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BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION

[00:03 - 00:50] Kimstar Lander: Good afternoon, everyone. [indistinct chattering] Good afternoon, hi! [laughs] [indistinct chattering continues] Hi, welcome, it's good to see such a nice turnout on the right term lunch. And, um, it's a good thing. Welcome to the Center for Collaborative Conservation seminar series. My name is Kimstar Lander, I'm associate director of the Center for Collaborative Conservation. And our seminar series this semester, the topic is Power and Ethics in Conservation. And we'll have our first speaker today, this our first seminar. We do have a list on the table here acquire, if you'd like to see what other seminars and the author this semester. So, welcome, all. Thank you all for coming.

[00:51 - 00:52] Man: Thank you.

[00:52 - 02:06] Kimstar Lander: It is my great pleasure to introduce our speaker this afternoon, Professor Holmes Rolston III. I think a lot of you probably know who this gentlemen is, from the University Distinguished Professor and Professor of Philosophy Emeritus here at Colorado State University, and a founder of Environmental Ethics as a philosophical discipline. His many books. His books include Philosophy Gone Wild, Environmental Ethics, Conserving Natural Value, Science and Religion: A Critical Survey, Three Big Bangs: Matter-Energy, Life, Mind, and his most recent is A New Environmental Ethics: The Next Millennium for Life on Earth. He gave the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh in 1997-1998, which was published as Genes, Genesis and God, [indistinct chatter] advocating environmental ethics. He lectured on seven continents, and it would be sure to enjoy Palmer's Fifty Key Thinkers on the Environment, I'm sorry, when the Templeton Prize 2003, which is worth well over \$1 million, which is actually one of the Nobel Prize, which was given

by Prince Philip and Buckingham Palace. So, by the name of speaker we have to get. [chuckles] So, thank you very much Holmes for being with us [Holmes clears throat] and I will turn it over to you with what is called Anthropocene, beyond the natural conservation ethic.

[02:10 - 05:31] Holmes Rolston III: Okay, thanks. Uh, you might hit those light switches. [switch clicks] I appreciate being here. I see a number of faces that I know and some faces, a number of faces, actually, that I don't know. And I've been on campus a long time, uh, teaching environmental ethics, uh, defending the natural world. And one sort of recent, uh, phenomenon that has appeared is that people are saying, uh, we are entering the Anthropocene, uh hum, and we got to go beyond the natural. And I, uh, a little bit, uh, concerned about that. I want to think first about, uh, Anthropocene is a kind of a geological term. And yet, in a way, they're speaking more about human culture than about the geology. There's a way in which some people are saying, yes, we're entering the Anthropocene, and that's bad news. Uh, others say, well, we're entering the Anthropocene, like it or not. And so we've got to limit it as much as we can and adapt. And others say, yes, we're entering the Anthropocene, [brief clap] and that's good news. Uh, well, in that connection of a few thoughts about a biosphere or a Technosphere, uh, climate change, people may say, is the big deal in an anthropogenic world. And they now say, we've got to engineer the planet. We do face the end of nature. And now I want to, may I ask? Well, we got all this power to end the nature, to engineer the planet. Uh, what does that say about any need for an ethic? Might makes right. You didn't learn that in my philosophy class, [background laughter] is a respect for nature involved. And there's a way in which I think it's arrogant to think nature is gone. There's a kind of, uh, once and future nature. Well, we're entering a new geological era of the Anthropocene, says Paul Crutzen, a chemist won the Nobel Prize. Well, if you talk about geology, I think usually the geologists want to see something in the strata that separates this epoch from this epoch. They want evidence in the rocks.

