

# The Meaning of Wild

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## §The ReWilding A Column of Ecosophy & Practice

*Give me a wildness no civilization can endure.*

—Henry David Thoreau

I've heard philosophy dismissed as “so much words” in some activist circles. And yet it is words, strung together into concepts and amalgamated into perceptual models, that precipitate the destruction of the natural world. I think back to the formative works of Bill Devall, Christopher Manes, George Sessions and others, and the influence they had on the developing EF! vocabulary, tenets, values and activist priorities. They helped initiate a shift in perception from anthropocentric to ecocentric, from attachment to civilization to the personal, experiential, deep ecological embrace of the wild.

The world is, after everything that has been done to it, a wild place still. Even now, enshrouded in a crust of asphalt and concrete, the largest predators wiped from her face, the forests leveled for a bestiary of condominiums and golf carts, grinning missiles of commerce and war looming over her fallow rivers and silenced fields, the world is a wild place still, true to the process and essence of her own intrinsic, inherent nature—rhythmic patterns of impermanence and change, mounting waves of their own fertile heat. The birth and death of her varied parts are the flex and pause of the Earthen heart muscle pumping new life through the arterial causeway of time.

The Earth, like the movement to protect it, is wild, out of control, whole. The ancient Greeks named her wholeness Gaia, the daughter that emerges from chaos. To the indigenous pagans of northern Europe, the living Earth was known as Nerthus, and when the image of the Goddess Earth was drawn behind a sacred chariot, joy and peace would follow. By any name, this world is wild: willed—directed and empowered by its own inner nature rather than some outside force or idea. And we too are wild—originally, truly, deeply willed and willful. For safety, certainty and comfort we may try to deny our wildness, sacrificing our will as we seek shelter in the tame. Yet in spite of all the artifice and constraint we remain instinctual, dreaming beings who suffer in direct proportion to the suppression of our instincts and dreams. We are mirrors made of dancing flesh, interterrestrial sensors, activated nerve endings extending from the Gaian ganglion into the ever shifting universe of experience. At our best we are wild reflections of this greater whole, acting out our being, our gesture, our souls free of the regulation and desensitization of the modern order.

**wild** *adj* 1. Occurring, growing, or living in a natural state; not domesticated, cultivated or tamed. 2. A natural, unrestrained life or state; Nature.

Wildness can be described as the condition of oneness with our bodies, desires, needs, sensations, instincts and dreams. Wildness is oneness with the wild Earth, where there

is no abstraction and no real chaos, where even turbulence manifests itself in purposeful patterns more akin to art than artifice. The fear of sexuality, of mortality, of our nature and the natural world, is the fear of ourselves. The cure is in the reclamation of our wildness, a high-dive into the potent flux of natural forces, and the response-ability to act.

The dominant paradigm—the techno-industrial “world order”—must dominate every vestige of personal and cultural wildness in order to propagate its methodology of extraction and control. Theirs is the religion of separateness—a rigidly cultivated separation between body and intellect, vision and reality, self and planet. In order to guarantee the unimpeded dismemberment and marketing of the natural world, the paradigm must construct and tend a perceptual schism between the living Earth and its human constituents. We find the evidence of this campaign in the other, newer definitions of the word “wild”: “unruly, desolate, out of control, extravagant, fantastic, furiously disturbed or turbulent, risky, random, erratic, deviating, disorderly and disarranged.” The definition of wilderness has gone from one of “uncultivated, unrestrained profusion” to a “bewildering wasteland.” In the real world, wilderness is all there is—a condition of profuse nature that includes but is not determined by populations of natural humans. In what John Trudell calls the “shadow of the real world,” designated Wilderness is a sequestered preserve managed by the same forces destroying the rest of the planet, an isolated playground for the recreational indulgence of an increasingly privileged few. For even most “outdoor enthusiasts” wilderness remains something separate from the self, a place to visit rather than a condition of being. For those seeking deeper elemental contact with the forces of Nature, it is an opportunity to act out a wildness shared and enjoyed equally by the inspired natural landscape. Those escaping the boundaries of propriety and objectification are characteristically fun, and demonstrably feral.

**feral** *adj* 1. Existing in a wild, untamed state, especially, reverting to such a state from one of domestication. 2. Characteristic of a wild animal; savage.

To the dominant global society, wild means unruly, out of control, and hence dangerous. A few generations after escaping into the thickets, feral hogs have turned the tables on many an unwary hunter. The feral creatures are the ones who have returned to their true nature and their natural context, a freedom worth guarding once found. Society refers to a willful child as wild. Wild weeds. Don’t pick up the wild cat. Beware the feral dog, the savage wolf, the savages of “lesser” societies. We can learn so much about a civilization by the application of its language. We read common expressions like “savaged by a bear,” and witness people yelling at their kids for behaving like “little savages.” Savage wilderness. The word is derived from the Middle English *sauvage*, from the Latin *silvaticus*, meaning “of the woods.”

**savage** *adj* 1. Untouched by civilization, undomesticated, uncultivated, wild. 2. A primitive, uncivilized person.

They may be overheard saying “it was only the work of primitives.” Primitive art. Simplistic. Untaught. Coarse. Barbaric.

**primitive** *adj* 1. Of or pertaining to original state. 2. Primal.

If it is our original state, the condition of our true beings unimpeached by societal norms, then why the derogation, the fearful vilifica

tion of the primitive? What does sophistication have to fear from the simple, artificiality from the authentic, and civilization from the savage, the primitive, the primal? It fears the shift in perception and priorities, from denial to exuberance, from scheduled production to spontaneity and sensation. Civilization fears what Nature teaches—the ascendant power of present time and the primacy of direct experience. Going feral is an exercise in self-realization, and voluntary primitivity is the negation of the State. Nature teaches us what’s really important.

**primal** *adj* 1. Original, archetypal. 2. Of first importance; primary.

The human spirit dies when it is tamed, and the human species cannot survive the deliberate unraveling of contextual Nature. The scientific community has come full circle in its belated realization of the full extent of biotic interdependency, the ways in which even the most minuscule of living components may hold the key for the health of the entire ecosystem. Ultimately, the war of civilization versus Nature is a war against ourselves. The contemporary struggle against the civilized paradigm is, for all its assertiveness, an act of preservation—a celebration of diverse life forms, and the fullest living of our lives.

*In the early days of EF!, Wolf contributed sixty-some music and poetry review columns to the Journal. With this piece he launches a new, regular column on the evolving ecosophy of activism. To contact Wolf write him at, P.O. Box 708, Reserve, NM 87830.*

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