Democracy's University: A History of Colorado State University, 1970-2003.
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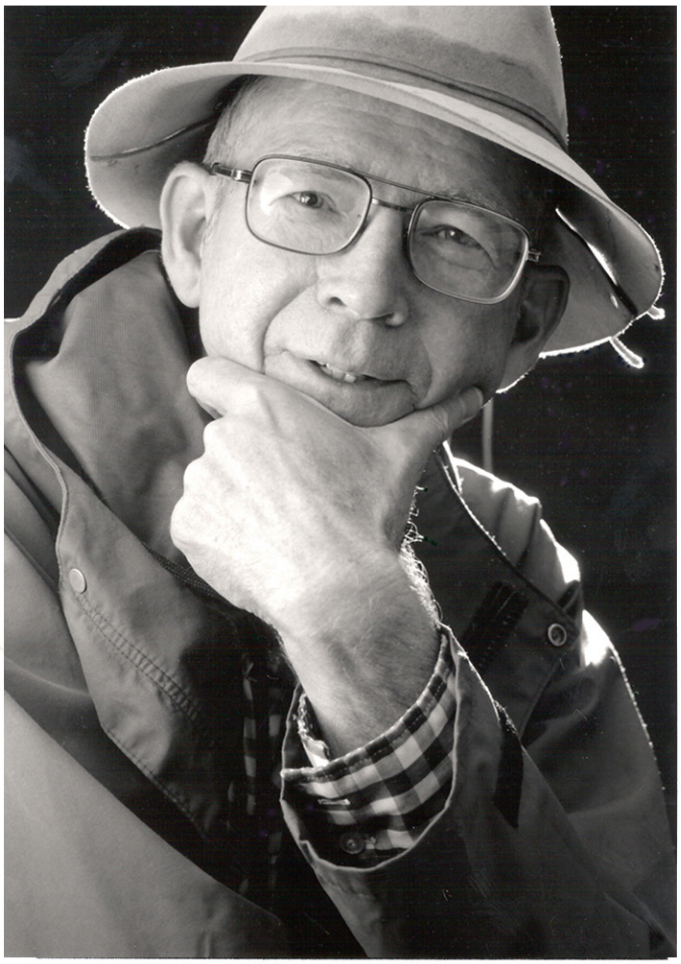
Success in promoting President Yates's Strategic Planning goal of enhanced student learning was mainly achieved by the efforts of dedicated, highly capable faculty such as Stephen Thompson. Another was philosopher Holmes Rolston III, the first person outside the natural sciences and engineering to be designated a UDP. Widely recognized as the "father of environment ethics," Rolston enjoyed a scholarly reputation comparable to CSU's most successful researchers.[25] Moreover, he probably knew as much about science generally as any specialist in that area. The son of a Presbyterian minister, Rolston spent his boyhood in the Shenandoah Valley, Virginia, and the rural South, where he acquired an early passion for the beauty and mysteries of his natural surroundings by "prowling the woods and swamps."[26]

Interested in formal education to complement his other experience, Rolston attended Davidson College and majored in physics. An avid intellectual curiosity impelled him to study this prestigious science in the era when nuclear power held a special fascination. He explained his thinking at the time: "Perhaps there was nothing to learn from trees and rustic places, but there was everything to learn about matter-energy from cyclotrons and Geiger counters in town. This wasn't wild nature; it was mathematical nature. At the bottom of it all, there was ordered harmony, symmetry, universal law, beauty, elegance."[27]

And yet, this first impression of physics was soon tempered by the realization that the cosmology of the universe and its galaxies, explained by quantum theory, "dwarfed and mechanized humans." Similarly, mathematical microphysics reduced humans to nothing more than "matter in motion." Rolston therefore began looking to biology as a field that might hold more satisfying and anthropic ideas. He recalled an inspiring college entomology class that included extended field trips to the Florida Everglades, taught by an instructor who collected insects instead of swatting them and who "saw things that nobody else was seeing. . . . He could name the birds, the plants; I couldn't." For