[05:32 - 09:38] Holmes Rolston III: Well, you don't see that kind of evidence in the rocks yet. But a lot of people say, okay, but it's coming, it's coming. Uh, human agriculture moves more earth than natural processes. We are told we are now the most important geomorphic agent on the planet's surface. Uh, so maybe the geologist will find evidence in the rocks. [indistinct conversation] Well, maybe, uh, let's see, it's going to be limiting and adapting. Maybe it's going to be bad news. Uh, maybe what we're facing is essentially a toxic Anthropocene. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment is not very rosy about this, 60% of ecosystem services have declined. Yes, but let's get going and make the best of a bad situation. Shrink the human footprint. And if we can see if they're not some places where humans will leave nothing but footprints. Now, we may hear that to try to mitigate these changes as it worked, it's not going to work. What you want to do is focus on coping strategies, on reducing your vulnerability. You've got to create a humanist view of adaptation. Well,

that begins to move in the direction of saying, you know, let's celebrate it. Let's embrace it. Uh, let's have dominion on Earth and figure out how we can live better with the new world we are creating. Here's Erle Ellis, uh, don't look at this as a crisis. It's a new epoch ripe with human-directed opportunity, or here's a series of slides from Kareiva and colleagues, uh, conservation doesn't want to go back to pristine landscapes. Uh, we've already transformed the planet. What we can promise, say these new conservationists, new vision. Yes, you'll have forest, wetlands, species, amidst the big variety of modern human landscapes, but conservationists are going to have to throw out old fashioned ideas about parks, wilderness, is it never been good conservation science, they think. And do what, have a more human-friendly vision.

[09:43 - 13:18] Holmes Rolston III: Biosphere, technosphere, it used to be we thought, there's a biosphere on Earth. And yes, there parts of the biosphere where technology is dominant. The technosphere is inside the biosphere. But now, these people say in the future, the technosphere is going to be around the planet global. And maybe, if you can, you'll have a few pockets of biosphere inside the technosphere. What's coming is sustainable development that's been endorsed by almost every nation on earth. It's been endorsed by the largest corporations on Earth. Can't you see it coming? But now, maybe the question we want to know is, are you going to put economy first in this new world? Yes, tend to the environment, but anything can be done to the environment so long as it's compliments of sustainable economy, or might you want to say, well, there's a way in which environment has to come first. Yes, you've got to have an economy, but what you want to give priority to is quality of life in a quality environment. Well, what we want on top, we want sustainable development. The United Nations says, it has first priority. Saving nature, a good idea, but it's got to be inside the pocket of Anthropocene planetary management. Then, if you turn to ecologist, they might say, now wait a minute, maybe sustainable development ought to come under the umbrella, larger umbrella of a sustainable biosphere. Here's the Ecological Society of America, not so much focusing on sustainable development, but on sustaining the biosphere. Not going to happen without managing the climate, people will say. Because that biosphere is going to be upset. Air, weather, climate, water, soil, ocean currents, shorelines, agriculture, it's going to be an upset to these background givens that we've had for centuries. So, you gotta manage things, you manage the global warming.

[13:18 - 16:40] Holmes Rolston III: You'll have to raise wheat in Canada and move people up there to raise it further north in Canada. But if you do this intelligently, carefully, you can grow more crops for more people in a world that's warmer. But maybe, you'll have to forget about wild nature. Hmm, well, maybe we should worry that humans are, yes, we are smart. We are smarter than ever. But we are so smart that we are on the edge constantly of overshooting. We can make changes that without

predicting the results, and we can predict results that we can't control. Maybe it's the Anthropocene, maybe it's going to be an Anthro-blitz [background laughter] that hits the planet. I don't find climate change is any great example of human expertise or wisdom. It's an accident, we don't want and don't allow to deal with, and we haven't shown much success in managing climate. Doesn't give me a lot of encouragement for a managed planet. Hmm, maybe that means, The climate has changed. I don't see a lot of evidence that we should celebrate climate change, but others do. Here's Allen Thompson, a friend of mine, good philosopher. You need to think now, with climate change, about how you can flourish in the new climate. Jeremy Bendik-Keymer taught at Colorado College for some years. I think, maybe we do need to think about degrees of naturalness. Yes, many plants and animals can adapt, but lots of them can't. And there is some sense in which, when they adapt, these still involve natural processes. Life on earth after all, where is it, right? It's all the way from the South Pole to the equator to the North Pole. It's not like life hasn't figured out how to adapt to a lot of different kind of climates. Is it right? I think we can still think there'll be some sense in which, even with climate change, there will be many natural processes continuing on our landscape.

