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Honour-related Challenges of the Disciplines an unexplored aspect of methodology and integrity

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Introduction

The question raised by the above review is whether a value as fundamental and intangible as honour has any role to play in disciplinary practice. In particular, how might honour be fundamental to significant, effective interdisciplinarity? Typically of course disciplines offer no cognitive space for values -- other than those relating to truth and falsehood. Even ethical questions of social responsibility are considered incidental, if not irrelevant, to the practice of most disciplines. The issue is whether honour underlies the capacity of a discipline to deploy its methods -- whether a discipline can operate in the absence of assumptions relating to honourability. The interdisciplinary implications are discussed in the main paper at [Integrative function of honour in interdisciplinarity and interfaith understanding](#).

Whilst the replicability of experiments is the essential determinant of the advance of knowledge, honour clearly comes into play in the assessment of the report of any experiment. It does so through the significance of "reputable" and of "academic integrity". If work is reported from a reputable source its results are taken on faith as being true. The work does not need to be repeated, especially if confirmed by other reputable sources. If reputable sources were not assumed to be honourable in their reporting, then every reported result would have to be repeated making the use of referenced works virtually impracticable.

This suggests that honour in some way underlies the operation of any discipline in practice. This is not widely recognized and does not feature in descriptions of the methodology of a discipline. It does of course figure very obviously in the assessment of the probable quality of research. Those of repute, being more honourable, are readily recognized as being more likely to produce quality results. Others are readily assumed to have been likely to have undertaken "shoddy" work, possibly disguised by disreputable "fudging" of results. Any such behaviour, within any research context, would be deemed to have brought dishonour upon the institution and the discipline. Those responsible might be disciplined but in all probability would be permanently dishonoured.

Such concerns are most explicitly recognized with respect to "academic integrity", without which loss of reputation is highly probable. According to the Center for Academic Integrity (*Fundamental Principles of Academic Integrity*):

We define academic integrity in terms of a commitment to five fundamental values and to the principles that flow from those values. Just as personal integrity involves standing up for one's fundamental commitments, even in difficult circumstances, so too academic integrity involves standing up for what is fundamental as well. In the case of academic integrity, it is standing up for the values that are fundamental to the academic process, even when it is difficult to do so. In the Committee's discussions with faculty, students, and administrators, five values emerged as fundamental to the academic process: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Academic integrity, in our view, is the commitment to stand up for these five values, even in the face of adversity. An academic community cannot flourish without these values.... Uniformly, campus honor codes and/or standards

of conduct deplore cheating, lying, misrepresentation, deception, fraud, forgery, theft, and dishonesty in all its forms, whether in class, in the laboratory, in writing and research, or in our dealings with one another as students, teachers, colleagues.

The role of honour in disciplinary practice can be illustrated by the examples of the following disciplines and their associated professions. It is clear that practitioners are vulnerable to a variety of pressures to engage in dishonourable practices, or practices that others deem to be dishonourable -- whether or not the practitioner deems it to be so. In the practice of their discipline, practitioners may also engage in inherently dishonourable practices of "backstabbing", possibly to ensure personal advancement and preferential honour for themselves, or to prevent honour being accorded to others.

In relation to wider society, efforts may be made to formulate "codes of ethics", possibly reflecting a sense of "social responsibility" that may well however be considered beyond the practice of the discipline itself. The purpose in what follows is to demonstrate the extent to which honour is even more intimately bound up with the actual practice of a discipline.

Fundamental research disciplines

With respect to honourable patronage, the case of mathematician G.H. Hardy in relation to [Sreenivas Aiyengar Ramanujan](#) can be contrasted with the case of astrophysicist Sir Arthur Eddington in relation to Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar (Arthur I Miller. *Empire of the Stars: Friendship, Obsession and Betrayal in the Quest for Black Holes*, 2005). The honourable response to an unknown and uneducated Ramanujan is in striking contrast to the dishonourable response to the insights of Chandrasekhar. The first was central to rapid advances in number theory, whereas the second significantly retarded recognition of work on black holes.

The dishonourable treatment of researchers initially reporting on the possibility of cold fusion, whereby they were effectively hounded out of the profession, is unfortunately characteristic of how innovative thinking tends to be handled, whether or not it proves correct. Curiously in this case, subsequent to this treatment -- for which no honourable apologies are deemed due -- continuing heavy investment in the possibility is made by reputable Asian laboratories and a major Western government energy agency has recognized its possibilities.

