

The Issues of Morality and (Scientific) Ethics

Throughout human history the #1 issue has never been our collective good looks, or our ability to “subdue Mother Nature,” but first-and-foremost the #1 issue has always been our ability to conduct ourselves in a manner consonant with the basics of ethical behavior.

In my humble opinion, the proverbial giants are the average members of humanity, upon the shoulders of which you will find standing, the so-called scientific community. The latter, contrary to, of late, its all too mindless but characteristic vanity, is utterly dependent on the average people that comprise day-to-day society; the people that pave the roads, build the houses, and grow and cook the food. If a scientist is looking to thank someone for the lofty perch that they sit upon, take a moment to observe the average person upon whose shoulders you truly stand.

The scientific community is merely an offshoot of humanity, and as such is not immune to the pitfalls of unethical behavior. **ClimateGate** is just one example of that community that was exposed as unethical. When one canvasses the broader reality, that most unethical behavior goes undetected or unproven, one can become generally insolent or even cynical. No one promised that life would be easy.

In the last paragraph of my December 15, 1987 letter to then-Dean Curtiss Tarr, Cornell University Johnson Graduate School of Management, I used the term:

“Koyannisqatsi”

Pronounced coy – yah – niece – got - zee, it is derived from Hopi, meaning “crazy life.” I ended that decades-old letter with a warning from Counsel to the King (Arthur). Merlin warned, “. . . for it is the doom of men that they should forget.”

In a scene from the John Boorman film Excalibur, Arthur and Merlin discuss the “greatest virtue.”



The greatest virtue is, of course, **truth**. <https://vimeo.com/150384524> As the deans of the Cornell Graduate School of Business and the Law School, will affirm, I have pursued the truth:

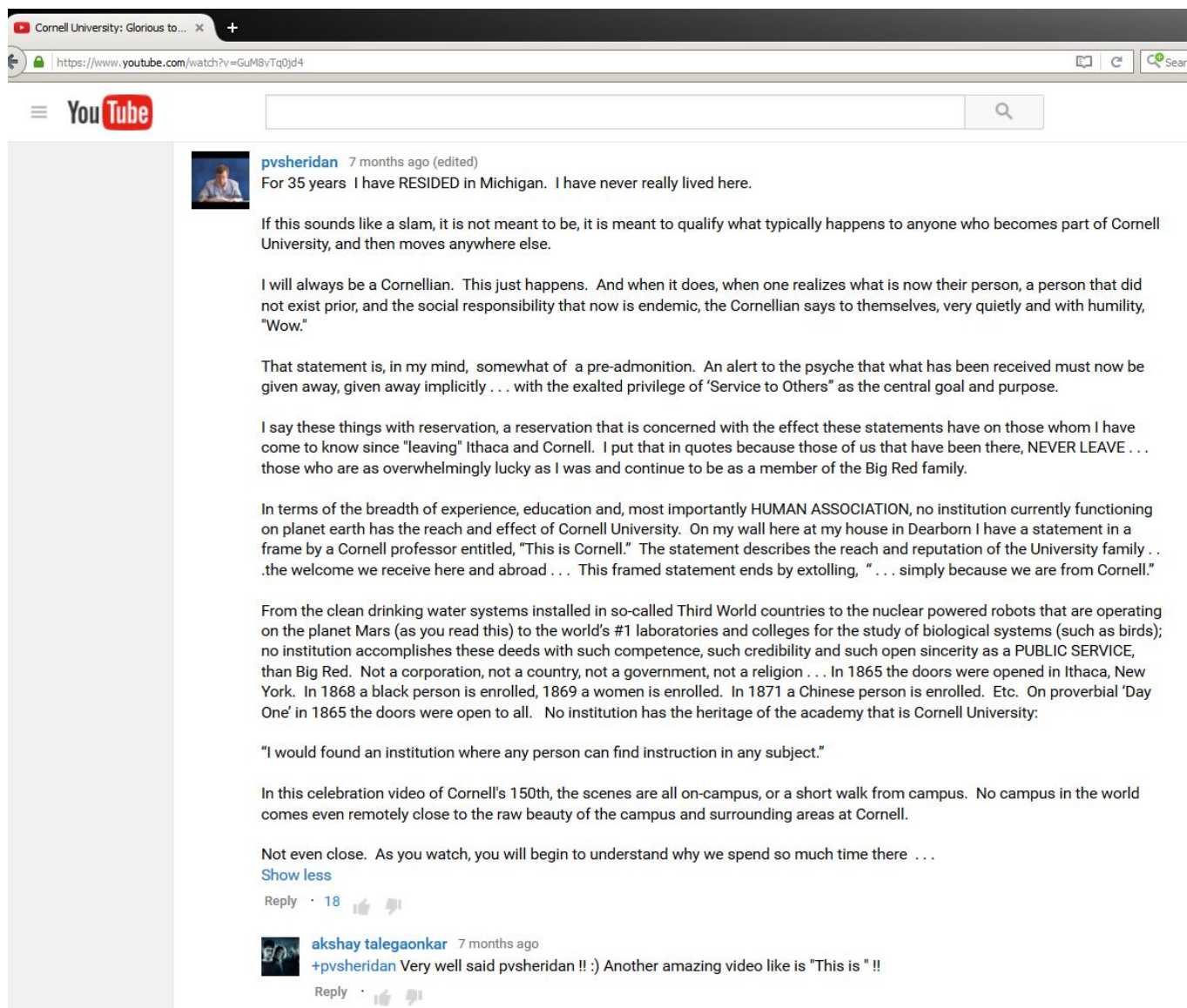
<http://pvsheridan.com/Sheridan-SafetyLeadershipAward.pdf>