[16:42 - 20:28] Holmes Rolston III: Well, yes, but it's certainly got to have those planetary engineers increasingly. Here's a special issue of Scientific American managing Planet Earth, and open it up inside they say, you got two questions. What kind of planet do we want? What kind of planet can we get? And we will fix it for you. Before I take a pair of pliers to crunch the planet, I might want to ask what kind of planet we've got. Now, you're going into the post-natural world, there'll be virtual nature. It may look like nature, but it's going to be managed like the Colorado River, looks like a river, but it's a virtual river because every drop of water in it is closely managed. Micheal Soule, excellent conservationists, but he concedes that turn of this century. There'll be on the landscape, some remnants, some reintroduced natives, some engineered species, some exotic species, and the term natural will virtually disappear from our vocabulary. Daniel Botkin, excellent ecologist, nature will be a nature that we make. We can mold it into what we want it to be, or if you even go back to our beloved Aldo Leopold, uh, much praised on this campus, uh, long time ago. We can't curtail the influence of human occupancy, too late for that. We'll have to better understand our influence and have an ethic to govern it. So, the end of nature, Bill McKibben wrote a book about that, bestseller, excellent conservationist, incidentally. The world is changing, no such thing as nature anymore. [clicks tongue] McCloskey Spalding, human-dominated ecosystems cover more of the land surface than wild ecosystems. Well, that's really not a surprise we've known for centuries that humans inhabited agricultural landscapes widely on the face of the earth. How widely? Uh, well, so widely that. As we said, uh, 10- 20 minutes ago. We move more dirt around than anybody else, so nature is over. Well, here's a Scandinavian study. If you look at the land surface on Earth and you think about all the desert and poles, about half of it is little disturbed.

[20:28 - 24:03] Holmes Rolston III: You think about the habitable landscapes, about a fourth of it is little disturbed, partially disturb-- disturb the habitable landscapes, about a third of it human dominated landscapes, again, about a third of the habitable landscapes. Well, are these bleak figures, or are these figures that might encourage conservationists? You can put a down spin on it. Three quarters of the Earth is dominated or partially disturbed, but the same numbers if you want to group them and put enough spin on it. Two thirds of Earth is little or partially disturbed. And McCloskey and Spalding, look at where were the land on earth could be considered wild, and they say you got to leave out Europe. But on the other settled continents, they're not talking about Antarctica at all. Between one-third and one fourth of these landscapes are wilderness that sounds like nature is not as over as Bill McKibben thought it might be. It sounds like, there are places on our landscape that we haven't yet re-engineered. Well, are we going to re-engineer them? Or maybe, uh, yes, we want, uh, to think about the working landscapes. But maybe we also want to think about respect for nature. So, as these newcomers to the conservation movement are preaching, are we going to save what's good for us, or any sense, are we interested in saving what's good of its kind? Well, the focus is going to be me and my kind. Here's Kareiva again and his colleagues, protecting biodiversity for its own sake doesn't work, it's not going to work, you gotta protect nature, not way off, far away. You gotta learn to protect nature on your landscape that sustains your communities. These are the way forward. Give up these old myths, about conserving wild nature. That's what the United Nations says, humans are at the centre of concern. And if you go to the World Health Organization, priority goes to human health. Well, this might conflict with protecting the environment.

[24:05 - 28:47] Holmes Rolston III: The priority to human survival is first-order. Respect for nature is second order, which must be observed unless it conflicts with first order principle. Always put first, survival needs. Edward Wilson, marvelous biologist, a friend of mine. The biosphere that covers Earth, a miracle we've been given. That doesn't sound like just natural resources that we are to exploit for our benefit. Maybe not something that always comes second to human health. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, thinks that we have often increased extinction rates as 1000 times over background rates. Well, it is going to be any, uh, restraint on that continuing and escalating, we've got to pay attention. To some, 600 major reserves for wildlife, 80 countries, whether or not there may be hungry people adjacent to these landscapes. Well, Michael Rosenzweig says, no, you can't set people against nature. You've got to have a win-win ecology. Species survive, they've got to survive in the midst of prospering humans. [clears throat in the background] And I'm wondering if there isn't something a little morally naive about saying we come first. And everything else comes relative to its utility even if you find some nice ways of saying it. Saying we are primary and everything else is secondary, right. Maybe some sense of respect for life. Needs to be now and in the future in our conservation ethic. Once there was nature, will there be nature in the future? Uh-hum, maybe the

