

# The Relationship between Plagiarism and Morality

Adriana Tulus

*Jurist, Master's student at Titu Maiorescu University, Bucharest, Romania, adrianatulus@yahoo.com*

**ABSTRACT:** This paper aims to analyze the following issue: plagiarism is considered to be an unethical behavior, and the perpetrators are to be sanctioned, including expulsion from their institution. Sometimes, we should admit, plagiarism is accidental. The ability to produce unique content without being plagiarized is like securing a software or biotechnology patent. A patent is the inventor's method of protecting his intellectual property and livelihood. Copyright infringement is a violation of the rights of the copyright holder when the material whose use is restricted by copyright is used without consent. Acts of plagiarism are morally reprehensible because the rules of the codes of ethics for students, academics, writers and scholars are intentionally violated. In this case, it is important to note that most cases in which the act of plagiarism has been determined can be discussed as intentional, as people choose to copy the material as the fastest way to cope with the task. As a result of such activities, the idea of intellectual freedom is also taken into account. Therefore, it is possible to pay attention to the reasons for discussing the facts of stealing other people's words and ideas as being morally wrong.

**KEYWORDS:** plagiarism, morality, moral values, deception, ethics.

## Plagiarism

The word *plagiarism* has its roots in the Latin *plagiarius*. According to the Online Dictionary of Etymology, the word means "kidnapper, seducer, robber, one who kidnaps another's child or slave ...." (Valpy and Jackson 1999, 345) and was used by the Roman poet Martial to describe another poet who he had robbed the works. Plagiarism is defined as "the unauthorized use or close imitation of another author's language and thoughts and their representation as an original work of one's own person" (Romanian Academy 2009, 974) This violates the author's right to ownership of the work, which is a fundamental moral right. In academic circles, plagiarism is considered unethical behavior, and perpetrators can be punished, including expulsion from their institution.

A student, borrowing an idea from a website while doing research forgets to attribute it to the author. Obviously, it is a small problem when it is a sentence or a short paragraph. It is a bigger problem when several paragraphs or chapters make their way into the paper. In many industries, content production is a business model. Most publishers produce books, magazines and websites as a means of attracting readers, subscriptions and revenue. Plagiarism is a direct attack on this business model. If the integrity of a publisher's content is not protected, it dramatically lowers the value of the service they provide to their customers.

Simply put, the originality of an author's content is not the point of a philosophical or moral debate, but rather the central element of a business model. The ability to produce unique content without being plagiarized is like securing a software or biotechnology patent. A patent is the inventor's method of protecting his intellectual property and livelihood. If a biotechnology company makes a discovery, it is in their best interest to protect their rights to this invention. At the same time, an author or publisher must protect their content from plagiarism. As we read, study, experiment, and gather perspectives, we rely on other people's ideas. Based on their ideas and experiences, we create our own ideas. In academia, the originality of the content, whether it is produced by students or educators, is essential for educational activity. If student plagiarism remained uncontrolled, it would drastically reduce the value of a diploma. There are many types of plagiarism. We cite only a few of them: (Gravetter and Forzano 2015, 122).

*Direct plagiarism:* is the word-for-word transcription of a section of someone else's work, in which the user does not use the appropriate quotation marks or quotations. Such deliberate actions are considered ethical and academic dishonesty.

*Self-plagiarism:* occurs when a person submits his or her previous work or a mixture of previous tasks without the permission of the teachers involved.

*Patch writing:* It is also called "mosaic plagiarism". Occurs when a student borrows sentences from a source without using quotation marks. Or find synonyms for the author's language, but keep the same general structure and meaning of the content.

*Accidental plagiarism:* such a situation occurs when a person neglects to cite their sources or cites them incorrectly. Unintentional paraphrasing or grouping of words that match another source may also fall into this category. Cases of accidental plagiarism are taken as seriously as any other plagiarism.

By following simple suggestions, plagiarism and its negative consequences can be easily avoided. In most cases, we can avoid it by quoting original sources. A simple acknowledgment that certain materials have been borrowed from that source can keep things normal. A student can certainly improve his learning of different citation styles to avoid such academic problems. Plagiarism Checker X also tried to help students by creating a dedicated "reference guide" page. Even if we try our best, we may fall prey to plagiarism, unintentionally. Therefore, the last option is to download a plagiarism detector such as Plagiarism Checker X and use it for every task.

