

A [sample entry](#) from the

Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature

(London & New York: Continuum, 2005)

Edited by

[Bron Taylor](#)

© 2005
All Rights Reserved

of the Wilderness Society, from which in 1988 he received the Robert Marshall Award for his “devoted long-term service to and notable influence upon conservation and the fostering of an American land ethic,” he was also a historian of the West and depression-era America. Watkins’s 1991 book, *Righteous Pilgrim: The Life and Times of Harold L. Ickes, 1874–1952*, was a finalist for the National Book Award.

As a nature writer and land-ethic activist, Tom Watkins was devoted to the idea and experience of wilderness. His last book exemplified his call for the preservation of public lands and his celebration of place, written and photographic – from geology to political disputes – for the sheer wonder of the redrock canyons of southern Utah. The first Wallace Stegner Distinguished Professor for Western American Literature at Montana State University, Watkins was a tireless advocate for western lands and good writing about those lands. In the conservationist tradition, Watkins believed that wilderness would teach humans how to live: “For in wilderness,” he wrote,

as in the eyes of the wild creatures that inhabit it, we find something that binds us firmly to the long history of life on Earth, something that can teach us how to live in this place, how to accept our limitations, how to celebrate the love we feel when we let ourselves feel it for all other living creatures (Watkins 1994: 104).

In *Stone Time* Watkins reveals his attachment to wilderness rather like a young Wordsworth of the *Prelude*:

I have two important landscape memories from my childhood – that of the seashore and that of the desert . . . The sundown sea of my childhood gave me abundant joy, a sense of freedom and possibility, but it was an easy place, generous and forgiving; even the sea itself, its waves eternally flowing toward security, promised salvation. But this contrary landscape, this desert place of rock and sky, sere and implacable and forever challenging, gave up nothing easily (Watkins 1994: 5–6).

His romanticism was anchored to meticulous geological, historical, and legal information and insights. And as with many nature writers, he thought what was needed to save this land was to look upon it and reflect. As an environmental ethicist, he worked to affect legislation that would preserve the place for a walk, a look, a reflection. He loved the desert, and there his ashes were scattered.

Lynda Serson

Further Reading

Watkins, T.H. *The Redrock Chronicles: Saving Wild Utah*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.

Watkins, T.H. *The Hungry Years: A Narrative History of the Great Depression in America*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, Inc., 1999.

Watkins, T.H. *Stone Time, Southern Utah: A Portrait & a Meditation*. Preface by Terry Tempest Williams. Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1994.

Watkins, T.H. *On the Shore of the Sundown Sea*. Earl Tholander, illus. American Land Classics. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990 (reprint edition).

See also: Autobiography; Marshall, Robert; Memoir and Nature Writing; Wilderness Religion; Wilderness Society.

Watson, Paul (1950–) and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society

Terrorist to some, ecowarrior to others, Captain Paul Watson has been a looming presence over the animal rights and environmental movements for the last three decades. Since the 1970s, Watson has been a founding member of Greenpeace, a medic in the 1973 Wounded Knee face-off between the American Indian Movement and the U.S. government, and the founder and president of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. Although he has tracked elephant poachers in East Africa, saved wolves in the Yukon, liberated monkeys from zoos in Grenada, defended bison in Montana, and campaigned for the rainforests in Brazil, Watson is best known for his dramatic efforts to halt the slaughter of whales, dolphins, seals, and fish of the sea.

Watson’s militancy is fueled by his intense sense of connectedness to the living Earth as expressed in his biocentric philosophy that all life is rich, beautiful, intrinsically valuable, and sacred. Watson had a number of startling epiphanies that spoke of his destiny to protect animals, such as in 1975 when a mortally wounded whale looked him directly in the eye, expressing pity for humankind, and communicating that he knew Watson was trying to help. Watson’s biocentrism is conjoined to a scientific understanding of the laws of ecology that dictate how human beings must live on the Earth if they are to live at all. Watson condemns the anthropocentric hubris that presumes the laws of society can override the laws of nature. He decries the violence human primates have long inflicted on the Earth, other species, and one another, and warns of an impending species extinction crisis the like of which has not been seen since the age of the dinosaurs. Echoing Aldo Leopold, Watson believes the human species is doomed so long as it sees itself as conqueror of the biocommunity rather than a respectful citizen within it. More explicitly than Leopold, however, Watson calls for “Biocentric Religion” (including in volume one of this encyclopedia).

Born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1950, Watson’s love and protective instincts for animals and nature were

manifested early. Living in southern New Brunswick, he fell in love with the water and marine life. A “kindred spirit” to all animals, Watson protested any abuse he witnessed and destroyed snares and traps. His Earth-consciousness was so intense that by age 15 he had “pledged allegiance not to Canada, the Church, or humanity, but to nature” (2002: 49).

