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## PLAGIARISM AS THE MORAL PROBLEM OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

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**Abstract.** *The problem of plagiarism in the information society is specified by the opened nature of social communication, by changing author's status in contemporary culture, by the distribution of contemporary creativity – not traditional creation. From a moral point of view a plagiarism is an insult to the moral dignity of man, capable of creative activity. Copyright is the juridical problem, and plagiarism is an ethical one. The best controller of the plagiarism problem wouldn't be the law but the unprejudiced academic public opinion.*

**Keywords:** *plagiarism, moral, traditional creation, contemporary creativity, information society.*

### Introduction

The problem of plagiarism appeared in the early modern period when the author, unlike many ancient eastern and medieval European cultures, which neglected the personality of the text creator, took central stage. The main value was to translate the tradition, to which the writer was related no more than an interpreter. Personal authorship became important, when the scientific and artistic achievements were thought of as the

results of single individual's work. "The concept of unconditional originality is a modern concept, born during the Romanticism epoch"<sup>1</sup>. Plagiarism turned into the illegal act and moral evil, it was now considered as an attempt to seize the human right to produce some knowledge and the scientific society's morale. From that moment the prohibition on attributing the authorship on someone's ideas became the basic norm of science. It worked also for art and literature where the composition was considered the result of personal illumination and individual effort of the creator. The prohibition on plagiarism became the fundamental norm of culture.

Changes that occurred in the modern world were characterized by the postmodern philosophy as "author's death"<sup>2</sup>. Nowadays it's impossible to create something ultimately new – one only might combine texts, meanings, interpretations. So, plagiarism is inevitable in some sense and it stops being an attack on the individual's sovereignty – it appears as a form of quoting, recognition of the author's importance, as a form of distributing the information. Earlier the ideas were "in the air" before someone could state them, now fresh thoughts and ideas created by a person immediately spread across the information environment as anonymous self-evidences. The open and democratic nature of modern culture leads to alienation of ideas from their author and dissolution of ideas in the communicative space. The operating of the anonymous information field blurs the idea of authorship and plagiarism. And though the latter remains a moral and legal crime as the intentional appropriation of authorship on the original compositions, the problem of plagiarism appears in new dimensions to analysis of which this article is devoted.

With the development of information technologies the mechanism of functioning of all cultural spheres and the status of creation as the basic ability due to which culture has initially appeared has changed. According to the dictionary<sup>3</sup>, creation means 'producing new in their sense cultural and material values'. Complying with this all the achievements in our cultural life have formed from scientific, artistic, ethic, religious and technical work. The information technologies allow us to distribute the information about these achievements, but it's unclear, whether they help to produce new cultural values. The fact that the amount of information on Earth grows exponentially shows that the information is not so important – it has the producer, but no consumer. The growth of the amount of information leads to the devaluation of knowledge; it seems that everything is already known, and one only has to find it – 'information', the structured set of statements. In conditions of informational excess people are oriented to search not the new, but the interesting. That's why the information society needs almost no creation of new content for cultural spheres.

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- 1 Eko, U. Innovacija i povtorenije. Mezhdu estetikoj moderna i postmoderna [Eco, U. *Innovation and repetition: between modern & postmodern aesthetics*]. In: *Filosofija epokhi postmoderna*. Usmanova, A. Minsk: Kraenka-print, 1996, s. 69.
  - 2 Bart, R. Smert avtora [Barthes, R. Death of the author]. In: Bart, R. *Izbrannye raboty: Semiotika: Poetika*. Moskva: Progress, 1989, s. 384–391.
  - 3 Ozhegov, S. I. *Tolkovyi slovar russkogo jazyka* [Ojegov, S. I. Russian explanatory dictionary]. Moskva: Russkij jazyk, 1983, s. 703.

## Plagiarism as the Moral Problem

The Seorayn.ru web-site administrator says: “The copyright is nowadays much less necessary than rewrite. Because, even creating the copyright piece one can find that it (or something close) has already been written”<sup>4</sup>. The information environment provokes the creation of not the new knowledge, but of its entertaining expression, which is able to draw the audience’s attention. So, contemporary creation as the production of attractive ‘cover for the cultural contents’ becomes an independent activity working on a new product, which essence is different from the traditional creation as the process of working out new values.

