

A [sample entry](#) from the

# **Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature**

(London & New York: Continuum, 2005)

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the universe.” According to Dr. Hagelin, science has shown us that the laws of nature are the orderly principles governing life throughout the physical universe. When people violate these laws, problems such as disease, pollution, and poor quality of life result. The NLP describes a program for bringing modern life into harmony with the laws of nature, using scientific and medical studies as evidence for many of its ideas.

The party takes a strong environmental position. It argues that U.S. dependence on fossil fuels causes greater harm than benefit. The harm comes not only from pollution, which leads to health problems and creates an unpleasant living environment, but also from the waste of money and loss of lives in global conflicts centered on fuel resources. To solve this problem, the party advocates research and development of renewable fuel technologies and increasing energy efficiency. This does not mean giving up the present standard of living, but actually raising it through developing technologies that are in harmony with nature. It also requires educational programs that promote “pollution-free” behavior.

Education is a major focus for the NLP. This is not just a matter of basic school skills, but the broader idea that people must be given the ability to see how their individual lives fit into the natural order so they can make wise choices. Education must enlighten people so that they will want to live in accord with natural law. This will, of course, lead to better care of the environment. It may also lead to better care of the self, greater harmony in families, a more orderly society and, eventually, global peace. Behavior that is in accord with natural law should not create problems for society or the environment.

To teach this awareness, the NLP advocates Transcendental Meditation. This is not prayer directed outward to a god, but a turning inward to find the inner self which is part of the whole unified cosmos. With this awareness of unity, people see themselves as part of society and the world, rather than selfish individuals. The party cites medical studies that show TM practitioners handle stress better and thus are healthier, less prone to violence, and happier in their lives.

The NLP considers stress the primary cause of many world problems. Stress causes drug use, crime, health problems like hypertension, and even wars. Several studies have shown that meditation reduces stress. The party argues that teaching meditation in schools can help children handle life so that they avoid bad habits, teaching it in prisons can reduce crime, and teaching it to the military can help alleviate global tensions. The latter idea is based on the TM theory that if a small percentage of a population meditates, it has an affect on the stress levels of the larger community. This concept is supported by research published in peer-reviewed articles in respected venues such as the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Thus, a group of people could be sent into a high-tension area to

meditate and bring the people into harmony with natural law.

Cybelle Shattuck

#### Further Reading

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See also: Hundredth Monkey; Transcendental Meditation.

### Nature Fakers Controversy

At first glance, the Nature Fakers Controversy was a light-hearted literary debate over whether or not wild animals can reason and teach their young to hunt and avoid traps, or a fox can ride a sheep across a field to avoid pursuing hounds. On a deeper level, it embodied an increasingly urbanized United States public’s efforts to reconcile Darwinian, humanitarian and Edenic visions of nature and wildlife.

The controversy spanned four years of magazine and newspaper articles, book prefaces and a full editorial page of the *New York Times*. John Burroughs, America’s preeminent literary naturalist, began the debate in 1903 with an *Atlantic Monthly* article accusing a number of prominent nature writers of what he called “sham natural history.” Ernest Thompson Seton, William J. Long, Charles G.D. Roberts and others, he claimed, fabricated and overly dramatized the lives of wild animals in order to sell books to a burgeoning, lucrative national market of gullible nature lovers.

These writers were practitioners of a new genre, the realistic wild animal story. Such stories presented events from the perspective of their animal protagonists. This was a radical shift in perspective, one that emphasized non-anthropocentrism. A fox hunt, for example, is a very different story when viewed from the point of view of the fox, rather than the hunter. Inevitably, the authors often read their own expectations and biases into the minds and behaviors of their animal heroes. The psychology of the day tended to explain behavior in terms of either reason or instinct, with little ground in between. Facing such options, the authors accused of nature faking granted their subject the gift of reason.

