Research misconduct in non-empirical research – are there types of misconduct analogous to fabrication and falsification?

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Overview

• Identifying the core problem in fabrication and falsification

• Transferring this to one particular kind of non-empirical research, i.e. applied philosophy

• Providing examples of fabrication and falsification analogues in applied philosophy

• Briefly Considering some counterarguments
Correcting the Scholarly Record in the Aftermath of Plagiarism: A Snapshot of Current-Day Publishing Practices in Philosophy

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Abstract

Individuals discovered to have engaged in serial plagiarism in philosophy are few, but the academic publishers falling victim to them are many. Some of the most respected publishing houses in philosophy have recently dealt with the problem of having published plagiarized material. The various responses by these publishers to an instance of serial plagiarism, one that involves forty-three articles and book chapters, provides a real-time snapshot of the practices for correcting the scholarly record. The analysis offered in this article yields a twofold conclusion: first, there is relatively little uniformity among publishers in philosophy for responding to plagiarism; and second, in comparison with the natural sciences the discipline of philosophy often falls short of the accepted practices for correcting the scholarly record. The article considers only public, documented cases of academic plagiarism in philosophy and makes no new allegations of plagiarism.
Other obvious research misconduct in applied philosophy

Authorship misconduct

Reviewer misconduct

Misrepresentation of prior work

• Ignoring / suppressing prior work

• Misrepresenting the work of others, e.g. the erection of straw men
But what about the 2 Fs?

What is the core wrong in fabrication and falsification?

Deliberate deception in order to convince the reader to accept a claim, when that claim is unsupported by the evidence marshalled for it (because that evidence does not exist or has been manipulated)
Similar deception in philosophy?

Do we have instances of ‘Deliberate deception in order to convince the reader to accept a claim, when that claim is unsupported by the *philosophical arguments* marshalled for it’?

*Important premise in the further analysis:*

Philosophers writing academic papers for publication in academic journals are competent philosophers and able to produce valid and sound arguments if they want to
When is deception likely to be employed?

When:

1. The writer is strongly committed to and defending a particular line of argument

2. The writer is strongly committed to and advocating for a particular cause (more common in ethics and political philosophy?)

Note, these categories may overlap (e.g. also in the philosophy of mind)
4 ‘F-analogues’ in philosophy

1. Cherry picking the available empirical evidence for empirical premises (making a logically valid argument potentially un-sound)

2. Relying on deliberate elision to make an otherwise invalid argument valid

3. Using ‘thick’ concepts as if they were ‘thin’

4. Suppressing implications to make a conclusion plausible
Cherry picking

Examples:

Presentation and interpretation of data on end-of-life decision making in the Netherlands

The ethics of prostitution*

Elision

Example:

‘Identity’ in discussions of ‘mitochondrial replacement’ and ‘nuclear replacement’

Many different concepts of identity!
Some lead to the conclusion that these techniques are not identity affecting
Some to the conclusion that they are
And, some to the conclusion that they sometimes are and sometimes not

Elision enables us to reach different conclusions about the two techniques, although they are biomedically/technically identical with arguments that seem valid, except when put next to each other
Using ‘thick’ concepts as if they were ‘thin’

Using thick concepts as if they were thin introduces normative claims to the argument, without making that explicit.

Example:

Using the term ‘mutilation’ in discussions of male circumcision without arguing for the interim conclusion that male circumcision constitutes mutilation.

Also, possible elision between legal and non-legal meanings of ‘mutilation’.
Supressing implications

Many examples from implications of basic theory to more specific arguments
Counterarguments

1. Academic writing in applied philosophy makes no claims about the truth of the conclusions presented

2. Academic writing in applied philosophy is not research, but advocacy or policy advice; and different rules apply to the rhetoric of advocacy and policy advice

3. All of the examples can be explained as ‘honest error’ or at worst as sloppiness

4. In relation to empirical premises – We should not expect philosophers to be able to systematically review the evidence
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