

## Book Reviews

### *A Question of the Sanities: Ecology and the Human Conundrum of Remorse*

By Michael Charles Tobias, PhD and Jane Gray Morrison

“Every new work (both fiction and nonfiction) by Tobias and Morrison is a cause for gratitude and celebration. Their latest book, *A Question of the Sanities: Ecology and the Human Conundrum of Remorse*, is a penetrating treatise of essential, perennial ideas, and insightful new ones. Grounded in the heartbreaking realities that the biosphere is unraveling with unrelenting speed, each of the 31 essays illuminate an aspect of human biophilia and biophobia, our confoundingly mixed relationships with the greater world of other living beings. This work is unique because it dares to ask the questions that might save us, such as: “In the persistent struggle between violence and unconditional love ... what can we actually manifest that is something new and thoroughly refreshed?” ... To read this indispensable book is to be at once educated, delighted, and transformed — not only intellectually but also in our heart of hearts that calls for a deeper and more meaningful existence.” – **Michael Pastore, Author, Publisher of Zorba Press, <https://ZorbaMedia.com>**

“In a time when human proclivities are entwined with, and overwhelming natural systems, we seem to be lurching towards Armageddon. We wonder if there is a safe harbor still in sight. This book - *A Question of the Sanities* - provides an unblinking view of the future, but gives a philosophical understanding that hope is possible. It should be read by all those of us trying to make sense of our world.” - **Dr. G. Wayne Clough, PhD, 12th Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, President Emeritus of the Georgia Institute of Technology**

“Michael Tobias and Jane Morrison are more attuned to what’s happening on our planet right now than anyone I know. Surrounded by insanity, they bring sanity. Enveloped in darkness like the rest of us, they have found a unique and profound way to bring light.” - **David Rothenberg, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, New Jersey Institute of Technology**

“In this collection of essays, Tobias and Morrison illustrate two human conditions. The collective (population level) where groups of humans exhibit greed, stupidity, short-sightedness, and distancing from the Natural World. The other is the individual condition, where individuals show love, compassion, and respect for other humans and the Natural World. The question is how to reconcile the two before we make ourselves irrelevant by going extinct and taking much of Nature with us. Tobias and Morrison address this question brilliantly with their characteristic insights and erudition.” - **Con Slobodchikoff, PhD, Professor Emeritus of Biology, Northern Arizona University, CEO of Zoolingua, CEO of Animal Communications Ltd, Director, Animal Language Institute**

“As ever, Michael Charles Tobias and Jane Gray Morrison can be counted on to confront the big questions of our time, in this case the survival of the human psyche – meaning soul in the deepest sense – at a time of unprecedented ecological violence and emotional chaos. The authors draw on a vast range of scientific, sociological, and literary/philosophical reference points to make their argument for endurance in the face of catastrophe. There is bravery here, brilliance, and a willingness to push against the usual boundaries of thought.” - **Jay Parini, Author of *The Last Station* and *Borges and Me*, D.E. Axinn Professor of English and Creative Writing at Middlebury College, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/jay-parini>**

“Michael Tobias and Jane Morrison’s newest book, *On the Question of Sanities – Ecology and the Human Conundrum of Remorse*, is an unprecedented analysis of ecological insanity and its counterpoints. In the manner of the great Talmudic scholar, *Maimonides’ Guide of the Perplexed* (AD 1195), the Authors have delivered a devastating critique of classical theodicy, the philosophical debate regarding how there can be evil in a world of such beauty and staggering biodiversity. They ask the hardest questions; reveal the most devastating data; and lead readers through a labyrinth of intellectual history that is enlightening and deeply persuasive. Its central premise argues brilliantly for a kinder future, if there is to be any future.

Looking at probability distributions of species and population extinctions, the Authors bring to bear a most singular and paradoxical of dilemmas: our slim chances of success – in the sense of surviving ourselves in the 21st century. I’ve personally been to the edge of space, and I am convinced that space travel is not going to solve our toxic debacles here on our home planet. Tobias and Morrison rightly point to the key scientific and ethical transitions that might yet save life on earth. Their argument, ultimately, is – like Maimonides – prophetic, painful, clinical, indeed almost unbearable in its clarity.

They argue that evolution selects not fitness per se, but ideals. Who we are as a newborn species (only 315,000 years old) is not what we have been, what we did, what we are inflicting on this planet, even what we have suffered: But what we dream.

