Subject: Re: INFO: Plagiarism & Blind Submissions Digest
Date: Tuesday, April 12, 2011 12:53
From: Adrian Piper <amsp@ADRIANPIPER.COM>
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Conversation: INFO: Plagiarism & Blind Submissions Digest

Following is a digest of responses to my post below. As the responses often, rightly, treat *The Berlin Journal of Philosophy* as a proposed solution to or at least case study of the issues raised in this post, I comment accordingly.

(1) Several people argued against anonymous refereeing on the grounds that disclosing the referee's identity to the author discouraged referees' plagiarism of ideas from unpublished papers.

    The Berlin Journal of Philosophy's Anti-Plagiarism Policy at http://adrianpiper.com/berlinjphil/anti_plagiarism.shtml is primarily intended to guide a referee who suspects an author of plagiarism. Although its first three and concluding paragraphs also have application to an author who suspects a referee of plagiarism, it does not directly address this very serious problem, and I am grateful to those who raised it. On reflection, I think referee plagiarism has even worse moral implications, because it takes advantage of the referee's privileged position of professional trust and confidentiality. But I also think that excessive institutional demands of productivity ("publish or perish") that deform and pressurize the natural creative intellectual cycle and lead some individuals to believe that this kind of parasitic betrayal of trust is justified on survival grounds at any stage in one's career need to be examined very closely. That would be an independent discussion.

    In any case, if an author's paper is fully anonymized in accordance with BOTH the Submission Guidelines at http://adrianpiper.com/berlinjphil/submission_guidelines.shtml AND ALSO the blind submission web application template I have offered below, a plagiarizing referee cannot know how widely the paper has already been circulated or delivered – and therefore how quickly an attempt to plagiarize it will be publicly detected. Just because readers who do detect this may remain silent in order to avoid professional repercussions, this does not mean they do not realize what plagiarizers are doing.

(2) On a related point, several people asked whether Paragraph 2 of the Anonymous Referee Contract was to be interpreted literally, implying that anonymous referees for the *Berlin J Phil* were prohibited from listing that service on their CVs.

    The answer is that yes, this is the correct interpretation of Paragraph 2, and the implication holds. The point is to protect the referee's freedom to evaluate a submitted paper solely on its merits, without fear of professional repercussions even in those difficult and painful cases where the paper raises plagiarism issues. The price of this freedom is that the referee must forego the professional advantages of being publicly identified as a referee for the *Journal*.

(3) Aaron Sloman questioned the assumptions behind my first paragraph below, and offered a thorough, extended defense of abolishing blind reviewing altogether. The full text of his argument can be accessed at <u>http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/research/</u>

projects/cogaff/misc/post-publication-review.html . I like Aaron's conception of post-publication review a lot; but I think it should supplement rather than replace the traditional pre-publication review procedure. Here I will address only his arguments against blind review as they bear on my post. Aaron questions my assumption that "judging academic works exclusively on the basis of their quality (as opposed to reputation of authors or institutions, or influence of good or bad personal relations between reviewers and authors, etc.) is done best by hiding the author's identity," for the following reasons *inter alia*:

(3.1) When a paper builds on previous work, it is impossible for a referee to evaluate the quality of the present work without knowing the context that the author's previous work provides. Blind reviewing creates corresponding difficulties for some authors whose "work does not consist of a collection of separate reports on things done or discovered in isolation," but instead "extend or revise things ... written previously, and trying to present a new paper without setting the context, which would make it very easy for any reviewer to identify me (and inspect the papers on my web sites), can be very difficult."

I recognize and sympathize with the "Gestalt" problem. But when it looms too large, this may be a sign that the journal article format is perhaps not the right one for the project; and that a monograph may be more appropriate. A referee's obligation is to evaluate the paper as the author presents it. If it is incomplete or not self-contained, that suggests that a Revise and Resubmit decision may be appropriate.

(3.2) "[W]hen a research community is fairly integrated it is often quite easy to recognize the author of a paper from the style, the assumptions, the work it claims to be extending or refuting, etc., especially when it is a paper by a well known, highly respected or highly controversial researcher."

