

**Review: With Nature: Nature Philosophy as Poetics Through Schelling,  
Heidegger, Benjamin, and Nancy**  
By Warwick Mules

**Reviewed by Ryder W. Miller**  
*San Francisco, California, USA*

Mules, Warwick. *With Nature: Nature Philosophy as Poetics Through Schelling, Heidegger, Benjamin, and Nancy*. Bristol, UK/Chicago: Intellect, 2014. ISBN 978-1-84150-573-2, paperback. US\$43.00. Series: Cultural Studies of Natures, Landscapes and Environments

*With Nature* is an intriguing exploration of philosophical thought which seeks to explain and understand our relationship with nature. The idea or noun “nature” has taken on many meanings and has become complicated enough that some find it hard to justify protecting something that has been named Nature in the past. The arguments have made it difficult for people to converse about wilderness protection. Herein is a philosophical exploration with a poetic and critical perspective.

The story or history of an idea and search for definition is told rigorously in this philosophical presentation. The goal is to recount and understand our relationship with nature. Kant provides a background for a tale that really begins with German Idealist Schelling and is picked up subsequently by modern and contemporary philosophers Heidegger, Benjamin, and Nancy.

The book and these philosophers take on a number of interesting subjects including Nature Philosophy, Poetics, Technology, and Art.

It is not a brand new idea that we create our own definition of nature. For example, it has been called “The Practice of the Wild” in Japan. We do find ourselves debating and struggling for a definition and this is an interesting perspective to the debate. The book argues that we should keep our ideas open for a new openness or new ways of seeing Nature. In effect, we are in a contemporary age and we might need to realign our definition and interactions with nature again.

Sadly there are more thoughts, art, and ideas here than natural sciences. It would have been very entertaining to see how Mules would write about intricate biological systems like ecosystems and habitats. Mules covers a wide palette, however, providing plenty of interesting insights for those in The Environmental Movement. The book concludes that we are living in a new era and once again, we get a chance to decide what we think nature is. In this tale there are eco-critics, artists, poets, genetic engineers, and thinkers with ideas.

The author is in the right place in that this is not a treatise about battling Nature or exploiting Nature. Instead, it is more about beginnings than endings with Mules writing:

“My aim in this book has been to initiate a critique of the present human-nature relation by ‘grasping it in what is’ in order to carry it otherwise.... Positive critique does not destroy nature by reflecting back into the human, but carries nature with it, in the beginning it enacts.” (p. 200)

We do lose track in these arguments sometimes that we can think of Nature as something we belong to, something we can damage, something that can harm us, something we can protect from technological society as other, and something inside us. One might lose track here of the fact that movement grew out of a desire to protect wild places and wild creatures. Nature was also a place where we could go to get away from technological society

This book will be interesting reading for philosophers and those who are curious or grapple with these ideas, as well as those who are grounded in the field. The book is rigorous, but not unduly difficult. Some sentences may need to be read more than once and one is likely to want to have a dictionary present to understand all of the nuances of language and arguments. This book would have only been strengthened if the author had provided a critique of how successful the field has really been with different definitions of nature.

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