Creation was first understood as the Divine Creation – creating from nothing, limited only by the creator’s potential; creation as forming the sample ideas; creation as a self-important act which results are valuable due to their derivation only and do not need proof of their good. Contemporary creativity is a fruit of the postmodern information culture, which rejected the metaphysical (including religious) basics of consciousness and activity. While traditional creation means producing the new essence, contemporary creativity may be satisfied with producing phenomena or even simulacra. While the basis of traditional creation is working out the self-confident ideas, later incarnated into work, the contemporary creativity is oriented to give the product (goods). Even in the spiritual production sphere the idea is considered creative if it can be used to affect social practice. Russian professor of philology I. Miloslavsky considers that “the word ‘creative’ designates such creativity which not only puts forward ideas, but also leads up them to the concrete practical result”<sup>5</sup>.

In classical culture creation was thought of as a universal attribute of human nature capable of revealing in specific spheres of activity. Nowadays creative managers or creative directors are becoming a special group of workers unequal to the former ‘people of creative professions’. “The essence of creativity – in opening and creation something qualitatively new, having considerable value, – is explained by philologist Alexey Shmelev. Are there can be aesthetic values, the facts and laws, technical devices. And word ‘creative’ is used in the field of advertising, marketing and management of the personnel”<sup>6</sup>.

The democratic side of creativity is in its possibility to appear in any sphere of life, and the writer or scientist doesn’t have to be a ‘creator’ in its sense. The indication of professionalism now is not the creation of original piece, but the competent reproduction of technology. For example, selling the rights for a stage play the owners watch closely that the new one doesn’t differ from the original or doesn’t content any artistic deviation. The most important skills for a scientist now are working with an electronic database,

4 Seo i Newrayn [interactive]. [accessed 05-05-2011]. <<http://seorayn.ru/2009/06/03/rerajt-kopirajt-i-td.html>>.

5 Miloslavskij, I. Kreativnyj ili tvorcheskij? [Miloslavsky, I. Creative or creative?]. *Izvestija*. 27.04.2009.

6 Shmelev, A. Kreativnyj ili tvorcheskij? [Shmelev, A. Creative or creative?] [interactive]. Subscribe.ru [accessed 11-04-2011]. <<http://digest.subscribe.ru/woman/carier/n708911094.html>>.

performing search via full text or key words, compile the accumulated information, and make template texts.

In the world of creativity ‘author’s death’ does actually happen and so the understanding of plagiarism gets changed. Adding the Salvador Dali-like moustache to the Mona Lisa picture is a ‘creativity’ act – not plagiarism, and its creator gets a fee instead of being sued by the heirs. The scandal about the “Da Vinci Code”, which ideas were borrowed from the scientific work, shows that owning someone’s ideas is not a plagiarism act. Copyright now covers not the creative work, but the ‘creativity’ part – ‘literary wrapping’ of ideas, the way of their positioning and sales. That’s why in modern information era legal and ethical angles of the plagiarism problem diverge. Despite complying with the law, the makers of the ‘re-make’ production insult the moral right of the traditional creators, because the authorship of the ideological design of the piece is put in line with the authorship of the creator of the piece. The person legally filed his/her right to use someone’s idea creatively may be a plagiarist from the ethical point of view, and vice versa – the one who created the idea but did not patent it cannot receive any profit from its commercial use. E. g. the creators of graphene – the new material with exclusive properties – received the Nobel Prize in 2010, but do not have a patent for this invention.

The commercialization of the problem of creation is in the term “innovation” which is widely used in social discourse. The term is used to mark not any novelty as a result of human creative activity, but the novelty which acquired the form of goods. It may seem that the criterion of innovation is not the degree of novelty, but the profitability of those innovations. The profitability depends on the creative technologies for promoting innovations on the market. So, if the new product has no commercial perspective, its plagiarism (punishable by law) won’t receive any moral conviction.