In 1968, Watson signed up as a merchant seaman and found his true home at sea. He joined the Don’t Make a Wave Committee that protested nuclear testing by sailing activist crews into target areas. In 1972, with Watson as a co-founder, the group renamed itself the Greenpeace Foundation and cruised into French and American nuclear testing zones. During this time, Watson also did freelance writing and studied linguistic and interspecies communication at Simon Fraser University, thereby adding scientific weight to his belief that animals such as whales and dolphins have highly evolved brains and communicative capacities.

From 1972–1977, Watson emerged as the most militant member of Greenpeace. At his urging, the organization expanded its focus to include wildlife preservation issues and in 1975 launched the world’s first sea-going expedition to protect the whales. In 1976, Watson led the first Greenpeace expedition to the ice floes off the Labrador Front to rescue seals and document the killing. He returned the next year with a larger crew that included French actress Brigitte Bardot, whose presence drew unprecedented international publicity to the seal slaughterers. Watson’s plan was to spray the seals with a harmless green dye to render their beautiful coats valueless to sealers, but the Canadian government quickly outlawed the tactic leading Greenpeace to renounce it. Saving the dye tactic for future campaigns, Watson instead shielded seals with his body, moved them to safety, and threw sealers’ clubs into the sea.

By breaking Canada’s “Seal Protection Act” Watson saved many seal lives and helped to inaugurate a new era of direct action for animals, but the Greenpeace board voted him out in 1975 after concluding that he violated their direct-action guidelines which stress nonviolence and bearing witness. Stung by the betrayal, Watson berated Greenpeace as the “Avon ladies of the environmental movement” because of their focus on fundraising over action. They in turn denounced him as a “terrorist” and interfered with his subsequent campaigns.

Watson started his own group, first named Earthforce and then the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, which he calls “the most aggressive, no-nonsense, and determined conservation organization in the world” (1994: xv). With the help of Cleveland Amory and the Fund for Animals, Watson purchased the first of many Sea Shepherd ships in December 1978. In a series of bold, notorious actions, Watson and crew rammed pirate whaling ships at sea and sunk others at dock, sprayed thousands of seals with dye,

intervened to halt dolphin kills, and destroyed miles of driftnets that environmentalists denounced as “curtains of death.”

Influenced by Marshall McLuhan’s theories of electronic media, Watson argues that nothing is real or believable for the public until it becomes a media event. Through sensationalist tactics, celebrity supporters, videotaped evidence, and dramatic press conferences, Watson aimed to galvanize a sleeping global village to help protect marine mammals.

Unlike many activists who resort to sabotage in defense of animals and the Earth, Watson accepts that property destruction tactics can be called “violence,” but he argues sabotage is necessary to thwart a much greater violence and to capture media attention. As he explains it,

To remain nonviolent totally is to allow the perpetuation of violence against people, animals, and the environment. The Catch-22 of it – the damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don’t dilemma – is that, if we eschew violence for ourselves, we often thereby tacitly allow violence for others, who are then free to settle issues violently until they are resisted, necessarily with violence . . . sometimes, to dramatize a point so that effective steps may follow, it is necessary to perform a violent act. But such violence must never be directed against a living thing. Against property, yes. But never against a life (1982: 26–7).

Watson’s strategies and rationales place him squarely in the radical environmental camp, where illegal tactics are considered morally permissible if not obligatory to thwart the destruction of a sacred and intrinsically valuable natural world. Indeed, he made strong connections during the 1980s with the Earth First! movement, which musingly considered the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society its Navy, as they were his Army. Indeed, at Earth First! gatherings, Watson’s heroism is often celebrated in poetry and song, and individuals who have served as crew for the Sea Shepherd have recruited there with some success.

Watson’s champions credit him with inventing a powerful new mode of activism and bringing bold warrior tactics and values to the defense of the Earth. His critics berate him as an arrogant vigilante and violent pirate, an “eco-terrorist” who recklessly destroys property and endangers human life. Like most radical environmentalists, Watson insists that he explored the “proper channels” for appeal, protest, and change, but found only corrupt governments that either ignore or defend immoral and unsustainable killing. He argues, moreover, that he has proposed credible alternatives to industries such as sealing only to be rebuffed without a hearing. Where laws such as the 1986 International Whaling Commission ban on whaling are flouted without consequence, Watson insists he is upholding, not breaking, the laws. He freely admits to

violating statutes such as the “Seal Protection Act,” while reminding us that Gandhi and King also disobeyed laws in contradiction with the just and the right. Watson feels the charge of terrorism carries little weight coming from those who profit from killing, and he finds no credible comparison between damaging property to save life and slaughtering life for profit. For Watson, the true violence and real terrorism lies with those who massacre animals and devastate the Earth.