Contrary to what appears to be presented in this short letter, words that imply a disdain for my alma mater (Cornell University), my relationship with that institution (and academic institutions like it) is one of ongoing deference and deep caring. I have not given up on the process of high education. Alternatively I am not known for “sparing the rod.” This instant effort should be viewed as confirmation of the exact opposite: My ongoing commitment to high education and Cornell.

The 150th Anniversary gala of the founding of Cornell included the film, ‘*Glorious to View.*’ Shown to alumni at the gala, it is available at the Cornell home page, and their YouTube account:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuM8vTq0jd4>

If you scroll into the Comments section you will find the #1 ‘thumbs-up’ comment; that would be mine:



The screenshot shows a YouTube video player interface. The video title is "Cornell University: Glorious to...". The URL in the address bar is "https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuM8vTq0jd4". The YouTube logo is visible in the top left. The main content is a comment by user "pvsherdan" posted 7 months ago (edited). The comment text is as follows:

For 35 years I have RESIDED in Michigan. I have never really lived here.

If this sounds like a slam, it is not meant to be, it is meant to qualify what typically happens to anyone who becomes part of Cornell University, and then moves anywhere else.

I will always be a Cornellian. This just happens. And when it does, when one realizes what is now their person, a person that did not exist prior, and the social responsibility that now is endemic, the Cornellian says to themselves, very quietly and with humility, "Wow."

That statement is, in my mind, somewhat of a pre-admonition. An alert to the psyche that what has been received must now be given away, given away implicitly . . . with the exalted privilege of 'Service to Others' as the central goal and purpose.

I say these things with reservation, a reservation that is concerned with the effect these statements have on those whom I have come to know since "leaving" Ithaca and Cornell. I put that in quotes because those of us that have been there, NEVER LEAVE . . . those who are as overwhelmingly lucky as I was and continue to be as a member of the Big Red family.

In terms of the breadth of experience, education and, most importantly HUMAN ASSOCIATION, no institution currently functioning on planet earth has the reach and effect of Cornell University. On my wall here at my house in Dearborn I have a statement in a frame by a Cornell professor entitled, "This is Cornell." The statement describes the reach and reputation of the University family . . . the welcome we receive here and abroad . . . This framed statement ends by extolling, ". . . simply because we are from Cornell."

From the clean drinking water systems installed in so-called Third World countries to the nuclear powered robots that are operating on the planet Mars (as you read this) to the world's #1 laboratories and colleges for the study of biological systems (such as birds); no institution accomplishes these deeds with such competence, such credibility and such open sincerity as a PUBLIC SERVICE, than Big Red. Not a corporation, not a country, not a government, not a religion . . . In 1865 the doors were opened in Ithaca, New York. In 1868 a black person is enrolled, 1869 a women is enrolled. In 1871 a Chinese person is enrolled. Etc. On proverbial 'Day One' in 1865 the doors were open to all. No institution has the heritage of the academy that is Cornell University:

"I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any subject."

In this celebration video of Cornell's 150th, the scenes are all on-campus, or a short walk from campus. No campus in the world comes even remotely close to the raw beauty of the campus and surrounding areas at Cornell.

Not even close. As you watch, you will begin to understand why we spend so much time there . . .

Show less

Reply · 18

akshay talegaonkar 7 months ago

+pvsherdan Very well said pvsherdan !! :) Another amazing video like is "This is" !!

Reply ·

I have personally experienced the unethical behavior of Cornell, including but not limited to climate science. As implied above, rather than behaving in a manner beholden to day-to-day society, the shoulders upon which Cornell truly stands, my alma mater has diverted to a path that grovels before the agendas of financial and other sorted vested interests. Attachment 7 above documents just one example.

Much of what currently constitutes climate science, and certainly the climate bolshevism that characterizes higher education's approach to it, could be relegated to **Koyannisqatsi**.



**Cornell University
Johnson Graduate School
of Management**

Curtis W. Tarr, Dean
Malott Hall Ithaca NY 14853-4201 (607) 255-6418

July 28, 1989

Dear Paul,

On my last day as dean, I am thinking about those who have helped to make this such a splendid experience for me and a promising one for this fine School. You certainly are one of those people. I owe you my gratitude.