way to think of it, I like to say, is, uh, you want an ellipse which has two foci. If you remember your geometry. Some of the area of the ellipse is under the control of nature, we call that wild. Other parts of the ellipse are under the control of culture urban systems. Much of the landscape will be hybrid, or symbiotic, or synthetic, or maybe, uh, we might think of a tapestry of cultural and natural values that's in the future, and not just an accelerating trajectory into the Anthropocene. Yeah, I think that something the women and the audience might teach us what a men want, they want a rifle with bullets that can shoot far.

[28:48 - 33:07] Holmes Rolston III: They want an engineer, or a planet that they can shoot far into the future like they want it. What is a woman want? She may be more interested in thinking not so much of power, but of a tapestry of values woven together. Well, Kareiva can say that nature could be a garden, uh, not a rigid garden. Wildness among lands used for food, mineral extraction, and urban life. It's hard to disagree with this kind of statement, but this is preceded by this kind of statement. Don't think about biodiversity for biodiversity's sake. What you want to do is enhance the systems that provide the most benefits to the most number of people. And now, they seem to take the high ground, especially those who are poor. But of course, most of us know that economic development doesn't automatically benefit, especially those who are poor. And they continue, you know, don't try to restore landscapes to some pristine condition. Conservation is going to be achieved insofar as it serves people's need, including the city dwellers. I've said all my life, and I'm not a young man. [indistinct chatter] We need three dimensional persons. Yes, human life needs the urban. Yes, it needs the rural. Yes, it needs the wild. And if you don't have all three, you are a, one dimensional person. In that sense, those who want to celebrate the Anthropocene may face a future in which they are increasingly one dimensional persons. I think, nature is, and will be the milieu of culture, the womb of culture, so womb that in some sense humans never entirely leave. We humans, or don't we want to be as we naturally are, male or female? Don't we want to have hearts and livers? Don't we want to have blood in our veins? Don't we still want to walk on two feet? Don't we want to eat energy that comes from our nearby star through photosynthesis. Don't we treasure much that's natural? Culture is going to be tethered to the bio system. And yes, we're going to have options in our environment, but that doesn't release us from nature as a life support system. Don't you want air to breathe? Don't you want water to drink that falls from the sky? Don't you want sunshine?

[33:10 - 37:15] Holmes Rolston III: Don't you want bacteria that can fix nitrogen and that can decompose, decompose humus? Don't you want fungi in the soil? Don't you want an ozone layer protecting you? Don't you want food chains? Insect pollination? Soils? Worms? Yes, we need worms as well as climates, oceans, genetic materials. I think, an ecology is an ought to lie the background of culture, sort of basic natural givens. What we want is an inclusive environmental fitness. Nature is not ended,

and it never will. See, nature is forever lingering around. Take a hike in the woods, come across some old settler's cabin, and the pine trees growing where the stove used to sit, right? And grass is growing in what used to be where the bed was, right? Nature reclaims these human landscapes. Nature is always hovering around and could return. And in that sense, wildness will return. Can return, you know, just what I have-- watch what happens in a vacant lot, a lot of trash, and bricks, and pop cans in there. But nature's going to figure out what it can best do on an empty, vacant lot and start putting in there some weeds that can adapt to that sort of thing. You're just arrogantly naive if you think somehow humans in this new Anthropocene epoch have put nature forever out of commission. Earth, maybe we need to think Earth with a capital letter. Is it valueless except as we maintain it for our life support system in this new epoch in which we are so powerfully entering? Or maybe a better Earth ethic is going to think it's a superb planet more valuable than we are. Because it produces and sustains all revalue on this wonderland planet. Maybe we want to think of life as a creative process on Earth. And not simply of carefully managing this planet we inhabit and own.