Critics also accuse Watson of being a misanthrope, a Eurocentric imperialist, and a dictator on his ship. Watson is unapologetic about the kind of discipline and command required to run a ship in high-risk conditions. He unflinchingly affirms that his primary allegiance is to life itself, and especially sea life, as he openly expresses contempt for a human species plundering the planet and exterminating species. Privileging animals over humans, Watson repudiates claims advanced by some members of indigenous societies, such as a number of the Inuit and Makah, who assert they have a right to kill seals or whales in order to preserve their cultures and identities. Watson believes that when marine species are at risk of extinction further killing cannot be justified, no matter what group of people is involved or rationale they articulate. Watson thus epitomizes “no compromise” radical environmentalism as he calls others to such activist, biocentric religion. Despite such radicalism, he continues to work with mainstream environmental and animal liberation organizations including the Sierra Club, whose members elected him to serve on its national board of directors in 2003.

Steven Best

Further Reading

- McLuhan, Marshall. *The Medium is the Message*. New York: Bantam, 1967.
- Watson, Paul. *Seal Wars: Twenty-five Years on the Front Lines with the Harp Seals*. Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2002.
- Watson, Paul. *Ocean Warriors: My Battle to End the Illegal Slaughter on the High Seas*. Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 1994.
- Watson, Paul. *Earthforce! An Earth Warrior's Guide to Strategy*. La Canada: Chaco Press Publications, 1993.
- Watson, Paul. *Sea Shepherd: My Fight for Whales and Seals*. New York, Norton, 1982.
- See also: Animals; Biocentric Religion – A Call for; Animism (various); Dolphins and New Age Religion; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Greenpeace; Radical Environmentalism (and adjacent, Rodney Coronado and the Animal Liberation Front); Sierra Club; Whales and Whaling; Whales and Japanese Cultures.

Watsuji, Tetsuro (1889–1960)

Tetsuro Watsuji played an important role as a major twentieth-century nativist philosopher in the Japanese response to modernization and Westernization. The 1867 Meiji Restoration ended a 250-year seclusion to reestablish the imperial throne to power and to survey Western models and train abroad to construct a new Japan as the best defense against Western colonization and commercial exploitation. By the 1890s, many knowledgeable Japanese who had gone abroad despaired at the great gaps between the West and Japan, some reacting by reexamining the values of the Japanese cultural past.

Tetsuro Watsuji trained under several famed nineteenth-century nativists (such as the novelist Natsume Soseki and the imperial ideologist philosophy professor Inoue Tetsujiro). In 1927 he spent a year in Germany studying Western philosophy; in direct response to the publication of Martin Heidegger's *Existence and Time*, Watsuji developed his theory of “natural environment” (*fudo* in Japanese), which he would subtitle “Considerations about Human Ecology” (*Ningengaku-teki kosatsu*). While others before him had considered the Japanese sense of nature, Watsuji was the first to do so in a modern Western philosophical style.

His starting point was Heidegger's emphasis on “beingness” (*sein*) as the singular foundation of human existence. Watsuji felt this to be incomplete because it stressed individual self-discovery in a temporal context; his Japanese experience of a communal society anchored in a unique awareness of nature led him to incorporate a spatial (i.e., natural environment) foundation to human self-discovery, which he termed *fudo*. It is usually translated as “climate, scenery, geologic conditions, weather” and so on, but is better rendered the “natural environment,” and includes as well the nuances of the French *milieux* (“surroundings, social sphere”). Watsuji's starting point for developing the concept of “natural environment” was the human awareness of cold – that cold is much more than a characteristic of surroundings external to the human or a sensation or an interior mental event, it is actually a human subjectively experiencing an objective awareness. The context of the experience as well as the process itself is *fudo*, “natural environment.” He interpreted Heideggerian self-awareness to involve both beingness and *fudo*, for the latter makes any objective self-discovery possible (Watsuji 1988: 12–13); since it enables humans to stand outside themselves, *fudo* is the “self-active physical principle of the human spirit objectifying itself” (1988: 10). This natural environment provides the opportunity or turning point (*keiki*) for concrete human activity. Humans face the challenge of survival because of the natural environment (the “tyranny of nature” [1988: 6]), so that all basic elements of survival such as food, shelter, and clothing, are inevitably tied to it. Tool making and the