Holmes Rolston. *Courtesy, William A. Cotton, University Relations.*

Rolston, "[P]hysics wasn't really getting at the nature of nature." It seemed devoid of true life.[28]

These issues concerned him even after he graduated from college in 1952 and decided to prepare for a career as a minister. He attended Union Theological Seminary in Virginia and then Edinburgh University in Scotland, where in 1958 he earned a Ph.D. in historical theology. His scholarly study of religion, however, proved frustrating because he often "had to fight religion in order to love nature." It was difficult to reconcile science and religion. Nevertheless, Rolston returned to America and assumed the duties of a Presbyterian pastor in southwestern Virginia, albeit with some intellectual discomfort. Ever curious and determined to pursue ideas that might make sense of his life, he used this period productively. He explained:

> Partly to relieve the pressures, I took two days off each week, one to prowl the Southern Appalachian mountains, and one to sit in on biology classes at nearby East Tennessee University. Graciously, the science faculty there welcomed me. I spent nearly a decade being a pastor but becoming a naturalist, bringing in the Kingdom five days a week, going wild the other two. I learned the mountain woods in splendid detail. After botany and zoology came geology, mineralogy, paleontology. Now in my late twenties and early thirties, I was for the first time free of mentors telling me what I should study. I could figure it out for myself. I loved it! The trees and the country places did have something to teach.[29]

One difficult lesson was the terrible toll human encroachment was taking on the natural world. With growing alarm, Rolston viewed the effects of strip mining, clear-cut timber wastes, soil erosion, and decimated wildlife. Surely there must be a philosophical rationale that might be used to stem this disgraceful devastation. Accordingly, despite never having taken a philosophy class, he decided to seek a graduate degree in the field and eventually gained admission to the University of Pittsburgh, which offered a philosophy of science major. There he encountered faculty committed to "hard naturalism"—the view that "nonhuman nature was value-free, nothing but a resource for the satisfaction of human desires, abetted by the skills of science." Rolston challenged his instructors, asserting that nature in fact embodied the genesis of value. Careful observation of a bird's song to attract a mate, a coyote's swift killing of a ground squirrel, and bits of new plant life poking through the earth in the early spring confirmed this view. "There was life abundant in the midst of perpetual perishing," he asserted. "These creatures valued life, each in their own way, regardless of whether humans were around. Indeed we humans were part of that history."[30]

In 1968 Rolston joined the philosophy department at CSU, where he devoted his professional life to teaching, refining a philosophy of environmental ethics, and reshaping his religious beliefs. His essay "Is There an Ecological Ethic?", published in 1975, inspired debate about the issue at a time when environmentalism was becoming a growing concern for many Americans. Then, four years later he helped found *Environmental Ethics*, a widely read scholarly journal that furthered this discussion. In his teaching and writing he was compared to Aldo Leopold, who championed nature's "holism." Like Leopold, Rolston perceived nature as having an intrinsic value—one reflected

in each individual life-form, species, and biotic community. The connection among these elements—an individual's ability to adapt through evolution to the requirements of its surroundings and thereby ensure the survival of the species—was a valuable endeavor. Rolston viewed the greater diversity and complexity of life-forms as a positive development, with the human species one result of this dynamic process. Humans were thus part of a natural whole, and, as such, their survival depended upon the preservation of diverse and complex ecosystems. We must maintain the oceans, forests, and grasslands, he insisted, so that further evolution of the planet, including human activity and culture, could continue.