The method of detecting plagiarism, however, can be seen as quite controversial, as its effects are often considered questionable. Needless to say, online plagiarism check devices, like any machine in general, are far from impeccable, and their process of analyzing academic activity is anything but impeccable. Therefore, even the work written entirely by a student and belonging exclusively to the person who composes it can be seen as easily plagiarized by an online plagiarism detector. Consequently, it is impossible to rely on online detectors, which is why most academic institutions allow a plagiarism margin of 3-10%.

A central and very important point is represented by the ancient view of plagiarism, in those days there was no plagiarism it was considered a theft. The ancients were guided by the universal law (Do not kill, Do not steal). The great German philosopher Immanuel Kant portrays in one of his great works the struggle between legal laws and moral laws.

### **Kant's ethics and morality**

The objects of practical reason are Good and Evil. The object of practical reason is understood as the relationship between the will and the action by which he or his opposite would be achieved, but considered according to a principle of reason. Starting from the concepts of good and evil, Kant identifies the categories of freedom, metaphysics of the theory of law, The Theory of Law and The Metaphysical Principles of the Theory of Virtue. The division of the metaphysics of morals into the theory of law and the theory of virtue is due to the fact that there are two kinds of laws of freedom, with the duties involved: legal laws and moral laws.

Kant's ethical view is deontologically oriented (it refers to the good or bad actions performed by a moral agent out of duty, as opposed to those performed by a moral agent for a good or bad consequence) and is centered on the concept of duty. It is based on the idea that reason is good in itself and that all individuals are rational beings. His major contribution was the theory of the categorical imperative which states that you must always act according to such a maxim that can become at the same time a universal law (e.g.: do not kill, do not steal etc.), namely be applicable to all in an identical situation.

The analysis of practical reason defines those judgments which comprise a universal determination of the will and to which practical rules are subordinated. Practical principles are maxims or practical laws, depending on their subjective conditioning (valid for the will of the subject) or objective (valid for the will of any rational being).

The foundation of the metaphysics of morals - this Kantian work has the role of preparing the ground for the edification of moral philosophy, or, in Kant's words, of researching and establishing the supreme principle of morality (Immanuel Kant, *The foundation of the metaphysics of morals; Critique of practical reason*, translated by Bagdasar). It consists of three parts: The transition from moral knowledge of common reason to philosophical knowledge, The transition from popular moral philosophy to the metaphysics of morals; The transition from the metaphysics of morals to the Critique of pure practical reason. Three parts - three passages, necessary for the elaboration of a pure moral philosophy "fully cleansed of all that can only be empirical" (Immanuel Kant, *The foundation of the metaphysics of morals; Critique of practical reason*, op. cit., 7).

A moral philosophy cleansed of all that is empirical is necessary because a law, in order to assert its moral validity, in other words to prescribe an obligation, cannot rely only on the authority of men, but on the concepts of pure reason. Moral laws are not simple practical rules, valid for people, but a priori laws, valid for any rational being.

### **The Relationship Between Plagiarism and Morality**

Plagiarism is not the same as copyright infringement. Although both terms may apply to a particular act, they are different concepts, and false claims by the author are generally plagiarism regardless of whether the material is protected by copyright. Copyright infringement is a violation of the rights of the copyright holder when the material whose use is restricted by copyright is used without consent. Instead, plagiarism is concerned with the undefeated growth of the plagiarized author's reputation or with obtaining academic credit, which is achieved through false claims by the author. Thus, plagiarism is considered a moral offense against the plagiarist's audience (e.g., a reader, listener, or teacher).

Plagiarism is also considered a moral offense against anyone who has offered a benefit to plagiarism in exchange for what is specifically supposed to be original content (for example, the publisher, employer or teacher of the plagiarist). In such cases, acts of plagiarism can sometimes be part of a claim for breach of the plagiarist's contract or, if knowingly, for a civil error. Authors and creative people devote a lot of time, resources, skills and knowledge to producing intellectual property. Plagiarism is a sign of disrespect for a person whose ideas are being copied. Plagiarism is morally wrong for two reasons.

