emotional attitudes and political choices. *Politics & Soc.*, 1972, 2, 209-241.

2. Fromm, E. *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. NY: Holt Rinehart, 1973.

3. See Ray, J. J. Attitude to abortion, attitude to life and conservatism in Australia. *Sociol. & Soc. Res.*, 1984, in press.

4. Ray, J. J. Measuring environmentalist attitudes. *Australian & New Zeal. J. Sociol.*, 1975, 11(2), 70-71.

Received April 20, 1983