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# Comment 2

Jeremie Bouchard

Thank you very much for allowing me to voice my views on ethics in the Humanities, a subject very dear to me. Thank you, Professor Koyanagi, for organizing this event. You have recently dealt shall we say 'head first' with thorny ethical issues in your own area of the Humanities. For that, my sincere gratitude and admiration goes to you. Also, my sincere gratitude goes to Professor Graf and everyone here today. In my commentary, I would like to concentrate on identifying the causes for scientific misconduct in the Humanities and in the sciences at large, and allow other speakers to discuss specific strategies for preventing such behavior from happening in the future. Specifically, I will identify some important features of the Humanities, and from that basis, explain how ethical misconducts are unfortunately too common in our field.

Research in the Humanities — as in any other fields of knowledge for that matter — is essentially aimed at bringing further sophistication of existing theories and methodologies which help us describe, explain and hopefully predict social phenomena. This unavoidable trajectory in which we are all engaged requires from each of us a high degree of critical engagement, not only to locate conceptual and methodological gaps and contradictions in our existing epistemologies, but also and perhaps more importantly to (a) remain acutely aware of the ethical grounds upon which we stand, and (b) remain critical of our own research practices. Please allow me a few minutes to explain why the Humanities are unique in this respect.

In his intriguing and insightful work *Homo Academicus*, the renowned

sociologist Pierre Bourdieu explains how the Humanities, or the social sciences developed within the university context, are built upon an intricate power structure emerging from a system of academic classification which, in many ways, acts as a hidden instrument of social classification and stratification. According to Bourdieu, professors in the Humanities are classified products, constantly classifying themselves and others in terms of academic taxonomies, creating permanent practices of self-appraisal where ambitions and self-esteem are inseparably defined. Their aspirations and career decisions anticipate the judgments that the academic system will eventually pass on their ambitions. In addition, those who are best classified and appraised end up ruling this classifying system by essentially granting legitimacy — thus controlling — what is said and written by individuals at lower levels of the hierarchy. In short, they create an ethical and intellectual aristocracy. As you can probably deduce from these arguments, there are two main problems here. Firstly, this emergent stratifying structure can only reinforce adaptable and conformist behaviors and dispositions by both the powerful and powerless. Secondly, in a constantly changing social world where human knowledge must be questioned and reformed on an ongoing basis, these classifying structures too often reproduce the structures of the objective relations of the society in which academia is embedded, and which have produced them in the first place. In his critique of the Japanese university system, Brian McVeigh, a scholar of Japanese pop art, education, politics and history, rightfully identifies the various forms of academic misconduct among Japanese academics as products of academic credentialism which, in his view, should be understood within the larger politico-economic environment of Japanese national statism. Personally, I think the same argument can be made with regards to any other academic system around the world. In short, the existing — I shall say *hegemonic* — system of appraisal and classification of

academic Self and Other — not only in Japan but everywhere — is self-reproducing, thus ill-fitted to the production of new knowledge and new epistemologies. This is a complex problem which, as academics and social scientists, we must all become aware of and come to term with.

As a tangent, let me mention a few words about why the mere reproduction of academic knowledge in our field can be problematic. The philosopher Jean Baudrillard's notion of the order of simulacra as a four-step process provides clarity here. The first stage of simulacra is a faithful image/copy, a reflection of a profound reality (e.g., a photograph). The second stage is a perversion of reality, where the sign is considered an unfaithful copy which "masks and denatures" reality (e.g., the digital alteration of a photograph). The third stage masks the absence of a profound reality, where the simulacrum pretends to be a faithful copy, but it is a copy with no original. Signs and images claim to represent something real, but no representation is taking place: only arbitrary images are suggested without explicit links with their real-world referents. At this stage, human meaning is communicated "artificially", often for ideological purposes. The fourth stage is pure simulation, in which the simulacrum has no relationship to any reality whatsoever. Published in 1981, Baudrillard's treatise was essentially warning us that, in our hyper mediatized and neoliberal society, simulacra — or in the current discussion, the ongoing reproduction of what we know — constitutes a regime of total equivalency, where cultural products need no longer even pretend to be real or related to real-world objects and experiences. This is the "hyperreal" stage, or as some have come to label it, the "post-truth" era. From this tangential explanation, we can see how ethical misconducts in our field can be related, at least in part, to this process of reproduction and uncritical simulation of knowledge production unfortunately common in the Humanities.