It is a sublime, consoling vision, a landmark work that takes the age-old discussion of good and evil, of far more recent deliberation across the natural sciences and genetics regarding evolutionary purpose or design, as well as the theory of random homeostasis (the title of their previous book) and places these critical wellsprings of research into a startling new context: The survival of pragmatic idealism as an evolutionary foundation.

For optimists and pessimists, young and older, fatalists and exhausted Utopians, scientists and theologians, philosophers and quantum physicists, Tobias and Morrison’s latest book is essential reading.”  
- **William Shatner, Actor, Writer, Producer, Director**

“An incredible book, profound and unprecedented investigation. Such philosophical courage and analysis are deemed highly necessary for this very lonely earth – ravaged by conflicts and war, greed, exploitation and mindless hunger for wealth and power. Through this outstanding book, Jane and Michael provide extensive discussions and key areas of research solutions towards protection of the planet in its ongoing challenges. An exhaustive and rare study, this study will prove to be a critical reference in this current epoch of an uncertain world.” - **Ugyen Tshewang, PhD, Former Environment Secretary of Bhutan, Founder of Bhutan’s National Biodiversity Center, and Bhutan’s National Gene Bank, Co-Author of *Bhutan: Conservation and Environmental Protection in the Himalayas*, and *Bionomics in the Dragon Kingdom: Ecology, Economics and Ethics in Bhutan* (Springer Nature Publishing Group, 2021 and 2018).**

“This remarkable original treatise explores and probes vast new wild territory of ecological understanding few have ever ventured or articulated. An absolutely astonishing, wide ranging, truly sobering first-hand account of our “insane” trajectory in a devastated world, sadly bereft of human conscience. Tobias and Morrison are some of the deepest thinkers of our time. This book is a serious wake-up call as well as sanctuary for the soul!” - **Michael S. Bostick is an Environmental Professional, Artist, and Freelance Writer**

“Violence towards one’s own species is not uncommon in nature. Infanticide and murder are present in chimpanzees and such violence is attributed to a heightened level of aggression for resources needed for survival. Yes, humans also kill to obtain resources. But do Others, like our closest primate relatives, harm one another out of anger, arrogance, entitlement, religious beliefs, and target and devalue one another to rationalize taking the life of another member of their own species? Not only do we harm one another, we harm the planet we share and have the intelligence and awareness to recognize the causes, effects, and consequences of such violence. But do we have any remorse for any of our actions responsible for destroying our species, and every other species on the planet? Questioning sanity is commonplace in our times. Tobias and Morrison provide a thoughtful, transformational perspective that makes us question why we conduct ideological warfare while our existence, and that of all Others, hangs in the balance.” - **Melanie L. DeVore, PhD, Georgia College & State University Professor, Department of Biology & Environmental Sciences; Arizona State University, Adjunct Faculty Member, Center for Biology & Society and School of Life Sciences; University of Washington, Research Associate in Paleobotany, Burke Museum; University of Rwanda, Honorary Research Fellow in the Center of Excellence in Biodiversity & Natural Resource Management (CoEB-UR, CST);**“If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.” ~ George Orwell.  
<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Melanie-Devore>

“Fascinating, frightening, and bursting with historical context and the wisdom of past visionaries, if a book can change the readers' perspective, this is it. Tobias and Morrison call on us to take our hands from our ears and hear what Edward Munch called "The scream of nature"; to remember that, even as we destroy the natural world for the most frivolous of reasons, we must see that we are part of, not apart from, it. Is there time? Be brave, read this book, perhaps aloud from the rooftops.” - **Ingrid Newkirk, Founder and President of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and its international affiliates, the largest animal rights organization in the world. A Forbes Person of the Year, Ms. Newkirk is the author of 14 books on animals, their abilities, language, and sentience, and the subject of the HBO documentary, “I Am an Animal.”** <https://www.peta.org/>

“Michael and Jane have produced a book that makes us all question our sanity. The population of our planet has increased four times during the last 85 years. All economies are exponentially fueled by the finite realities of gas, oil and coal, which will peak and decline to zero. Against this backdrop, the Authors have mobilized a comprehensive understanding of the physics, chemistry and mathematics that define our biological sphere. They frame each chapter with a psychological, philosophical and ethical underpinning. Their prose is flavored with music, art, literature and poetry. Each of the 30 chapters layers an assessment of the human conundrum.