Seton and Roberts did not defend themselves publicly and emerged relatively unscathed. Long, however,

mounted a vigorous defense and became the lightning rod of the debate. A Connecticut Congregationalist minister whom some accused of Unitarian tendencies, Long received his Ph.D. from the University of Heidelberg in 1897. He was no stranger to controversy. He attended Andover Theological Seminary shortly after it had been attacked for teaching “higher criticism” of the Bible. In 1898, Long became pastor of the North Avenue Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. However, the Cambridge Council refused to ordain him because of his liberal theology, which included a belief in universal salvation. This drew national attention in Congregational circles. Long resigned after serving only two months, but was praised for his religious conviction and integrity.

Long was an experienced woodsman and close observer of nature. Although he often misinterpreted what he saw, he did not intentionally fabricate his natural history “facts.” His vigorous defense of himself and his books, while principled and philosophically sophisticated, was misguided by his poor understanding of inductive science. Long rejected Darwinism and scientific rationalism, arguing that animals experience no struggle for survival. He believed that all minds, be they human or not, are reflections of the Creator’s. Thus, he relied on empathy as the key to understanding animal psychology.

John Burroughs’ existential view of nature had no place for a God, although he felt a deep emotional bond with nature. Many of those accused of nature faking, on the other hand, viewed nature in spiritual terms. For example, Ernest Thompson Seton, who later became a founder of the Boy Scouts of America, rejected Christianity and adopted a Native American-styled pantheism. William J. Long argued that animals are capable of religious experience. His *Brier-Patch Philosophy* (1906), an unsung classic in animal-rights literature, is one of the fullest statements of Long’s views.

Finally, in 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt publicly spoke out against Long. He was especially upset that books written by Long and other fakers were used in the public schools. He shifted the focus of debate from errant writers to irresponsible publishers and school committees. In response, they paid greater attention to the accuracy of nature books. Following Roosevelt’s attack, Long turned to writing books about American and English literature. Nevertheless, his publisher and fellow Congregationalist Edwin Ginn, a proponent of world peace and opponent of hunting, kept his books in print for years.

The controversy helped to set standards of accuracy for nature writers, while it also underscored the American public’s discomfort with “cold science” and eagerness for an emotionally and spiritually satisfying vision of the natural world.

Ralph H. Lutts

### Further Reading

Lutts, Ralph H. *The Nature Fakers: Wildlife, Science & Sentiment*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 1990; Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001.

Lutts, Ralph H., ed. *The Wild Animal Story*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

Lutts, Ralph H. “John Burroughs and the Honey Bee: Bridging Science and Emotion in Environmental Writing.” *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 3:2 (Fall 1996), 85–100.

See also: Burroughs, John; Indian Guides; Native American Spirituality; Scouting.

### Nature Religion

The term “nature religion” was introduced into contemporary discourses of the study of religion by Catherine Albanese’s *Nature Religion in America* (1990). Albanese uses the term to interpret a wide variety of phenomena not previously considered in terms of religion. However, subsequent to her study, the academic use of the term has been largely confined to research into contemporary Paganism and New Age spiritualities, notably in the collection *Nature Religion Today* (Pearson, Roberts and Samuel 1998). It is appropriate to restore Albanese’s broader understanding of the term, since the term has a more general currency historically and geographically, appearing not only in contemporary Paganism before Albanese’s work, but also in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Like Robert Bellah’s notion of civil religion, Albanese’s idea of nature religion can help make visible practices in popular culture and political activity of all religions as religious expressions, and thus broaden the understanding of religion beyond its most identifiable institutional expressions, and help religionists more easily to understand religious activities that do not easily correspond to categories of study derived from religious institutions like churches and scriptures.

Albanese does not explicitly define “nature religion” in *Nature Religion in America*, but indicates that she uses the term as a construct to describe a religion or type of religion found in the United States, which takes nature as its sacred center. She describes it as a religion, in the singular, but also says that it occurs in variants as nature religions. What the variants have in common is that in these phenomena, nature is the symbolic center. Albanese describes a chronological development of major variants of nature religion in North America. Forms and movements discussed include Algonquian spirituality and Native American traditions more broadly, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Puritanism, Freemasonry, Gaia consciousness, conservation and preservation movements, as well as Emersonian idealism, ecofeminism and feminist spirituality, and various New Age phenomena.