Personalising impersonal science
Narrative-ethical analysis of some authorship cases

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Cases like these...

• PhD-student generates data for research project and makes first analysis.

• Due to pregnancy, PhD-student leaves project, initially temporarily. Yet, after the birth of her child (with health problems) it sadly appears to be impossible to continue her project and it seems that will not return.

• Another PhD enters the project and starts to write the article based on the already data and first analyses of the first PhD.

• When the first PhD comes to know this, she demands to be on the author list of the article.

• The consequence is a dispute about authorship.
Goal

• **Not:**
  solving the normative-ethical problem: What is the right thing to do here, in this situation?

• **But:**
  deeper understanding (hermeneutics) of what happens here and how scientific texts actually come about

• **Central claim:**
  • Situations like these result from *plot fractures* in the standard-story of authorship
  • Tentative: Critical awareness of such plot fractures may prevent authorship disputes?
Cutting edge of two discourses

**Discourse I: Scientific treatise**
- **Impersonal** description of method, process, results of research
- Disinterestedness as ideal
- Background assumptions: *value-free*, facts, objectivity

**Discourse 2: Narrative**
- **Personalized** story of what happened, plot with characters who develop in situations that occur
- Personal *interests*, ambitions, motives and desires in reality
- Background assumptions: *values*, norms, subjectivity and intersubjectivity
Merton – the ideal of disinterestedness

• Robert K. Merton: arch father of sociology of the professions

• Implicitly assumed ideal norms in scientific practice (‘the ethos of science’)
  
  • C : ‘communism’/communality
  • U : universality
  • D : disinterestedness
  • O : organised
  • S : skepticism

• Non-ideal counter-norms
Cutting edge of two discourses

Discourse 1: Scientific treatise

- Impersonal description of method, process, results of research
- Disinterestedness as ideal
- Background assumptions: value-free, factual, objective
- Merton’s ideal norms of science

Discourse 2: Narrative

- Personalized story of what happened, plot with characters who develop in situations that occur
- Personal interests, ambitions, motives and desires in reality
- Background assumptions: values, norms, (inter)subjectivity
- Both ideal norms and non-ideal counter-norms
Discourse 2: authorship-narratives

Basic plot

• Single author

• Doing all the work

• From beginning to end in a linear process

• And, therefore,
  • deserves all credits, reward and recognition
  • and is responsible for the result
Basic authorship-story

author → actions → result

cause

responsibility

reward, recognition

Linear process
Discourse 2: authorship-narratives

**Basic plot**
- Single author
- Doing all the work
- From beginning to end
- And, therefore,
  - deserves all credits, reward and recognition
  - and is responsible for the result

**Usual more complicated plots**
- More than one or even many authors
- All contributing in one way or another, more or less, to the work
- From somewhere to somewhere during the process
- And, therefore, disputes arise about who
  - deserves credits, reward and recognition
  - and is responsible for the result
Basic authorship-story

- Author
- Actions
- Result
- Cause
- Responsibility

Linear process
Complications in authorship-story

PhD 1
Contributor 1 → actions → result

PhD 2
Contributor 2 → actions → result

Supervisor
Contributor 3 → actions → result

Non-Linear process
Questions to you as conclusion:

• What do you think?

• Does this distinction between discourse 1 and 2 make any sense?

• Does the distinction between basic authorship plot and the complicated stories with plot brakes make any sense?

• Do they help us to deepen our understanding in what goes on and what goes wrong in cases like the one described?