

Assignment 2: Misconduct

In this paper will be discussing how scientific misconduct is treated, specifically looking into the popular and high-profile Hendrik Schön misconduct case and the paper that Lucas Consoli has written on it. Schön was declared guilty of scientific misconduct in 16 out of 24 examined papers of his. Consoli criticizes the Committee's handling of the case including their conception of scientific misconduct. How reasonable his claims are will be looked at. I conclude that Consoli is indeed right in his claims.

The committee used the following definition of misconduct from the American *Federal Policy on Research Misconduct*:

'Research misconduct is defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results' (OSTP)

In the definition is it also included that honest mistakes and difference of opinion should not be categorized as misconduct. Consoli draws attention to this, as it is also defined that misconduct must be committed intentionally, knowingly or recklessly, and the committee declared that Schön did indeed either commit the misconduct intentionally or recklessly (Consoli, 536). Consoli raises concern with regards to allowing reckless misconduct to be part of this definition, as this implies that *sloppy* research is misconduct. However, this means that either the definition becomes so broad as to render it questionable for any use at all, or it means that the case was not that exceptional to begin with.

Consoli goes on to criticize the fact that the Committee makes it unmistakable and absolute that what Schön committed was unacceptable, even though it is with regards to an ever-changing and relative convention of what is *proper scientific methods* (Consoli, 537).

I believe the points that Consoli raise are completely reasonable. Whether or not Schön did something malicious or harmful, with the current definition, someone who truly simply made an error, e.g. using faulty data, may be convicted for less. The system should allow disagreements and such settlements of disputes outside of court. As Consoli mentions, the writers probably attempted to stay as objective as possible, but thus ended up skewing something normal in science to a degree too high (Consoli, 539).

References

- Consoli, L. 2006. "Scientific Misconduct and Science Ethics: A Case Study Based Approach," *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 12: 533-541.
- M. Beasley et al. (2002) Report of the investigation committee on the possibility of scientific misconduct in the work of Hendrik Schön and coauthors.
- OSTP, Electronic document, available at URL: http://www.ostp.gov/html/001207_3.html