[37:18 - 40:51] Holmes Rolston III: Edgar Mitchell, looking at Earth rising from the moon, long, slow-motion motions of moments of immense majesty or jewel, delicate sky-blue sphere laced with slowly swirling veils of white, small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery. Is this the planet? We want our engineers to go to work on. Maybe the engineering should be of us humans, and not of the planet. I remember so vividly what I looked back, tiny outposts suspended in the black infinity. Earth to be treasured, something that must endure. Michael Collins, in this small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery. So, the Anthropocene, uh, that's it, that's us. Are you going to manage the place with the head that's gotten just a little loose from everything else? [pauses] Aha. There's planetary management, that's what it is, or maybe hands are not always for management. Again, as the women know, maybe hands are for holding, in loving care. So, do you like that? Do you like that? What are the hands doing in this earth, making it an Anthropocene Earth, or treasuring [clears throat in the background] Wonderland planet? Well, so I conclude that, yes, we may enter the Anthropocene. We're not really interested in going beyond nature. We want to keep it in symbiosis with humans. So I might say, well, I think of the Semi-Anthropocene, but keep life basically natural. And enter the Semi-Anthropocene, keeping it basically naturable, very carefully. Thanks, let's talk about. [applause]

[40:59 - 41:03] Kimstar Lander: Thank you so much, Professor Ralston, we have some time for questions.

[41:03 - 41:04] Holmes Rolston III: Let's have some reactions.

[41:06 - 41:06] Kimstar Lander: Question? Thomas.

[41:11 - 41:18] Thomas: I'm just curious to Emma Marris wrote this, got recently wrote, um, Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World.

[41:18 - 41:18] Holmes Rolston III: Yeah.

[41:18 - 41:26] Thomas: I was curious, I heard Neil Wilson got, got into a little bit, um. I was curious as to your kind of perception on her philosophy for this [crosstalk].

[41:28 - 43:58] Holmes Rolston III: Well, I was with her. I didn't know anything about the Rambunctious Garden until I was at Princeton University in a seminar on governing science. And she had been invited, so I met her. She happened to be at the table where I was eating, so we had some interesting conversation. Well, to make the long story short, I think she's too rambunctious about what she can do in her garden. Uh, [background laughter] and I appreciate what gardeners think they can do. The Bible even starts out thinking of the first couple as in some sense gardening the earth. And so earth for human habitation needs some gardening. Well, what she says is, yes, but the garden is going to be that rambunctious, right? There's all kinds of stuff going to grow up in the garden that you don't want. What do you do? Well, you chop it all out. That's what my wife says, get every weed out of the flower garden. But, it ever weed out of the corn patch. That's what my granddaddy, he used to say. But after a while they sort of said, no, the stuff going to grow in their sort of despite you, whether you want it or not. And maybe every now and then you ought to turn around and celebrate a week that's doing really well [audience laughter] in the corner of your yard, right? Yeah, I can do that once in a while. And that element of her sort of rambunctious in the garden, I think I can appreciate it, but the larger sense of all of earth is ought to be gardened, which I think she seemed to espouse with me that evening, even though pockets of it would be left rambunctious in the garden. I still want to say that there is and ought to be lands that are genuinely wild, and ought not to be thought of as gardens at all, okay?

[44:03 - 44:09] Participant 1: I'm curious as to what you think about payments for ecosystem services. Do you think we should pay people to protect nature?

[44:10 - 45:43] Holmes Rolston III: Uh, I, I do, and, uh, we've got a good, uh, prospect of some opportunities for even opening up here with Rick Knights Programs. I've seen that happen in other places, particularly where people go into agreements with organic gardeners and so forth. Some of those have worked out pretty well in the cities, and this amounts to often they pay more for these. They pay whether or not they know what they're going to get, amounts to a kind of subsidy for those farmers who want to be more, uh, organic. I'm a little leery of that as being a substitute for rather than a complement to the more mandatory and regulated conservation. Oh, God, you're not going to

achieve the conservation we need. Uh, simply sort of inviting subsidize. People who are taking better care of the landscapes on which they reside. Yeah?