Other dramatic cases in which researchers were dishonoured by their profession include that of homeopathy, properties of water. It might be argued that the attitude that resulted in the original condemnation of Galileo by a religious hierarchy has effectively been integrated into the scientific method.

Such cases should of course be contrasted with those where there is deliberate fraud practiced systematically in reputable laboratories. Here what is interesting is that the honourability of the laboratory is effectively used by the scientific fraudster to perpetrate the fraud but that honourability is also used to retard attention to the matter, and possibly to cover-up the incident in order to best protect the honour of the institution. The case is even more dramatic where the fraud is perpetrated over an extended period of time, during which the fraudster accumulates honours and controls the research funds and priorities of others as in the case of Cyril Burt's work on twins (In D. J. Miller and M. Hersen (Eds.), *Research fraud in the behavioral and biomedical sciences*, 1992; Mackintosh N. J. (Ed.) (1995). *Cyril Burt: Fraud or framed?* 1995)

Medical disciplines

Medical research of course bears many similarities to research in general. Particular cases illustrative of questionable honourability are those involving experiments with human subjects. Well documented examples include those relating to use of radioactivity and biochemical agents on unsuspecting subjects who it has subsequently been recognized were dishonourably treated. The case of Nazi medical research in concentration camps is also well documented, as with the subsequent use of that research by medical researchers. The extraordinary case of the complicity of the UK medical profession in the 150-250 murders by Harold Shipman, a medical doctor, has been marked by a concern to avoid any "witch-hunt" investigation in order to protect the honour of the profession and the confidence of the population in it. Concerns have also been raised about the nature of the case made for "cancer research", where the apparent honourability of the claims may have been used to disguise the real need and the actual use of the funds. A clear case is offered by the century of delays within the profession impeding recognition of helicobacter (Barry Marshall (Ed). *Helicobacter Pioneers: Firsthand accounts from the scientists who discovered helicobacters*, 1892-1982)

It is worth inquiring how honourable is the approach of the medical profession to alternative and complementary medicine, especially given the complicity of allopathic medicine with the pharmaceutical industry. It is well-recognized that eminent members of the medical profession use their honourability to endorse -- without question and for a fee -- research results obtained by the pharmaceutical industry.

Defence research

A high proportion of research funds is allocated through military budgets, notably to researchers in disciplines deemed most honourable in the "pecking order" of sciences -- mathematics being at the peak. Such disciplines are naturally complicit in the design of weaponry, and notably weapons of indiscriminate mass destruction (such as thermobaric devices) -- which many would deem to be inherently dishonourable. Members of such disciplines are complicit in the deception of framing their activities as honourably focused on "defence" when the track record is of their extensive and unprovoked use against innocents -- deceptively reframed as "collateral damage". It might be simply asked how much threat, or what level of attack, justifies use of such weaponry in disproportionate (overwhelming) response -- and how researchers frame their contribution to such slaughter to be honourable.

Social sciences

A significant proportion of social science research funds is allocated under "defence" and "national security" budgets. This research has notably been used to seek ways to destabilize regimes -- whether democratically elected or not -- without use of military force. The most obvious examples are those of Latin America and especially Chile (cf [Project Camelot](#)). It was such destabilization that subsequently resulted in many thousands of "disappearances", associated with systematic torture. What is interesting is that the social scientists involved were able to frame their involvement as an honourable contribution to the defence of their country -- and were appropriately rewarded for it.

It is extraordinary that whilst funds are available for research on such destabilization, and the monitoring and assessment of intelligence that may precede intervention in the interests of national security, little priority is given to research on viable alternatives to existing modes of social organization. The possibility that alternatives emerging in other countries may have some value for those countries, and be deemed honourable experiments, is reframed as a potential threat to a "way of life" that might come to be seen as less attractive by comparison [[more](#)]. The extensive work on economic and social development could be seen as an effort to engender copycat models of a particular Western way of life, deliberately avoiding research into other possibilities.

The social science professions can usefully be challenged as to whether their efforts have been primarily focused on shoring up existing social systems, through which they can be honoured and rewarded, rather than researching alternatives and those prepared to experiment with them -- with or without the insights of social science disciplines. As such they are surely to be judged as, in some measure, aggravating the current social chaos rather than contributing to its alleviation. It is curious, for example, that whilst medical research in concentration camps is incorporated into the corpus of research literature, that on communes in discredited communist regimes is not considered in any sense relevant to exploration of possible social alternatives.

The "psychological operations" of the military, including the acquisition of intelligence (possibly through dubious methods of interrogation), and the range of techniques of propaganda in support of government initiatives, are all dependent on various branches of the social sciences -- presumably understood to be acting honourably in patriotic support of their country.

