

ROLSTON, HOLMES, III 1932–

Holmes Rolston III was born in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia on November 19, 1932. His father was a rural pastor. Rolston grew up with the Blue Ridge Mountains on the horizon; from his earliest years he recalls wandering the woods and swimming the creeks of his native landscape.

Rolston's formal education included a B.A. in physics from Davidson College (1953), a Ph.D. in theology from Edinburgh University (1958), and (after several years' service as a pastor back in Virginia) an M.A. in the philosophy of science from the University of Pittsburgh (1968). At each step Rolston felt dissatisfaction with the reigning concepts of nature and with people's mistreatment of nature itself. He especially disliked the common insistence that nature was value-free. He came to realize the need for an environmental philosophy that could undergird a richer appreciation of life on earth. His forty-year career in the Philosophy Department at Colorado State University, beginning in 1968, was largely devoted to creating such a philosophy.

Rolston's 1975 article, "Is There an Ecological Ethic?" helped to jump-start interest in environmental ethics in academic philosophy. In 1979 he helped to found the first journal in the field, *Environmental Ethics*, and as of 2008 remained an associate editor. During this time he was developing his own nonanthropocentric environmental ethics, first in articles later collected in *Philosophy Gone Wild* (1986) and then in a systematic presentation in the book *Environmental Ethics* (1988).

Rolston is best known for his sustained, ingenious, and uncompromising advocacy of the idea that values inhere objectively in nature. He holds that individual organisms, biological species, and ecosystems may all possess intrinsic values—values based on what they themselves are—in addition to their instrumental values to human beings. These intrinsic values ground duties to treat nature with respect and use it with restraint. Rolston insists that human beings are sometimes morally required to put values discovered in nature above their own preferences or self-interest.

In addition to defending nature's intrinsic values, Rolston attempts to enrich our account of nature's instrumental values to humans (including life-supporting, economic, recreational, aesthetic, scientific, and spiritual values). He also argues for nature's "systemic value": the creative capacities of the earth's ecosystems to generate intrinsic and instrumental values over evolutionary time. Rolston's goal is a comprehensive and accurate account of the way in which nature ought to be valued, one that not only does justice to human beings' uniquely complex and important roles on earth and to the new values

brought forth by consciousness, but that also appreciates nonhuman nature for what it is.

Rolston's value arguments are built upon detailed, scientifically informed descriptions and an appreciation of the natural entities in question. They have been so influential that casual observers often define environmental ethics as the position that nature has intrinsic value, or equate environmental ethics with nonanthropocentrism. Strictly speaking, this is false, since one can consistently hold an anthropocentric environmental ethics. Rolston, however, finds such ethical outlooks to be inadequate, either as guides to practice or as complements to a modern scientifically informed worldview.

Rolston has also worked to specify what respect for nature might mean for policy issues such as protected-areas management, endangered species and biodiversity conservation, wilderness preservation, sustainable development, corporate environmental responsibility, and population policy. *Conserving Natural Value* (1994) provides a comprehensive, nuanced account of Rolston's positions on many of these issues. Throughout his writings he places a premium on reining in human consumption in order to preserve wild nature.

In addition to his efforts to formulate an environmental ethics, Rolston has endeavored to overcome the modern split between science and religion. Motivation for this project goes back at least to his time as a pastor to evolution-fearing but nature-loving southern farmers. This work, also widely influential in philosophical circles, led to his invitation to give the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh in 1997–1998, later published as *Genes, Genesis, and God* (1999). In 2003 he was awarded the John Templeton Prize in Religion, the money from which he used to endow a chair at his alma mater, Davidson College. Rolston has been university distinguished professor at Colorado State University since 1992.

Often referred to as "the father of environmental ethics" and later sometimes as its "grandfather," Rolston lectured on all seven continents. He strongly influenced environmental ethics through his six books, fifty authored chapters, and more than one hundred articles; his many generous efforts to help philosophers, theologians, and scientists further their own work; and his practical conservation efforts at the local, state, federal, and international levels.

SEE ALSO *Biodiversity; Conservation; Consumption; Environmental Philosophy: V. Contemporary Philosophy; Intrinsic and Instrumental Value; Population; Preservation; Sustainable Development; Wilderness.*

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