[45:45 - 45:45] Participant 1: Holmes, I-

[45:45 - 45:47] Holmes Rolston III: Well, that's fair. I can see it, uh, okay.

[45:48 - 46:17] Participant 2: I share your feeling that we can go too far into the Anthropocene, but it seems to me that that necessary corollary of that position is that there should be limits to growth, limits to growth of the human project, whether that means the number of people for our economic activities. Uh, and it seems to me that is, you know, once was a vital part of the environmental movement in this country worldwide. You don't hear much about limits to growth anymore.

[46:18 - 47:51] Holmes Rolston III: And you didn't hear that in my talk, particularly because the only gateway. Holy moly, if you talk. [background laughter] This, this colleague of philosophy involved who works well with his marvellous white person conservation, have been deeply concerned about limits to growth. Uh, I share those concerns in turn. But, what kind of growth? Growth and numbers of bodies on the planet. He has stopped there, uh, escalating demands of people who are present on the planet to hear this since in some other talks of mine, I've got these graphs about how consumption has escalated. So in that sense, maybe I should have put in the limits to. Well here, maybe they're entering the Anthropocene has got tucked in as a, uh, suck on it, definitely broad. And if so, then that's one more reason to fear the Anthropocene. Yeah?

[47:53 - 48:14] Participant 3: I like your separation of those categories Urban, rural, and natural or wild. But in reality, they're not really separated. They do, you know, interact with one another. But could you give a sense about how you might look at each of those three differently, maybe some in a more anthropocentric way, versus others of them.

[48:14 - 50:00] Holmes Rolston III: Yeah, well, I think in, uh, when you're going to see, uh, a recent show in, uh, Manhattan, you just don't pay much attention to the wild world unless the play happens to be about loneliness or something. So there are parts of the landscape where I think the rural and the wild are just not up front and shouldn't be up front. But if they are increasing in size. Still, they are the urban spaces on the landscape. Look at the planet as a whole. They've grown a lot, but there's still most people on Earth still live in sensitive rural lands. They may come into the village at night. Um, we've got and ought to have widespread rural lands and wild lands. Now, some parts of the wild can yet be in the rural land and orderly, and every farmer enjoys having a fox that's still down in the cornfield. It's a diode, they may be shooting that's a fox for the, they would down there. So we want

that kind of edge. Everybody who sees plays in New York City wants the vacation in Yellowstone, and see wolfs that they may think seeing a wolf in Yellowstone is more exciting than seeing the latest Broadway play, especially if the inevitable similar duo production. I spoke about, the tapestry, I can't exactly say what and aesthetically pleasing, or functional tapestry will be grandmother's quilt is attractive goes on the bed, keeps you warm and going to learn small. She pieced together pictures she had, she quilted pictures of what was on the family farm in Alabama, right? So she's got birds. She's got stuff granddaddy shot brought home, and she says, before you skin it, when they sketch it enough to put it into my quilt, right? This kind of sense of a tapestry of values is what I want to solve yet.

[51:09 - 52:51] We need to test this audience. Um, well, through this term, Stanoplace- Anthropocene. How many of you have seen that term around frequently? And how many, for how many of you is thinking about it like this it's kind of new and surprising. Well, I mean is, but now, I think, the Anthropocene is replacing sustainability in calming the viruses. Now, sustainability always left open what you're going to sustain. Development was the usual answer, but other people said, um, sustain the virus here. And if you want to more to give an answer because you were making a political speech. You just said, we need sustainability. [brief clap] And everybody applauded because the specifics for that open, right? Now, but still sustainability could be put to good use, sustain population number, sustain consumption of. Whereas the sort of entering the Anthropocene seems to be to put us in center focus, dangerously. Okay, I've been upstaged by President Obama, and you guys want to go get in line. [background laughter] So thanks for coming. And we'll see if he pays any attention to what I can center. [audience laughter, applause] [indistinct conversation]

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