Having read many of their books over time, I have noticed that each one digs deeper into the circumstances in which we have the opportunity to survive or, if we don't pay attention to the ecological realities, perish. They conclude, "With unconditional love, the gift of nature is in our conscience."

The book is a challenge to read, but once read is a gift to all of us who are in awe of their genius.” - **Bob Gillespie, President and Chairman of the Board, Population Communication; Gillespie has designed 181 family planning and population policy instruction and evaluation materials that have been used in program and policy development in ten countries.** <http://populationcommunication.com/>

*"A Question of the Sanities* is a critical reflection on the condition of humans and other species, an earnest call for ecological redemption, and a vision for a peaceful and sustainable future. Drawing upon their global field research, dozens of disciplines, and the lived wisdom of humans across cultures and religions, the Authors challenge us to act in the spirit of ahimsa to mitigate the biospheric violence. That is, to make choices that are rooted in reverence for nature, compassion for all living beings, and conscious consumption. A must read for all who care about the wellbeing of our planet and its habitants." - **Tara Sethia, PhD, Founding Director of the Ahimsa Center, Emerita Professor of History, California Polytechnic State University Pomona. Her books include *Gandhi: Pioneer of Nonviolent Social Change* (The Library of World Biography, 2011). <https://www.cpp.edu/ahimsacenter/index.shtml>**

*"A Question of the Sanities - Ecology and the Human Conundrum of Remorse* by Michael Charles Tobias and Jane Gray Morrison engages crucial ecological, philosophical, and social issues of our times. Our lives are witnesses and participants in mass extinction and ecological pillage. The Authors note, "At odds is everything pertaining to the question of what 'evolution' is, is for, and is not." As ecologists shocked by humanity's culpability in the accelerating mass extinction of the Anthropocene, they realize that, "The ethics of biology are indeed terrifying because we cannot as yet imagine the perfectibility of a human being, whereas the gnat and its world of colleagues need nothing more to be perfect." This is the world we have remade. Our eight billion+ weigh far more than all the wildlife on the planet. And so-called farm animals doomed to be slaughtered – unless we can stop the genocide – weigh more than both people and wildlife." Tobias and Morrison recognize that "Beginning with its roots, there was no set of circumstances by which human rights could be extrapolated such that freedom of all Others might be instilled within the rubrics of any democracy. Tethered to the natural sciences, an ecological democracy suffers from a complete vacuum of imagined values that do not exist in any biotic form." *A Question of the Sanities* is a philosophically wide-ranging work that explores the social context and deep history of the way we all live in the 21st century. A highly recommended and challenging book; an enlightening opportunity to explore and help humanity confront the essential pursuit of ecological renewal." - **Roy Morrison, Author of *Ecological Democracy, Sustainability Sutra: An Ecological Investigation*, and his latest book, *The New Green Republic*. Morrison is an internationally acclaimed energy expert and Managing Partner of Sun Partners Solar. Morrison (no relation to the co-Author, Jane) is a Fellow at the Center for Ecozoic Societies, and has coordinated China's International Working Groups (CIWG) to develop super grid and ecological solutions ([www.ciwg.net](http://www.ciwg.net); [www.EcoCivilization.info](http://www.EcoCivilization.info); [www.SunPartnersSolar.com](http://www.SunPartnersSolar.com)) He as the Founding Director of the Office for Sustainability at the Southern New Hampshire University and wrote the first law in the U.S. for municipal aggregation under retail electric competition.**

*"A Question of the Sanities* is a poignant elegy to our beautiful and bountiful earth. We humans have known for ages about the environmental catastrophes facing us all, but have largely ignored them, hoping for scientific breakthroughs or some kind of miracle. Now, it is the alarming speed and scale of environmental crises that is finally getting our attention. Each year there are more and more unimaginable "natural" events converging with disastrous political and economic policies. In the face of this turmoil, Michael Tobias and Jane Gray Morrison invite us to stop for just a short time in the midst of our comfortable lives and ponder how we got to this point and how we might unravel all the issues and ethical considerations involved. They use scientific data, philosophical insights, literary references, history, and personal vignettes to make sense of our current reality. Their book offers an engaging and sometimes harrowing path to the environmental erudition that we all need." - **Anne and William Frej, Authors of *Travels Across the Roof of the World: A Himalayan Memoir*. William – a world-renowned photographer**

(<https://williamfrejphotography.com/>)- was stationed in Indonesia, Poland, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan as a career diplomat and has also authored *Maya Ruins Revisited: In the Footsteps of Teobert Maler*, *Blurred Boundaries: Perspectives on Rock Art of the Greater Southwest*, and *Seasons of Ceremonies: Rites and Rituals in Guatemala*. Anne is an urban planner with initiatives throughout the U.S., Indonesia, Central Europe and Central Asia. She was an early advocate of the “design with nature” movement, and Author of *Green Office Buildings: A Practical Guide to Development*.

