

Encyclopedia Britannica, 2004 Book of the Year

Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2004.

Pages 92-93.

Rolston, Holmes

"I had to fight both theology and science to love nature," Holmes Rolston III said upon being named the recipient of the 2003 Templeton Prize for Progress Toward Research or Discoveries About Spiritual Realities. In his acceptance statement, he wrote, "We must encounter nature with grace, with an Earth ethics, because our ultimate Environment is God—in whom we live, move, and have our being." The "father of environmental ethics" had spent his life in what he called a lover's quarrel with science and religion. He had been a pastor, a philosopher, an ethicist, and a naturalist and had published articles in such varied periodicals as *Journal of Forestry* and *Theology Today*.

Rolston was born Nov. 19, 1932, in Rockbridge Baths, Va., the son and grandson of Presbyterian ministers. His boyhood home had no electricity, and water came from a cistern pump. Each summer he visited the Alabama farm where his mother had been reared; there he explored the local woods and swamps. Rolston earned a degree in physics and mathematics (1953) from Davidson College, near Charlotte, N.C., a bachelor of divinity degree (1956) from Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Va., and a doctorate in theology and religious studies (1958) from the University of Edinburgh. He served as pastor of Walnut Grove Presbyterian Church in Bristol, Va., from 1958 until 1967. After receiving a masters degree in the philosophy of science in 1968 from the University of Pittsburgh, Pa., he joined the philosophy department of Colorado State University, where he was made a university distinguished professor in 1992.

Several journals rejected Rolston's writings on environmental ethics before "Is There an Ecological Ethic?" was published in *Ethics* in 1975. It was the first article in a major philosophical journal to challenge the idea that nature is value-free and that all values stem from a human perspective. The piece was also considered to have been seminal in launching environmental ethics as a branch of philosophical inquiry. Four years later Rolston co-founded the journal *Environmental Ethics*. In his book *Science and Religion* (1987), he wrote that "science is here to stay, and the religion that is divorced from science today will leave no offspring tomorrow." His other major works included *Environmental Ethics* (1988) and *Genes, Genesis and God* (1999), which was based on lectures he delivered at the University of Edinburgh during the 1997-98 academic year.

Rolston's field work included rafting the Grand Canyon, traversing Siberia, exploring the Amazon basin, studying tigers in Nepal, and tracking wolves through Yellowstone National Park. During his visit to Antarctica in 2000, he became the only environmental philosopher to have lectured on all seven continents. (DARRELL J. TURNER)