It should be mentioned that there is no word “plagiarism” both in the Copyright Law of the Republic of Belarus<sup>7</sup> and in the Copyright Law of the Russian Federation<sup>8</sup>. On this basis it can be concluded that copyright is the juridical problem, and plagiarism is an ethical one. So, plagiarism is not just the attempt to attribute personal property and moral right, which belong to the author of the piece, but attributing the values of the creative personality and thus insulting the true creator’s moral dignity. The moral crime itself is in disrupting the spirit of honest intellectual community by falseness and parasitism.

In humanity sciences the difference between the juridical and ethical aspects of the plagiarism problem is connected with the specific nature of the texts’ novelty. Following the philosophical idea and plagiarism are almost indistinguishable. And the novelty in

7 Zakon Respubliki Belarus ot 17.05.2011 № 262-3 «Ob avtorskom prave i smezhnykh pravakh» [The law of Byelorussia from 5/17/2011 № 262-3 «About the copyright and the adjacent rights»]. [interactive]. Nacionalnyj pravovoj internet-portal Respubliki Belarus [accessed 01-05-2011]. <<http://pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=1721&p0=Об авторском праве>>.

8 Zakon Rossijskoj Federacii ot 9 ijulja 1993 g. N 5351-I «Ob avtorskom prave i smezhnykh pravax» [The law of the Russian Federation from July, 9th, 1993 N 5351-I «About the copyright and the adjacent rights»]. [interactive]. Juridicheskaja firma Internet i pravo [accessed 01-05-2011]. <<http://www.internet-law.ru/law/avt/avt.htm>>.

the sphere is pretty much based on the unique narrative language and style, determined by the personality of creator. The main value of the text is the author's philosophizing pathos. The latter is the sanctity encroachment into which is understood as an invasion into the existential experience and an intimacy insult, infringement into personal identity. Stealing the 'philosophizing experience', attributing someone's – not self-elaborated – ideas is the main criterion of plagiarism now. It's obvious that plagiarism from the moral point of view is not only the problem of intellectual property, but the problem of spirituality disruption, profanity of mental activity.

Of course, the best controller of the plagiarism problem would be the unprejudiced academic public opinion when it's impossible for anyone violating the ethic standards of applying to anyone's work and texts to be there. But the society needs its structure to be supported and its ideals to be expressed. These functions are partly fulfilled by scientific magazines and the Highest Attestation Commission (HAC) in Belarus, which policy is lately oriented on strict standardization of scientific knowledge<sup>9</sup>. As a result, specific scientific products of different branches are presented in accordance with the rules of thesis register. The formal similarity of all texts is considered as their virtue. It is thought that the contents of the research are indifferent to its form, and that the way of expressing achievements is not the merit for deserving a scientific degree. From one hand, such unifying technology allows to identify the scientific novelty of the research, comparing with the other similar works, and thus stop plagiarism. From the other hand, it looks like HAC rejects traditional creation (e. g. new philosophic language) and welcomes contemporary creativity – finely packed innovation ideas, which hold the 'practical applicability and social importance'<sup>10</sup>.

## Conclusions

The contemporary world is in need of creators – to work out cultural values, sufficient for the information society, and "creative guys" – to make those values the social development motive power. So, there are some methodical settings that need to be specified. As both traditional creation and contemporary creativity are extremely valuable, they should be encouraged. All sorts of practical activity must be oriented on educating and encouraging the creators (in its traditional sense). It is natural that the new generation is taught the culture of scientific activity and ethical standards forbidding plagiarism. The requirements for course works as independent author's text cannot be lowered because only few may correspond to them. The non-creative course works should receive a poor mark as a general norm for the text no wider than the simple compilation of materials.

9 Polozhenie o prisuzhdenii uchenykh stepenei i prisvoenii uchenykh zvaniy v Respublike Belarus. Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus № 561 or 01.12.2011 [Regulations about award of scientific degrees and assignment of academic statuses in Byelorussia. The decree of the President of Byelorussia № 561 from 12/1/2011]. [interactive]. VAK Belarusi – Sait Vyshei attestacionnoi komissii Respubliki Belarus [accessed 01-05-2011]. <<http://www.vak.org.by>>.