"Holistic" ecology transcended self-interest because no firm boundary separated human existence and the ecosystem. Although cities and cultivated fields represented humankind's contribution to the evolutionary process and, as such, were natural and acceptable, conversion of the entire planet to this development would be harmful. Extinctions in nature were normal yet open-ended, usually leading to new ecological opportunities and species. Conversely, extinctions caused by humans led to diversity-destroying dead ends that "shut down evolution." Humans must therefore use their highly evolved culture and morality to ensure the survival of this fundamentally valuable process.[31]

Although Holmes Rolston's thinking augmented the momentum of environmental reform, he was not a political activist or extremist using every opportunity to publicize his convictions. Rather, he was a self-effacing scholar and teacher who calmly presented his philosophy through forums made possible by academic life. Nevertheless, the erudition and compelling logic of his ideas were used by others to strengthen and sustain environmental laws, such as the Endangered Species Act of 1973, designed "to preserve species and their habitats and protect wild places from human endeavors." According to journalist Steve Lipsher, Rolston "crystallized streams of thought into a concrete, academically defensible code of ethics." Rolston himself acknowledged, "John Muir believed the same kind of things that I believe (but) did not give [them] such a philosophical and academic analysis."[32] Moreover, Rolston believed his impact had been advanced by being a teacher at Colorado State University: "I'm not Rachel Carson, I'm not Aldo Leopold. . . . [But] among my students are several thousand people, many in decision-making contexts dealing with natural resources—supervisors in national parks and so forth. So I like to think I have some influence in those quarters."[33]

Certainly, students were attracted to his classes, characterized by rigorous standards and a welcoming atmosphere conducive to thoughtful exchanges of ideas and values. Some pupils came to Fort Collins solely to study with Rolston. Down-to-earth and natural were the qualities that characterized his demeanor. Student David Gutsche perhaps described Rolston's teaching style best when he observed: "He likes to express what he feels and believes, but he doesn't stuff it down anybody's throats. I think that one of the enjoyable things is [that] he likes to discuss rather than argue. You never seem to be right or wrong on any issue. He only asks that you defend what you're saying. He'll question this, he'll question that. More than anything, it's to make sure you believe what you're saying."[34]

In 1997 Holmes Rolston was invited to Scotland to participate in the prestigious Gifford lecture series at the University of Edinburgh—an event with a history of more than a century that previously included philosophers William James and John Dewey, physicists Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg, theologian and medical missionary Albert Schweitzer, astronomer Carl Sagan, and historian Arnold Toynbee. Rolston's place among this company was a remarkable tribute to his standing as an influential thinker. His lectures, subsequently published as *Genes, Genesis and God: Values and Their Origins in Natural and Human History*, convincingly confirmed the validity of this honor. The book encompassed the full spectrum of Rolston's scholarship and thinking. Essentially, it summarized the intellectual and philosophical journey of a first-rate mind. Drawing upon a lifetime of assiduous scholarly research, it contained scientific descriptions of the inanimate world; the biological realm of evolution and natural value, human culture and ethics; and, finally, religion, including an argument for the role of a divinity in this process. He concluded his book by saying:

> God is an explanatory dimension for which contemporary biology leaves ample space. . . . [W]e

> have seen biologists stutter over the origins of the information that generates complexity and diversity, over any selection for progress, over what to make of randomness, over the introduction of possibilities. If one adds the desire of a Creator not so much to conceal such complementing selective activity as to optimize the integrity, autonomy, and self-creativity of the creatures—letting them do their thing, generating and testing, discarding what does not work and keeping what does—with divine coaching on occasion, then a conclusion that there is a divine presence underneath natural history becomes as plausible as that there is not. The question becomes not so much a matter of conclusive proof as of warranted faith.[35]

In 2003 Holmes Rolston was awarded the Templeton Prize, an honor given annually in recognition of work advancing the understanding of spiritual values —described as philosophy's equivalent of the Nobel Prize. The ceremony took place in Buckingham Palace, and Rolston received the prize of $1.2 million from Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Almost immediately, the professor donated the entire sum to establish an endowed chair of science and religion at his alma mater, Davidson College. He wanted to do something that would have a lasting impact and jokingly added, "Now I'm prepared to claim that I was a millionaire for six hours."[36] Typically for him, values mattered far more than money.