I look forward to my new life, and I have too many things set aside to accomplish too soon. I will be here in my new office on the fifth floor most of the time. Please call me if ever I can help you; my number will be 607-255-1122.

You have my thanks and warm wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "C. W. Tarr", written in a cursive style.

Curtis W. Tarr

CWT:lw

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Johnson Graduate School of Management

Curtis W. Tarr
Dean

December 22, 1987

Dear Paul,

Thank you very much for your good letter about business ethics. You can be sure I will be reading all the details in this again with great care as I prepare for the course. You certainly are kind to share it with me.

I am grateful for your continuing loyalty to the School. I hope the new year treats you very well indeed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Curtis W. Tarr".

Curtis W. Tarr

CWT:tal

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December 15, 1987

Curtis W. Tarr, Dean
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SUBJECT: Your input request for the spring semester course on Business Ethics

Dear Curtis:

It has been said that in the "modern" business world the employee with a motivational mix that is 75% political and 25% substance will always outclimb the reverse: the employee who is 25% political and 75% substance. When I first heard that remark I thought it was incredulous. However, many of my experiences have given it more credence.

As you know, I began contributing to the greying of my parents' hair at a very early age via my infatuation with the automobile. From greasy fingerprints to ruined clothes to noisy driveways ... Twenty-five years later my situation has advanced itself and may be characterized by saying, "The only difference between men and boys is the price of their toys." The point being that "Motor City" and its workings represent a long-standing object of my attention both vocationally and, in recent years, professionally. I know something about Detroit ... especially its problems. It is in this context that I am able to offer the enclosed as a response to the subject.

In the mid to late seventies, when the proverbial apple cart was upset in Motor City, there were many superficialities cited as being the cause. The Arab oil embargos and rapid rise in fuel prices did, in fact, devastate Detroit's "rich", fuel inefficient product mix. The incredible public sector incompetence with respect to the administration of regulations that affected vehicle fuel economy, emissions and safety continues to be a focus of attention. The foreign competition, especially from Japan, was also cited as being the reason for woe in Detroit. Many, in this finger-pointing frenzy, even cited the UAW as the prime culprit for Detroit's ongoing economic demise. In fact, these "causes" are convenient scapegoats. They're obvious in nature and easily presented by the media. They represent items that "you can get your arms around" and then feel comfortable in the conviction that you have arrived at satisfactory conclusions. In reality, the impact of these overt events merely serve to verify that the cause is more fundamental.

Mismanagement is not new but it has changed in form, if not concealment. On the other hand, to claim that mismanagement is the fundamental cause of Detroit's commercial demise without providing a practical insight into the source and character of the mismanagement would be only slightly more valuable than erroneously qualifying the aforementioned effects as causes.

Published in the September 1983 edition of the Harvard Business Review, "Moral Mazes: Bureaucracy and Managerial Work" approximates the source and character of the mismanagement that runs all too rampant in Detroit, if not the nation. By using the Protestant Ethic as a historical point of departure, Jackall then provides a very accurate "interpretive sociological analysis of the moral dimensions of managers' work" in the context of the "new" business ethic: the Bureaucratic Ethic.

He poses the central question early:

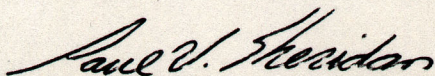
"What if ... men and women in the big corporation no longer see success as necessarily connected to hard work? What becomes of the social morality of the corporation - I mean the everyday rules in use that people play by - when there is thought to be no standard of excellence to explain how and why winners are separated from also-rans, how and why some people succeed and others fail?"

Subtitles include, "Who Gets Credit?", "Fealty to the King," "Capriciousness of Success," "Blame Time," "Playing the Game," etc.

The current irony for me is our (Chrysler) investigations into the inner workings of competitive automotive organizations, specifically the Japanese firms. When I read these reports, I come to the perplexing conclusion that the ethical behavior of, say, Honda is more "American" than the American firms! It is as though the Japanese firms have become the "Americans" of the international business world and the Americans have become ... something else.

I commend your efforts to introduce the ethical issues of the professional business world to the future MBA's of JGSM. Although not as glamorous as high-powered finance or computer-aided operations management, and therefore not as immediate in terms of gratification, business ethics represent the axiomatic basis of all other business disciplines. The subtlety here is that the ethical status of a firm (or a nation) is never fully tested during easy times (such as the post WW II era in Detroit). Only when adversity arises can one fully ascertain the character and competence of management ... without a strong ethical foundation there can be neither. There can only be or become what the ancient Hopi called "Koyaanisqatsi" or "crazy life." 'People scurrying to find the rules of the game, when in fact, "there's nothing new under the sun." As Merlin once said, "... it is the doom of men that they should forget."

Sincerely and respectfully,



Paul V. Sheridan

Enclosures