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Unethical Behavior in Academia: Forms, Causes, and Countermeasures

Friday 19 September 2025 09:00 (45 minutes)

Recent years have seen a steady flow of media reports about cases of unethical behaviour in academia. Such behaviour seems to be surprisingly common, often cause great damage, and typically remain unsanctioned. In my talk, I will first introduce a number of concepts that are relevant to the discourse on this topic (e.g., power, abuse of power). Then I will discuss some key factors that may explain the emergence and the persistence of unethical behaviour in academia. Notably, some of these factors are properties of unethical actors themselves (e.g., psychopathic traits), some are properties of the people that surround unethical actors (e.g., fear), and some are properties of the organizational setup (e.g., incentives, hierarchies, lack of effective controls). Based on this analysis, I will present recommendations for reforms of the academic system that may help reduce the frequency and the severity of unethical behaviour in academia.

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