Perhaps so. But surely the content of a referee's report on a paper should not be based on unconfirmed guesses about who its author is. According to my sources, the author plagiarism problem is widespread enough that such guesses actually have a reasonable probability of being mistaken.

(3.3) "Moreover, nowadays with search engines it is often not very hard to take some distinctive phrases from a paper under review and identify closely related work by the same author, or even a preprint version of the work submitted." Aaron argues that this additional information can improve a referee's review.

A reviewer who tries to find out who the author is when asked to write a blind review report breaks the rules the journal has established, and under which the paper was sent to him or her.

On the other hand, when refereeing is conceived as an uncompensated service to the field that one is professionally obligated to render when called, one may well reason that, having been given no opportunity to make or consent to those rules in the first place, one violates no moral

obligation in breaking them. The problems that ensue under these conditions are hardly limited to breaking the blind review rule. To quote from Hannes Leitgeb's and Berit Brogaard's illuminating Philoso-L post of 24 October 2010,

> People who are unfamiliar with journal editing think that the turn-around time should be around one month. Well, here is the reason it's not. First, the editor-in-chief receives the paper. Then he or she asks one of the associate editors whether they are interested in taking on the assignment, and they then accept or reject. Then the associate professor who (finally) accepts sends the paper out to two to three referees. They may turn down the invitation or even fail to answer. Then the associate editor sends it to new referees, and so it goes, until two to three referees have agreed to review the paper (at this point two to three months may have lapsed already). Then those who agree to review might be late. They are then sent a letter to remind them. Occasionally that helps. When it does not, the associate editor has to find a new referee, who will need at least a month to referee the paper. ... [E]ditors and referees edit and referee as a service to the profession. It's not part of their job, and most of us don't even get a course release or a graduate student helper.

This was the post that convinced me that *The Berlin Journal of Philosophy* had to require a signed contract to which the referee explicitly consents, and also had to offer at least a nominal honorarium to those who did. This assumes that referees will be more inclined to follow rules to which they have agreed, and for which the value of their service is explicitly acknowledged.

(3.4) "The attempt to make heavy use of blind reviewing expresses the assumption that most reviewers are unreliable, prejudiced, dishonest, vindictive or have similar flaws. If that's true the faults in the community will be too bad to be remedied by blind reviewing and should instead be addressed by mechanism that identify, expose and criticise people who are guilty of dishonest, biased, or incompetent reviewing."

The use of blind reviewing does not necessarily express these assumptions. It minimally expresses the same assumptions that led Rawls to stipulate the Veil of Ignorance as a condition of rational decision-making in *A Theory of Justice*.

One argument in favor of non-blind reviewing that Aaron does not mention is what I will call the Gatekeeper option: A journal may want the freedom to publish a particular author's paper for valid reasons that are nevertheless independent of the quality of the paper, e.g. the author's historical importance, the light the paper sheds on the author's previous work, the author's stature in the field, the journal's professional obligation or sentimental connection to the author, etc.

These legitimate considerations are overriding for some journals. For others, they are not. But then no one would argue that all journals should have the same policies

or priorities. For *The Berlin Journal of Philosophy*, they do not outweigh the risk of misusing the Gatekeeper option, to *decline* to publish a particular author's work for reasons that are independent of the quality of the paper, e.g. the author's historical unimportance, lack of stature in the field, the journal's lack of professional obligation or sentimental connection to the author, etc.

(4) One person wondered whether the *Journal's* anonymizing procedure might not be more robust if references to an author's previous work simply gave the author's name objectively, as with other work cited (McIntosh states . . .), rather than substituting "Author's Book [or Article]" for the entire bibliographic citation.

Objective reference is a viable alternative in many cases. But sometimes, citing one's own work as an objective reference can skew the content of the argument in unacceptable ways. For example, explicitly acknowledging that you are reprising or condensing an argument you've developed at greater length elsewhere is very different from crediting someone else with having developed an argument at greater length elsewhere that you are presently reprising or condensing; and each entails different expository obligations.

(5) Several applicants for the anonymous referee position questioned the purpose of requiring not only a CV but also a sample publication.