First of all, because it is dishonest and a form of lying. When we pretend to have created something that we actually simply copied from someone else, we are lying. We mislead our listeners into believing that we have done something we did not actually do, and we can personally gain from it, for example, "if we are praised or judged competent for something, we are not really competent for. So, usually, it's not just about theft, but a kind of lie, which intends to deceive another (teacher) by presenting that work as his own creation" (Florea 2018, 107).

Secondly, because we are stealing from the creator the work of recognition that he would have rightly deserved. This recognition can take many forms, from fame and respect to monetary compensation in cases where the plagiarized work is the one on which the creator obtains income from the sale of children. If we make money by selling what someone else has created, then that money would belong to the creator and not to us. "Plagiarism was not always morally reprehensible, much less legal. It became a problem only when two conditions were met: the institution of authorship was established, that is, people were recognized as authors, and when the world of universities and research developed, becoming one of hyper specialization and intensive publication of articles and books, a world based on funding applications" (Vica, Socaciu, Gibeau 2018, 109).

Plagiarism is an important ethical issue that should be discussed as a morally reprehensible act, because plagiarism is direct theft based on dishonesty in relation to students and scholars who share their ideas and are based on intellectual property rights. The progress of the internet

contributes to this process due to the possibilities of access to open and available documents written by different people. However, many people choose to ignore the ethical aspects of academic writing and focus on violating the idea of academic integrity while plagiarizing.

Acts of plagiarism are morally reprehensible because the rules of the codes of ethics for students, academics, writers and scholars are intentionally violated. In this case, it is important to note that most cases in which the act of plagiarism has been determined can be discussed as intentional, as people choose to copy the material as the fastest way to cope with the task. As a result of such activities, the idea of intellectual freedom is also taken into account. Therefore, it is possible to pay attention to the reasons for discussing the facts of stealing other people's words and ideas as being morally wrong.

Plagiarism is part of the broader concept of cheating in school. Plagiarism is stealing and lying, while assimilation is the process of educating the mind to gain knowledge from a wide variety of sources. Plagiarism is unethical because it goes against typical college and class standards that require students to create original papers and projects. The purpose of written projects and schoolwork is to help students think, create and communicate critically in writing. If we plagiarize, we bypass this educational goal.

If the use of the words of other authors can be verified with the help of various plagiarism detectors, theft of ideas is a more complex procedure that cannot be successfully determined in all cases. "Plagiarism is a form of moral corruption, but also of material corruption, and, like any phenomenon of corruption, it fades like translucent whiteness when it is brought to light. Any corruption becomes visible, shameful when it is revealed. This happens with plagiarism, with the so-called scientific works elaborated in the penitentiary in improbable conditions" (Alexandrescu 2020).

## Conclusions

We can conclude that plagiarism is unethical for three reasons:

- First, it is unethical because it is a form of theft. By taking the ideas and words of others and pretending to be yours, you are stealing someone else's intellectual property.
- Secondly, it is unethical because the plagiarist subsequently benefits from this theft.
- Third, a degree is proof of the skills and knowledge of its holder. If a student wins a job based on a grade he or she did not get, it could be a risk to others.

## References

- Alexandrescu, Vlad. 2016. *Plagiatul este o formă de corupție morală, dar și materială (Plagiarism is a form of moral and material corruption)*. <https://www.gds.ro/Actualitate/2016-01-12/>.
- Florea, Bujorel. 2018. *Reflecții despre plagiat (Reflections on plagiarism)*. Bucharest: Hamangiu Publishing House.
- Gravetter, Frederick J, Forzano, Lori-Ann B. 2015. *Research Methods for the Behavioral Sciences*. Cengage Learning, 5th Edition, Hardcover.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1972. *Întemeierea metafizicii moravurilor; Critica rațiunii practice. (The foundation of the metaphysics of morals; Critique of practical reason)*. Translation of N. Bagdasar. 1972. Bucharest: Științifică Publishing House.
- Romanian Academy, Institute of Linguistics. 2009. *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române (ediția a II-a revăzută și adăugită). The explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language (2nd edition revised and added)*. Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic Gold Publishing House.
- Valpy, Francis, Jackson, Edward. 1999. *Etymological Dictionary of the Latin Language*. Adegi Graphics LLC. Available online at <https://www.etymonline.com/word/plagiarism>.
- Vică, C., Socaciu, E., Gibea, T. 2018. *Etică și integritate academică (Ethics and academic integrity)*. Bucharest: University of Bucharest Publishing House.