

Introduction to the Roundtable: Holmes Rolston III's *A New Environmental Ethics: The Next Millennium for Life on Earth*

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In the 1970s, when the contemporary environmental movement was still in its infancy, Holmes Rolston, III began publishing philosophical essays in environmental ethics, and it is no exaggeration to say that his early efforts contributed to establishing this subject as a serious academic field, one in which he has played a leading role ever since. Indeed, over the past five decades Rolston has not only developed and defended one of the most comprehensive and recognizable positions in eco-philosophy, but he has also used it to address some of the most difficult and challenging issues that environmentalism in the modern era has had to face. It should come as no surprise, then, that the appearance earlier this year of his *A New Environmental Ethics*¹ represents both the culmination of a professional lifetime of dedication to the discipline that he helped to create, as well as a guidepost out ahead of those of us who have only recently ventured into the territory that he began to explore so many years ago.

Readers familiar with Rolston's work will quickly recognize that *A New Environmental Ethics* is at one and the same time both a familiar and a novel text. On the one hand, it straightforwardly presents most of Rolston's now well-known positions in environmental ethics, positions on things such as the intrinsic value of organisms and the ethical priority of ecological wholes that have changed fairly little over the course of his writing. On the other hand, this book is an entry into an ever-changing academic field in which new questions are continually arising, and thus it incorporates Rolston's most up-to-date reflections on subjects such as the current fascination with the notion of "sustainability," the looming threat of global warming, and the ongoing academic debates about the social construction of nature.

One thing that the contributors to this roundtable discussion have in common – Marion Hourdequin (Colorado College), Nicole Klenk (University of New Brunswick), and myself (University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point) – is that we are all from a generation of environmental thinkers that has always been able to look to the pioneering work that Rolston did long before we came on the scene. That we are still so thoroughly engaged with his texts, and find our own thinking so thoroughly illuminated by his, is testimony to his intellectual rigor, the broadness of his intellectual scope, and the importance of the issues that his work has consistently addressed. The pieces collected here stand, no doubt, as just one of the first of many thoughtful conversations that *A New Environmental Ethics* will inspire, and they are offered in the same spirit that one finds in Rolston's own works: that of passionate, reflective and critical engagement with the question of how best to live a meaningful human life on a valuable planet Earth.

Reference

1. Rolston, Holmes, III. 2012. *A New Environmental Ethics: The Next Millennium for Life on Earth*. New York: Routledge.