This ensures that an anonymous referee's language and manner of exposition in his or her own scholarly work fit the criteria, described in the Submission Guidelines at http://adrianpiper.com/berlinjphil/submission_guidelines.shtml and in Paragraph 3 of the Anonymous Referee's Contract, for papers publishable in the *Journal*. Of course this is not to deny the value of other languages or expository styles in themselves. But a referee is best positioned to evaluate paper submissions for the *Berlin J Phil* whose own work also meets its criteria for publication.

So far, the *Journal* is gradually gaining good referee coverage in E&M, Logic, and Value Theory. We would appreciate more volunteers in those fields, but also most especially in the History of Philosophy specialties and subspecialties. Please consult the Call for Referees at http://adrianpiper.com/berlinjphil/referees.shtml .

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THIRD PUBLICATION ANNIVERSARY of
Rationality and the Structure of the Self (2008)
Volume I: The Humean Conception
Volume II: A Kantian Conception
http://www.adrianpiper.com/rss/index.shtml

From: Adrian Piper <amsp@ADRIANPIPER.COM>
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For those who aspire to peer-reviewed publications accepted exclusively on the basis of their quality, or at least to avoid treatment affected by knowledge of the author's identity, a policy of blind submissions is a necessary supplement to double-blind reviewing: By concealing the author's identity even from administrators, it guards against information slippage, whether intentional or unintentional, between administrators and referees.

   For those whose publications receive rather more use than mention by their colleagues, a strong and consistent anti-plagiarism policy, of the sort recommended by the Office of Research Integrity (http://ori.hhs.gov/), the Committee on Publication Ethics (http://publicationethics.org/), or the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (http://www.singaporestatement.org/) is equally important.

   These two procedures appear to be mutually incompatible: A robust blind submissions policy requires that the author's identity not be disclosed, even to administrators, until after referees have made a positive decision on the paper; and, if a negative one, not at all. A robust anti-plagiarism policy requires that plagiarism sanctions apply independently of whether or not the paper is accepted for publication; and this, in turn, requires that the author's identity be known at least to administrators in advance of that decision.

   For a long time, I tried to think through a peer-review publication procedure that might reconcile these two conflicting policies, with very limited success. Suppose, for example, an administrator were to require blind submissions to remain anonymous only until the referee's notification to the administrator that a decision had been made. At that point, the administrator would require disclosure of the author's identity only to the administrator, in advance of the referee's disclosure to the administrator as to what that decision was. Should the referee then report evidence of plagiarism to the administrator, the administrator then would reveal the author's identity to the referee and both would apply the anti-plagiarism policy.

   One problem with this procedure is that it requires of administrators both professional incorruptibility and also sharp powers of concentration on the timing and detailed execution of each step in the procedure. Professional incorruptibility is irritating enough, the insufferable prigs. Unleavened by absent-mindedness or general administrative incompetence, it is completely intolerable.

   A second problem is that, unlike a pure blind submissions process that can be fully computerized, it places all of the responsibility for executing the procedure on an administrator who, even with the best and most focused will in the world, is humanly

fallible – and may thus accidentally leave disclosing information in the wrong in-box, send it to the wrong e-mail address, delegate it to an insufficiently trained assistant, grade and return it to a student, photocopy and distribute it as a course hand-out, or send it to a referee doing unannounced double duty as a co-administrator.

These problems led me to wonder whether some such procedure could itself be fully computerized, on the model of the very successful, recent XI. Kant Congress Pisa 2010 blind submissions procedure, such that human error could be eliminated at least up to the point where substantive judgments as to the evidence, origin and consequences of plagiarism had to be made. In the process of researching this possibility, I was compelled to conjure in imagination the philosophy journal in which such a procedure could be most easily put to use; and concluded that I would have to establish it myself. The result can be viewed at http://www.adrianpiper.com/berlinjphil/index.shtml . A proper announcement of that journal, *The Berlin Journal of Philosophy*, follows on the heels of this post.

In this post, I aim merely to have outlined the problem, announced a solution, and now offer to share that solution, a simple web application template, with any other journal that might wish to consider it.

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