Coming back to Bourdieu's account of the Humanities, some of you

might disagree by asking *Isn't such a system of appraisal and classification necessary to judge the value of new research?* Well, yes, at least in principle. But in fact, what we most often observe is the reproduction — not the transformation — of existing knowledge. Later, I will explain why this is the case. Some of you might also ask *Since academic appraisal and classification are essentially true of both the social and the natural sciences, how are the Humanities different or unique here?* To answer this question, Bourdieu draws from Kant's somewhat old-fashioned division between higher faculties and lower faculties, and argues that in the Humanities, researchers tend to be more often left to their own reasons and rationales, and less often judged with reference to long-established scientific rules and norms.

In my view, this is an interesting but insufficient argument. More elaborate and convincing is the explanation provided by the social realist thinker Karl Maton. In his inspiring volume *Knowledge and Knowers*, Maton describes the natural sciences as possessing a 'strong grammar' — a language capable of relatively precise empirical descriptions and generation of models of empirical relations. This also means that the natural sciences have a relative but strong capacity to predict how future events in the natural world might happen. The natural sciences are also said to be characterized by a horizontal knower structure, whereby the social status of individual researchers matters less than how research outputs relates to and inform existing theories and methodologies, and how they can improve them.

In contrast, Maton describes the Humanities, or cultural studies, as possessing a 'weak grammar' — i.e., their objects of inquiry and research procedures are ambiguous, nebulous. Their capacity for prediction is consequently greatly reduced. The Humanities also adopt a hierarchical knower structure, built upon an ideal knower — what I would call the

'expert interpreter' — and the integration of new knowers in an increasingly expanding field. In this field of knowledge, researchers tend to share a subjectivist understanding of knowledge, and tend to emphasize the social influences on how different kinds of knowers act, think and feel — what we might call the ongoing legitimization of the 'expert interpreter'.

This is where Maton's views bridge with those of Bourdieu summarized earlier. The Humanities are even more dependent than the natural sciences on the social aspects of knowledge. Stated differently, the importance of the person who formulates knowledge is greater in the Humanities than in the natural sciences. This has fundamental ramifications for the direction in which the Humanities evolve over time. According to Maton, cultural studies depend a great deal on radical disjunctures, or critical deconstructions and transformations of knowledge previously developed. The idea is that, rather than building upon previous knowledge and fine-tuning it over long periods of time — as would be common in the natural sciences — social scientists tend to declare new beginnings, re-definitions and even complete ruptures with the past. The Humanities, as an intellectual field, then gives the appearance of undergoing permanent cultural revolution, and ownership of 'revolutionary ideas' then becomes central to the legitimacy of the researcher — or 'expert interpreter' — within the field. In parallel, progress in the Humanities tends to be measured by the addition of new voices advocating the rejection of past theories and the introduction of new, more radical ones. We can see clear evidence of this in the passion expressed by so many contemporary social scientists for anti-positivist, postmodern perspectives. Essentially, postmodern theories share the contention that knowledge claims are reducible to the social characteristics of the group voicing them, which forms the basis for a critique of notions of neutral voices and objective truths, notions which have a much more solid standing in the natural sciences. Instead,

postmodernism strongly advocates contextualist and perspectival episte-
mologies, and emphasizes the multiplicity of truths and narratives. The
influence of Michel Foucault's work — or to be more exact, the various
interpretations of his work — on the Humanities is undeniable here, and
certainly not unproblematic.