“Is there hope for humanity? For a humanity that has abandoned its birth mother and forgotten where it came from and where it is going? The Authors of *A Question of the Sanities* seek answers to the most critical questions of our time, while holding up a mirror to take us through millennia of forgetting. For centuries, we have glorified our actions, proclaimed our own superiority, while forgetting the rights of nature, the greatness of simplicity and cooperation, and our responsibility to our world. We have forgotten the bond that binds us to Mother Nature and all her inhabitants. I thank the Authors for inspiring us all!” - **Maria Sagi, PhD in Psychology, Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest. The creator of the Sagi Method of Informational Healing and Diagnosis, she is the author of 12 books and more than 150 articles and research papers published in Hungarian and translated into English, French, German, Italian, and Japanese. The Science Director for the Club of Budapest, she lives in Budapest, Hungary.** <https://www.mariasagidr.com/>

“Tobias and Morrison are those rare trans-disciplinary souls who endeavor to give the Universe a language of compassion, hope and transcendence in an Anthropocene of unfathomable pain and violence. Their research spans history, art, species legacies, activism, the voices of the voiceless, tribal heritages and imaginations to shine light on what we can and must do to avert a planetary catastrophe. The voice in these chapters is authoritative, and its wisdom timeless.” - **Atul K. Shah, PhD, is a Professor of Economics at City University of London. He is the author of four books on issues of ethical and sustainable finance, the politics of financial risk and accounting, and a world-recognized Jain ethicist.** <https://atulkshah.co.uk/about-us/>

“They sheltered a freezing Central Park squirrel inside their wintry parka pocket, then nurtured it to health on acorn pancakes from their unwitting hotel room service. Unconventional? Absolutely. And yet it bets the existential question: how to weigh in on a living being’s worth when its inherent value is not monetary, but elemental to survival on earth? With the demise of our biosphere and an overheated emotional ‘atmosFear’, civilization is on the brink of self-annihilation – yet desperate for self-preservation. This book is a round-the-world tour (de force) through a systemic epidemic; disconnection from Self and Other. It’s as if the pathos of every current and ancestral expression of life to ever grace this planet has contributed to authoring these pages. A tree is not just some ‘noun’ over there. Nor is water, air, soil, species ... and earth in relation to cosmos. Nature and Human Nature: that’s our forgotten love story. Michael Tobias and Jane Morrison: this is our blessed reminder.” - **Alison Goldwyn is a Writer, Podcaster, Music Composer and Founder & Creative Director for Synchronistory®**

“Tobias and Morrison’s *A Question of The Sanities* begs the central questions: Why are Homo sapiens so destructive? Is there hope for humanity in a world which has entered a sixth, global-extinction Anthropocene? Anyone already familiar with their writing will immediately recognize the Thomas Pynchonesque complex literary style that explores the dilemmas of being human. They interpret the fate of the world through a multifaceted prism: history, science, ethics, the arts and humanities, as well as by personal anecdotes. It would be difficult to overstate the breadth and depth of the thinking and writing

of Tobias and Morrison. They are without equal, and this, their latest, will give pause to any reader with an ounce of compassion if not concern. *A Question of the Sanities* is an intellectual and artistic achievement. I highly recommend it.” - **David J. Wagner, PhD, Former Museum Director, Author of *American Wildlife Art (2008)*, Independent Curator of travelling environmental exhibitions throughout North America and the world. <https://www.davidjwagnerllc.com/>**

“At the heart of this seminal book, *A Question of the Sanities*, is a crucial, and singular message: We desperately need to stop imparting pain to not only our own species, but all others; by restoring our traditional interspecies relationships that are so critical for every biome.” - **Dr. Tarun Chhabra, Botanist, Anthropologist, Head of the EBR Trust in the Nilgiris, India, and Author of *The Toda Landscape - Explorations in Cultural Ecology*, Orient BlackSwan, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 2015. Edhkwehlynawd Botanical Refuge Centre Trust - Nature Needs Half.**