It should not be forgotten that initial research in the social sciences was primarily supported because of its potential role in influencing behaviour -- notably with respect to marketing and advertising, whether of products, services or candidates.

A key conclusion of the investigation into the intelligence disaster in relation to intervention in Iraq -- in which so many lives were lost -- was the extent of groupthink amongst social scientists in the various think tanks contributing to the government position. It is worth considering the underlying role played by honour in relation to this groupthink process. Clearly patriotism influenced the honourable framing of the issue and inhibited dissent ("you are either with us or against us"). Many of the involved think tanks were highly reputable -- with honoured social scientists -- whose honour could not be impugned. Challenges from the less reputable would only bring their honour into greater disrepute.

Military disciplines

The military has traditionally attached the highest value to honour and is the most explicit in that regard. At the lowest level there is concern that any action should bring dishonour on the individual military unit, on those of which it is directly or indirectly a part in the military hierarchy, and on the military as a whole. The military might be said to exist to defend the honour of the country that it serves. Much is made of honouring the national flag (or "showing the colours") in ceremonies and parades by the military as symbolizing that attitude. Flag burning may be criminalized.

The military in all countries is much challenged in its training facilities by the dishonourable way in which soldiers are treated through bullying and hazing -- to the point of provoking suicides. Despite an "honour code", military academies are acknowledged to face a significant problem of cheating. The products of the most reputable academies have been officially involved in ... [cf Oliver North, Westpoint, General Dwyer, My Lai, etc] Comparisons between My Lai and Abu Ghraib have been made to demonstrate an unchanging mindset [[more](#)].

The military hierarchy of those countries most closely associated in their own view with the defence of civilization now justify the practice of any form of torture and humiliation (as anticipated in the movie starring Bruce Willis, *The Siege*, 1998). Assassination is now freely advocated and used.

Curiously all notion of honour in relation to a "fair fight" has now been lost. Whilst criticizing opponents for subterfuge and stealth, "stealth weaponry" is now explicitly developed. Whilst recognizing the challenge of asymmetric warfare, the strategic response is deliberately conceived in terms of use of overwhelming force. Whilst deploring the cowardice of terrorists, indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction (thermobaric and air fuel devices) are dropped on urban areas from an invulnerable height -- after forcing the enemy to disarm. Can dropping an indiscriminate bomb ever be more honourable than blowing oneself up with the bomb? Typically however, in asymmetric warfare, it is the weaker that emerges as the most honourable, whereas the disproportionately brutal response of the stronger erodes any honour with which they might previously have been associated.

Regrettably military honour has been further undermined through the involvement in UN Peacekeeping Operations. The military has stood by whilst massacres were perpetrated (Rwanda, Srebrenica). Soldiers freely made use of the population they were there to protect for sexual services (*A comprehensive strategy to eliminate future sexual exploitation and abuse in UN peacekeeping operations*, 2005)

[more]. Rather than "peace-keeping", such conduct justifies the term "piece-getting" operations.

Challenges to understandings of honour have become evident in recognition of the level of sexual and racial discrimination in the military [more]. The nature of honour in a military context has been further reframed by exposure in 2005 of the level of religious discrimination and harassment amongst officer cadets in military academies. In the case of the U.S. Air Force Academy, complaints included allegations that Jewish students were harassed or insulted, that those of other faiths were not given the same latitude in exercising their religion and that some chaplains urged cadets to tell those not "born again" that they faced "the fires of hell." [more] Academy teachers also were said to have promoted their faith in class [more]. One issue is whether religious proselytizing on a campus funded by the US government is a violation of the separation of church and state. [more]

The more critical question that has been raised is that if a sizeable proportion of those acquiring a military discipline are prepared to treat their own female colleagues brutally, and treat any cadet who is not an evangelical Christian with derision, and this sort of behaviour receives tacit approval of their commanders, what are their attitudes likely to be toward the populations -- men, women and children -- of countries like Iraq, targeted for US military assault? Even more crucially, is the Christian faith being used -- possibly condoned by military chaplains -- to legitimize abuses, including humiliation and torture, by the military against those which oppose the USA? Given the command structure, can the USA now prove otherwise with any credibility?

Politics and diplomacy

In principle political parties lay explicit claim to serve the best interests of a country and are most attentive to the honour to be accorded to elected representatives in doing so. Curiously, however, whilst opponents may be referred to by honorifics ("the honourable member", "my honourable colleague"), much effort is made to dishonour them, whether in parliamentary debate or by other means. This notably extends to "negative campaigning". Extreme examples include politically-motivated charges, whether fabricated or not, as in the case of Anwar Ibrahim (former Prime Minister of Malaysia).