In my view, this is all very good in principle. Social scientists can work
very well with a weak grammar and within a stronger hierarchical knower
structure. In reality, however, and drawing from my experience in the field
of sociolinguistics, what we most often see are claims of new knowledge,
not new knowledge per se. What we too often have is a reproduction — or
uncritical simulation — of existing theories and methodologies merely
applied to the study of local realities. To me, this also constitutes an ethical
problem for the Humanities, because it has significantly constrained our
ability to generate new knowledge and understanding of the social world.
These odd processes are not necessarily observed in the natural sciences;
they are rather unique to the Humanities, which again is a field in which
researchers tend to be more often left to their own reasons, rationales, and
interpretive skills.

I mention these distinguishing features of the Humanities to explain
how they are built and developed upon what we might call more
ambiguous foundations than those which ground the natural sciences. More
pertinent to the current symposium, I also mention this because, as social
researchers, we have a fundamental ethical responsibility towards what we
do and towards the knowledge we produce. Because the type of research
we produce is characterized by weak grammar, theoretical and methodo-
logical ambiguity, and a rather rigid hierarchy of knowers and experts,
ethical considerations become particularly salient. These arguments are
certainly not aimed at diminishing the value of the Humanities to human
knowledge. Quite the contrary: what I have said so far is aimed at clarifying

the very nature of our work, not only to avoid ethical misconduct but also to improve our research.

Lastly, there are many things we can do to protect the authenticity, or the ethical grounds upon which the Humanities stand. I think these challenges must begin with greater theorization of our field, as I have tried to do just now. Through greater theorization, we can develop a clearer understanding of the structure and logic of our field, how it evolves, what constitutes knowledge, how to better classify and categorize both knowledge and knowers, and very importantly, how to identify ethical issues at the heart of what we do. Secondly, we need to understand ethical misconduct in the Humanities not exclusively as the product of faulty personalities of individual researchers, but also as the unfortunate outcome of existing power structures in our field. We must refrain from adhering to the simplistic neoliberal principle that successes are systemic and failures are individual, and instead develop a broader view of where we stand and what we do as a community of researchers. As Professor Graf rightfully points out, "scientific misconduct has to do with the rapid structural changes in the scientific systems of many advanced societies. Modern industrialized societies see research and technological development as basic instruments for the increase of national wealth and the improvement of their people's health and standard of living." One thing we can draw from this argument is awareness that the new challenges ahead of us pose new ethical problems. We must, for one, be critical of the growing need for more and more new researchers to produce and publish new works to secure or improve their employment status. As we all know and are surely ready to admit, this reality creates a permanent state of competition, of classification of self and others which, unfortunately, too often leads to the reproduction — or uncritical simulation — of existing knowledge rather than its transformation. Coupled with the increasing commodification of academia

and education, this ongoing race for recognition and legitimization is, in my view, an important reason why scientific misconduct happens in the Humanities.

In closing, the question tackled in this symposium is *How Can We Guarantee the Scientific Authenticity of the Humanities?* To this, I have little to contribute, except to mention that ethical codes of practices are essential in informing and guiding researchers and ensuring proper ethical practices. As I was working on my PhD, I remember having to read various thick documents on ethics in social research. I initially dreaded this portion of my doctoral studies. Gradually, however, this entire discussion on ethics actually began to reshape my understanding of what I was trying to do. I would therefore invite everyone in the audience to consult the broad range of existing materials on ethics in social research, and be ready to develop a new, perhaps more insightful view of the Humanities. I still have those documents in my files, and I would be very happy to share them with anyone interested in understanding what is meant by ethics in social research, the various manifestations of ethical misconduct in our field, what can be done to deal with cases of misconduct, and rather importantly, how to protect the people who make rightful allegations of research misconduct. These people must be admired not only for demonstrating honesty but also courage.

Thank you.