

November 11, 2014



*Critically Endangered Arabian Leopard (Panthera pardus nimr)
(C) Copyright 2014 by Michael Charles Tobias*

The Legacy of Lima?

Michael Charles Tobias and Jane Gray Morrison

At Yale University October 14th, [Todd Stern](#), the U.S. Special Envoy for Climate Change, suggested that – along lines of what is now being termed New Zealand’s approach – the way towards a climate change treaty involves creating fluid parameters on a nation-by-nation basis. Said Stern, if countries come together and work through it according to the best wisdom on the table at present (our characterization of the way New Zealand’s strategy is being perceived) then, Stern goes on to say, “we would have for the first time established a stable, durable, rules-based agreement with legal force that is more ambitious than ever before, even if not yet ambitious enough – an agreement that is applicable to all in a genuine and not just a formalistic manner.”

Three weeks before Stern was speaking at Yale, Peru’s President [Ollanta Humala](#) called this same, general ambition realizable and conveyed a sense that “the time has come to mobilize history’s greatest alliance in an effort for climate and development,” emphasizing that a “clear and coherent document” should be finalized at the Lima Summit in the first week of December of this year; one that should be ready to be signed a year later at the [COP21](#) (the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties to the [UNFCCC](#)) U.N. Climate Summit in [Paris](#) (late November, early December, 2015).

President Humala was wise, if not a little optimistic, to declare that “No other problem [requires so much public planning](#), so much mobilization of civil society, so much foresight and competitiveness from the private sector.”

The fact that we have long surpassed [350ppm](#) (the parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere) and now have exceeded 400ppm, would give any other species pause, but not our

November 11, 2014

own. Recently, Abigail Marsh of Georgetown University, and her colleagues, suggested in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, that there is a genetic [“caring continuum”](#) at one end of the human nature spectrum, and a gaggle of psychopaths at the other. A link, in other words, between [“genes and moral judgments.”](#) The research paper, entitled “Neural and cognitive characteristics of extraordinary altruists,” might well bode ill for what we would term *“policy altruism.”*

Very few instances in human history of policy altruism can actually be thoroughly documented. One such case, known in the Ahl language of the Todas of southern India, is named a [noyim](#). The Todas, largely vegetarian, have achieved a unique and tenable approach to conflict resolution that embraces common sense-driven community wisdom, taken one olive branch at a time, century after century. Quakers have invoked similar consensus mechanisms. The era unleashed by the Japanese Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) represents 250 years of Japanese peace and the renunciation of all guns, though at the schizophrenic price of the murderous Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. Denizens of a myriad of geographic regions and ethnic nationalities claim to have established the first true democracy, from the 10th century Icelandic Althing, to the Six Nations known as the Iroquois.

In each and every case of conflict resolution and consensus generating mechanisms, there have been flaws, time delays, gaps and contradictions. Now, ecologically speaking, we are uniquely poised in this history of resolving long-standing global conflicts, namely, there being precious little time left to save the majority of species. Most scientists and others who reflect deeply and with broad biological and ethical perspectives on the matter, know, or at least sense this crisis to be unique in the annals of human history.

But whether history be any guide is no longer at stake at a time of the Anthropocene – that 15,000 year old human-centered egomaniacal hegemony, equivalent in its implications for the biosphere, to a geological force – with which delegates to the upcoming Lima talks must now grapple.

Are politicians more likely to focus on hurricanes or Critically Endangered Arabian leopards? On Ebola virus or African elephants? On the strength of the Euro or an invisible molecule – extrapolated into the chain of command called fossil fuels - that the majority of the world still uses to generate its electricity?

Had Thomas Edison never lived, there is no doubting that hydrocarbons would nonetheless hold in thrall, like some hallucinogen, the majority of the world’s energy consumer’s.

The debate rapidly escalates over the cost of endangered human health, increasing global ambient temperatures, shifting rain curtains and food belts, melting continents, and the extinction of vast swathes of life on Earth. Yet, the hierarchy of political systems that individuals such as Aristotle and Plato, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Ruskin have taken to task, remain essentially unchanged since the earliest claims to democracy, with all their clamor and unresolved basic ethical positions.

November 11, 2014

To provide but one example of this glaring societal ineptitude, that is to say, our inability to actually work in teams to solve solutions, consider the following: The International Criminal Court (“ICC”) in the Hague, with its 111 nation-state members, cannot even come up with an agreed upon definition of “aggression” (although linguistic consensus was reached with regard to the shared understanding of “genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes”). Only one of the member countries of the ICC, Great Britain, has fully agreed to adopt the provisions and obligations of the 1998 ICC Rome Statute, though 60 countries ratified its principles as of July 1 2002.

In other words, with violence spiraling out of control across the planet – the sole result of human behavior, of a war our species is waging against earth - the vast majority of us have ceded power, like it or not, to a minute coterie of individuals in whose hearts and minds we are vesting the future of the world: the climate talks, at Lima, and then in Paris.

If anybody has a better plan, now is the time to speak up.

© 2014 by Michael Charles Tobias/Jane Gray Morrison/Dancing Star Foundation

MAHB-UTS Blogs are a joint venture between the University of Technology Sydney and the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere. Questions should be directed to joan@mahbonline.org

MAHB Blog: <http://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/the-legacy-of-lima/>