The circumstances surrounding the decision to intervene in Iraq provide a range of examples of highly dishonourable manipulation of information, and the dissemination of misleading information, by politicians and diplomats or with their complicity. Most striking have been the cases of George Bush and Tony Blair, both honourably "sworn to uphold". Perhaps the most dramatic was the presentation to the United Nations Security Council on 5 February 2003 by Colin Powell, deemed a highly honourable person by many [more]. It was his honourability that was effectively used as guarantee of the authenticity of the evidence he presented, which others were unable to verify.

Following the invasion of Iraq, the complicity of politicians in the allocation of contracts for reconstruction raises fundamental issues regarding the honourability of processes supposedly designed to install an honourable democracy in the country. The complicity of various parties associated with the United Nations in the oil-for-food scandal also raises issues of the honourability of those involved in what was conceived as an honourable effort to respond to conditions of food shortage in Iraq.

- renege on commitments, tsunami
- honouring commitments

Economics, finance and accounting

The generation and control of money is a discipline fundamental to the operation and survival of individuals, groups and nations. The key to its success lies in the collective confidence in the capacity of a central agency to back any monetary token and to honour any promise made in relation to it.

Having dropped the gold standard, the capacity to honour commitments associated with monetary tokens has become less straightforward. The situation is rendered more complex because of the tendency of countries to print more monetary tokens, or to borrow monies, without necessarily being in a position to honour the associated commitments.

Statistics

The challenge for statisticians has long been made through the phrase: "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics" [more]. Statisticians are highly vulnerable to pressures from those that employ them (or bribe them), whether businesses or politicians, to selectively massage figures in order to make whatever case is presented. The challenge is most evident in the fraud scandal associated with the European Commission's Eurostat agency in 2003 [more].

Legal disciplines

The legal system, and specifically the courts, provide a rare and striking instance of the manner in which the intangible notion of honour is given formal recognition. Not only is there the courtesy of rising in honour of the judge, as representative of the system of law, but there is the specific process of oath taking by any witness taking the stand. Oath taking is a commitment on one's honour to tell the truth and only the truth.

The honourability of the legal system has been exemplified by the processes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa in dealing with the aftermath of the apartheid regime.

Dishonourability is most evident in the legal system where the judge, the jurors or the witnesses have been subject to intimidation or otherwise bought off. It is also evident in instances of tampering with evidence -- possibly to frame innocent individuals -- by the police,

who are otherwise expected to act honourably and impartially. Those with power or resources may also act dishonourably -- possibly "above the law" -- to use the legal system to harass any that oppose them.

Spiritual disciplines

Many religions have specific spiritual disciplines associated with them whose practice is designed to ensure an appropriate, if not a progressively closer, relation to divinity. Those who practice such disciplines may themselves be honoured for doing so. However, those who are considered to practice them most successfully, may be honoured for their holiness and for any capacity to communicate and transmit the relation to divinity. Priests in particular may be understood to fulfil this mediating capacity with divinity for the followers of a religion -- and may be honoured above others in their community for doing so, and for the holiness that they in some measure represent.

Abuses by priesthoods, dishonouring the beliefs they claim to represent, have over the centuries resulted in schisms within religions and the formation of new religions deemed to reflect spiritual insights more truly and more honourably. Recent scandals of sexual abuse by priests, or in religious institutions, have notably brought great dishonour to the Catholic Church.

Sporting disciplines

All the sporting disciplines place much emphasis on the honour that is brought to the individual, whether as winner or participant, to their team and to their country. That honour is, for example, celebrated in flag raising ceremonies at the Olympic Games -- as well as in any presentation of medals.

The honourability of sport as a whole has been severely undermined by reports of the corrupt practices associated with determining the location of the Olympic Games as the highest celebration of honour in sport. Other forms of corrupt practice undermining the honour associated with sports have been widely documented. They include: "fixing" fights and races, "nobbling" horses, and use of performance enhancing drugs. The real extent of such practices is unknown.

In the "mythology" of sport, much is made of the honourable response to an opponent, whether stronger or weaker, whether "honourable" or "dishonourable". This is particularly the case in the Eastern martial arts (aikido, judo, etc). (Aspects of this are reflected in the "mythology" of "westerns". It is unfortunate that there is little trace of this in modern military practice.)

- Coliseum gladiators (Roman Empire)
- citation games



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