10 *Ibid.*

At the same time, educational activity should be organized the way which will allow students acquire the skills (not connected with producing new knowledge) which are necessary for living in the information society. Such are: to search information, to use it to solve definite problems, to make the creative contents presentation avoiding plagiarism. It should be aimed to teach students how to search and find the necessary information in libraries and in the Internet, and how to apply useful information. So, there should be made a strict division between truly creative works of high responsibility for the intellectual product uniqueness and the works of abstract nature in the educational process.

In the information society the academic power is performed as an enclave, which is responsible for preserving the knowledge value and the standard of plagiarism prohibition. No matter how forms and operational terms of human creative abilities change, and how the ways of copyright protection transform, the moral prohibition for plagiarism remains principal.

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## PLAGIATAS KAIP MORALINĖ INFORMACINĖS VISUOMENĖS PROBLEMA

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**Santrauka.** *Plagiato problema iškilo modernio epochoje, kuomet mokslo ir meno pasiekimai imti suvokti kaip atskirų individų veiklos rezultatas. Plagiatas kaip autorystės pasisavinimas imtas laikyti neteisėtu veiksmu ir moraliniu blogiu. Informacinėje visuomenėje plagiatas pavirto citavimo forma, padedancia padidinti autoriaus reikšmingumą ir skleisti informaciją. Nors iš esmės plagiatas tebėra teisinis ir moralinis nusikaltimas, jo problema įgavo naujų aspektų, kurių analizei ir skiriamas šis straipsnis.*

*Paplitus informacinėms technologijoms, atsirado „kūrybiškumo“ (angl. creativeness) sąvoka, kuri skiriasi nuo tradicinės „kūrybos“ sąvokos. Kūrybos sąvoka sieta su dieviškuoju tvėrimu, tuo tarpu kūrybiškumas yra postmodernios kultūros, atsisakiusios metafizinio sąmonės ir veiklos pamato, vaisius. Kūryba reiškė naujos esmės sukūrimą, o kūrybiškumas gali tenkintis simuliacijų gamyba. Kūrybos esmę sudaro savarankiškų idėjų sukūrimas ir įgyvendinimas meno kūriniuose, o kūrybiškumas pirmiausia orientuotas į produkto (suprask, prekės) sukūrimą.*

*Dėl šios priežasties autorinės teisės suteikiamos ne kūrybos, o kūrybinei kūrinio daliai – jo „įpakavimui“, pozicionavimo būdui ir pardavimui. Taip teisiniai ir moraliniai plagiato problemos aspektai išsiskiria. Tas, kas teisiškai įtvirtino savo teisę į kūrybišką svetimos idėjos pritaikymą, gali būti plagiatorius vertinant moraliniais kriterijais. Jei naujas kūrinys neturi komercinės perspektyvos, tai plagiatas šiuo atveju, nors baudžiamas teisiškai, nebus pasmerktas moraliniu požiūriu.*

*Taigi klausimas apie autorines teises priklauso teisės sričiai, o apie plagiatą – etikai. Plagiatas – ne vien pasikėsinimas į autoriaus teisę, bet ir dorovinių kuriančios asmenybės privalumų pasisavinimas, vadinasi, – tikrojo kūrėjo moralinio pasididžiavimo įžeidimas. Tai ne nuosavybės, kad ir intelektualinės, problema: tai protinės veiklos profanacija.*

*Siekiant spręsti šias problemas, būtina visai patikrinti kūrybinę studentų veiklą, supažindinti juos su etinėmis normomis, draudžiančiomis plagiatą, o kartu lavinti kūrybiškumo įgūdžius: sugebėjimą ieškoti informacijos, naudoti ją sprendžiant konkrečias problemas, kuriant medžiagos prezentaciją.*

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** *plagiatas, moralė, tradicinė kūryba, šiuolaikinis kūrybiškumas, informacinė visuomenė.*

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